The Case of Escola Eleva and the *Janelas Abertas* Scholarship Program: De/reterritorializing Elite Notions of a Brazilian International School

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This empirical case study considers the experience of scholarship students participating in the Janelas Abertas program from 2017 to 2022 at Escola Eleva, an elite international school in Rio de Janeiro. Using ethnographically-inspired methods and an assemblage theory framework, the study challenges dominant narratives about elite schooling by analyzing how racially and socioeconomically diverse scholarship students both shaped and were shaped by the school community. Narrative interviews with scholarship recipients reveal interconnected individual and collective transformation organized around three themes: confronting racism, fostering economic solidarity, and (re)affirming identities. The findings show that the students were integral to an assemblage that de/reterritorialized traditional notions of an elite school. This case contributes to research on racial and socioeconomic diversity in private international schools by offering a Brazilian example in which scholarship students were not passive markers of diversity but were conscious of the political and social significance of their belonging to the school.

Keywords: assemblage theory, educational inequality, elite schooling, scholarship programs, de/reterritorialization, belonging, Brazil

I thought it was all a great utopia, but I was going to bet on it. Why?
Elite education and racial relations do not combine.
But it was a utopia, and I thought, let's see what happens.

- Raquel[1], mother of a *Janelas Abertas* scholarship recipient

It's not just about excellence rising to the top, especially in Brazil. It's a much more closed world. And a racist world. There's so few of you, you need an advocate. You need somebody who's going to open that door. And then you need to kick it open for a few more people.

- Cameron, Escola Eleva teacher

Introduction

When she was hired to teach High School History at Escola Eleva in 2017, Camila's job offer arrived with a bold proposal: "Let's Change Brazil Together![2]" Education has been recognized as a powerful tool to combat high levels of racial and socioeconomic inequality in Brazil, as evidenced by a persistently low-ranking GINI Coefficient and a clear race-based income gap (OECD, 2021). This empirical study

[1] All names of students, teachers, and parents have been replaced with pseudonyms. The names of publicly known figures remain unchanged.
[2] Original: "*Vamos mudar o Brasil juntos!"* All translations my own.

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examines the impact of the *Janelas Abertas*[3] scholarship program, which has addressed Brazil's educational inequality by providing robust access to *Escola Eleva*, an elite private K-12 international school in Rio de Janeiro. The Janelas Abertas program was conceived with the brand-new Escola Eleva serving 25 students when the school was founded in 2017 to 110 students in 2022, and institutional data of socioeconomic and racial indicators demonstrate a positive correlation in serving more families earning near minimum wage and an increase from 45% to 63% of scholarship students self-identifying as Black over the same period (Janelas Abertas, 2022, p. 12). The scholarship provides students with full tuition through high school graduation, school lunches, uniforms, after-school activities, a yearly school trip, snack money, and a laptop for the duration of each recipient's studies. In 2022, Escola Eleva was sold to British owners, and Janelas Abertas was immediately suspended, raising questions about the school's commitment to a distinctly Brazilian identity, including socioeconomic and racial diversity. While the school's new owners continue to honor previously awarded scholarships, they have suspended the recruitment of new recipients.

Across Brazil, but especially in Rio de Janeiro, private schooling has historically served the white elite, and over the last few decades, the Brazilian middle and upper classes have increasingly invested in bilingual education and international education models (Aguiar & Nogueira, 2012; Windle, 2022; Windle & Nogueira, 2015). This has driven a wedge in a society rife with social inequality—the rich acquire more social and cultural capital through elite private schooling, while the poor are left to navigate the public school system or lower-tiered, lower-quality private schools. Escola Eleva serves as an example of a private international school trying to disrupt the status quo by prioritizing racial and socioeconomic diversity in a shifting educational landscape in Brazil. Through narrative interviews, this study makes meaning of the Janelas Abertas scholarship student experience to highlight the urgent need to provide more, not less, material support to contest educational inequality at the school level.

Guided by the research question—*How did the Janelas Abertas scholarship affect the lives of the students who received it?*—The study assumes a direct financial impact on students and their families and considers more nuanced ways that the scholarship impacted not only recipients, but the broader school community. Applying an assemblage theory framework (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987), the study concludes that the Janelas Abertas scholarship program enabled the de/reterritorialization of an elite Brazilian international school; students who otherwise would not have studied together did. The findings show that the Janelas Abertas scholarship created space for difficult conversations confronting racism, fostered opportunities for economic solidarity, and shaped scholarship students' perceptions of themselves and others.

I trace how teachers like Camila believed in changing Brazil, parents like Raquel "took a bet" on the school, teachers like Cameron supported students in understanding their blackness in a majority-white space, and the students

[3] Portuguese for "Open Windows."

themselves vocalize a sense of situated belonging to the school that is rightfully theirs. This study addresses a gap in the literature on diversity and inclusion in elite schools, specifically from the student perspective, examining not only what it means to be included but also what it means to belong and how belonging is a shared relational experience. The Janelas Abertas case serves as an important example of how robust scholarship programs can affect not only recipients but also educators, parents, and tuition-paying students in imagining new ways of doing elite education in Brazil.

Literature Review

One factor in conducting this study is to address a gap in the literature regarding scholarship programs in private international schools, especially outside the US. Academic research on elite schools, drawing from key examples in the US, shows that educational institutions reproduce social hierarchies and a myth of meritocracy, even when adopting the language of diversity and inclusion (French, 2018; Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009; Khan, 2011; Pollock, 2005). In Brazil, educational inequality is shaped by a distinct historical, racial, and policy context that includes a precedent for identifying and critiquing social closure (Almeida, 2015; Windle, 2022). Considering both bodies of literature—the exclusivity of elite institutions, broadly, and the situated context of private schooling in Brazil, specifically—highlights how Janelas Abertas responds to challenges elite schools face when prioritizing diversity and to a shifting Brazilian educational landscape conducive to change.

Educational Inequality and Elite Institutions

Bourdieu and Passeron's (1977) framework of social and cultural capital explains why some students appear to succeed, as their inherited advantages are deemed individual merit. This, combined with economic capital and whiteness, secured through a racialized colonial social hierarchy, is identified in the literature as the main consistencies of what it means to be elite (Gaztambide-Fernández & Angod, 2019; van Zanten et al., 2015). Recent ethnographic accounts of elite schooling in the US have revealed that the social power that excludes others is a commonality across elite schools (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009; Khan, 2011). Khan's (2011) ethnography, *Privilege*, traces how a prestigious US boarding school became increasingly racially diverse, contributing to a belief that students attended a "multicultural" school, obscuring inequality as a structural problem while reinforcing elite privilege and claims to meritocracy. Gaztambide-Fernández's (2009) *The Best of the Best* provides an even narrower ethnographic account of how diversity worked in another elite North American boarding school. The author found that inclusion did not equate to belonging. To the contrary, Gaztambide-Fernández and Angod (2019) warn that in the rare instance of non-white students gaining access to an elite institution, they have two options: "remain pinned in space and time," embodying an essentialized identity, or "unhinge themselves" and "invest in the production of (honorary) whiteness" (p. 737).

Van Zanten et al.'s (2015) edited volume, *World Yearbook of Education 2015: Elites, Privilege and Excellence*, considers how race, class, and social and cultural capital

represent "shifting strategies" that work together to reproduce elite status. Across the literature, the authors agree that diversity and inclusion initiatives in elite schools can contribute to cosmopolitanism that further enriches the cultural capital of the elite (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009; Khan, 2011; van Zanten et al., 2015). These discussions foreground a broad understanding of some challenges in advocating for diversity in historically exclusionary elite institutions in the US. Turning to Brazil, I will consider the particularities of the localized context to situate Escola Eleva and the Janelas Abertas program.

Social Closure and Opening in Brazilian Schools

Brazilian schooling has been characterized by "social closure," with unequal access to the best public federal universities, which are also free and awarded through competitive admissions exams, and the quality of students' K-12 schooling is a strong factor in exam performance (Almeida, 2015). While federal universities administer an extremely limited number of highly sought-after feeder public K-12 schools, more widespread public schooling is administered at the municipal level, and private schools account for a third sector (Windle, 2022). Comparing the two most common options, Windle (2022) concludes that "municipal schools represent the most racialized, dehumanised and exploited sector of a society founded on slavery, while private schools carry the legacy of colonial Whiteness and privilege" (p. 103). The study establishes a center-periphery dynamic showing that private schooling in Rio de Janeiro is "historically white and socially elite" (Windle, 2022, p. 97). This dynamic remains true today.

In the last two decades, Brazilian K-12 private schools have further differentiated themselves through increased internationalization of secondary schooling, offering Brazilian elite students the possibility to apply to universities abroad (Aguiar & Nogueira, 2012). While this responds to global trends, it also reflects the implementation of a successful affirmative action policy that makes it harder for Brazil's elite to secure access to federal universities (Windle, 2022, p. 94). Enacted in 2012, the policy allocates half of the total spots at each federal university for public school students, which must be awarded to Black and Native Brazilians in proportion to their percentage in the state where the university is located (Almeida, 2015, p. 74). In 2018, Brazilian public universities celebrated a milestone: for the first time in Brazil's history, Black students became the majority, comprising 50.3% of enrolled students (OECD, 2021). This data shows that Brazil's affirmative action policy is closing the gap between the representation of racial groups at public universities and the roughly 55% of Brazil's population that identifies as Black (OECD, 2021). This shift challenges the racialized center-periphery dynamic, contributes to ongoing dialogue exposing centuries of structural racism, and discredits the myth that Brazil is a racial democracy (Almeida, 2015; Windle, 2022).

The Janelas Abertas case study is situated locally in Brazil within the national backdrop that the literature describes, at once recognizing exclusionary practices of elite schools (Aguiar & Nogueira, 2012; Windle, 2022) and considering a precedent for critiquing social closure (Almeida, 2015). While racialization in Brazil and the US differ in important ways that go beyond the scope of this study, the literature also

shows that advocating for racial diversity in elite schools risks foregoing non-white students' sense of belonging in these historically white spaces (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009; Gaztambide-Fernández & Angod, 2019). This study considers the extent to which Janelas Abertas students feel included at Escola Eleva and how this case might provide a counterexample given its particular context.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for this study draws on Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) assemblage theory to capture the nuance of the scholarship student experience at Escola Eleva beyond individual financial benefit. Assemblage theory is a poststructural framework that describes how heterogeneous elements, both human and nonhuman, combine to form a new whole—in constant evolution, in a process of becoming something other than the parts (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Assemblage theory shares Foucault's (1978) notion of power as diffuse and relational. This matters in conceptualizing deterritorialization, the unsettling of that which has been static or stable, and reterritorialization, a remaking or settling of a new way of being (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Considering the actors—the teachers, parents, school leadership, the scholarship recipients, as well as tuition-paying students—the material support of the scholarship itself, and the specific time and place of this study, assemblage theory makes it possible to analyze the ways the scholarship program de/reterritorialized notions of an elite school.

Assemblage theory centers on the affectability of relational encounters and experiences, providing a lens to observe subtle changes beyond what might be expected from studying the impact of a scholarship program, such as how students' understanding of themselves and others transformed over time. According to DeLanda (2006), it is impossible to predict "in what way a given entity may affect or be affected by innumerable other entities" (p. 2). Assemblage theory provides a lens for understanding how all subjects are both affecting and affectable. This responds to Ferreira da Silva's (2007) critique of the mind/body or interior/exterior dichotomy as a fallacy, linking white European subjects to interiority and racialized "others" to exteriority, negating a shared human experience (p. 5). Considering this framework, I will analyze how the scholarship students' narratives reveal a sense of situated belonging, rather than passive markers of diversity.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs ethnographically-inspired methods based on two principles: patchwork ethnography and the ethnographic hunch. Pink's (2021) ethnographic hunch is an approach based on a researcher's sensibility to discover and follow an emergent thread toward deeper understanding. The hunch "signifies an openness to knowing, feeling, and thinking differently through our contact with other people's worlds" (Pink, 2021, p. 33). My ethnographic hunch appeared in 2022, in my sixth year of working at Escola Eleva as an English teacher. I believed that Janelas Abertas

was what made our school unique, and I struggled to understand why it was suspended under new school ownership.

I followed this thread in a graduate program in Comparative and International Education, moving away from wondering why it was suspended to being curious about what was achieved. This led to patchwork fieldwork. Günel and Watanabe's (2024) patchwork ethnography is an inclusive method, drawing on familiar sites and pre-existing relationships while maintaining "long-term commitments, language proficiency, contextual knowledge, and slow thinking that characterize so-called traditional fieldwork" (p. 133). I returned to Rio de Janeiro during school breaks, conducting intermittent fieldwork, having informal conversations, and conducting formal interviews with former colleagues and students about their experiences with Janelas Abertas. I iteratively returned to the hunch, allowing the data to speak for itself, and also through theory (Pink, 2021).

The findings are presented as narrative vignettes in which participants explain their experience for themselves, "taking the point of view of the other" (Becker, 1996, p. 58). I consulted primary sources on the school to further contextualize this case study and add depth to the narratives, drawing on my prior knowledge of some of the students interviewed, including classroom artefacts and participant observation.

Sampling and Participants

Research participants were chosen nonrandomly through convenience and purposive sampling. The sample consisted of 18 participants: 10 scholarship recipients, 4 mothers, 3 former colleagues who are current teachers, and 1 school director. I selected research participants who represent a sampling of current and former students to consider what it means to be a Janelas Abertas scholarship recipient, both during and after the experience, considering how proximity and distance might affect student perspectives. Six students graduated within the last one to four years, while the four current students were in their sophomore or junior year at the time the study was conducted. I chose to focus on older students because of my personal connection to them and a bias toward their cognitive ability to reflect on their experiences, including topics such as identity and belonging.

The explicit focus on racial dynamics was not intentional from the start but emerged as a central theme to explore further. Cameron, who was featured in a guide quote, is a Black Canadian teacher who has lived in Brazil for over a decade. The other teachers and the school director are white Brazilians. Of the ten students interviewed, eight identify as Black, while two identify as white. For the purpose of this study, I include the stories of Sara, Carolina, Ana, Daniel, Luiza, and Roberta, all of whom self-identify as Black, as do all the scholarship recipient mothers.

Data Collection

Participant interviews generally lasted an hour and followed a semi-structured narrative arc. I asked students to describe their lives before attending Escola Eleva, to reflect on their impressions upon arriving at the school, and whether the scholarship had impacted their lives. In every instance, the interlocutor affirmed that it had,

allowing each of them to elaborate on the variety of ways the scholarship made a difference. My interviews with teachers were both informal and formal, reflecting an iterative data-gathering process. I conducted most interviews in person in Rio de Janeiro in August 2024, and a few additional interviews over Zoom in the months that followed. Additional data were gathered by reviewing classroom artefacts from students I previously taught and consulting primary sources on the institutional websites of Escola Eleva and Janelas Abertas. Data saturation was reached when data collection did not produce new insights or patterns (Creswell, 2013). I conducted interviews in both English and Portuguese, as determined by participants' preference.

Data Analysis

I transcribed and analyzed the interviews, indexing for common themes through an iterative process (Creswell, 2013). I analyzed across the data, looking for patterns and connections between the students' stories to make sense of both their individual experiences and a shared collective narrative, relying on participants' views to construct a reality grounded in their experiences (Creswell, 2013). Finally, I followed my ethnographic hunch, remaining open to new insights produced in putting the data "in dialogue with theory" (Pink, 2021, p. 32). Thinking with theory (Jackson & Mazzei, 2011), I made meaning of the relational nature of the students' stories and the interconnectedness I observed in their narratives.

Positionality

Having taught English at Escola Eleva from 2017 to 2022, I approach this research with an emic *insider* perspective that reflects my prior relationship with several research participants and informs my understanding of the research site and my analysis. While I was previously an active part of the school community, nearly two years passed between my departure as a teacher and my return as a researcher for formal fieldwork. In conducting this research, I practiced reflexivity, employing critical sensitivity to my active role in shaping this study (Creswell, 2013). My familiarity with the research site afforded both trust with research participants and a deeper contextual understanding of the school. I remain attentive to how my positionality may have shaped participants' engagement and mitigated biases by deliberately questioning my assumptions to ensure the integrity of the study and seeking insights from other teachers and participants whom I did not previously teach.

Ethics

I obtained Institutional Review Board approval from Teachers College, Columbia University, to conduct this study. All participants were informed of the purpose of the research and the voluntary nature of participating. I obtained written informed consent from all research participants, including parental consent and student assent for minors. All participants consented to audio recording our conversations.

Limitations

One limitation of the study is its narrow focus on Escola Eleva, which does not reflect the reality of all private Brazilian international schools. The case study findings are context-bound and not generalizable.

Findings

In late 2024, I sat with Raquel, the mother of a scholarship recipient, at a café on a busy street in Copacabana to understand how she became involved in Escola Eleva. She received an invitation to learn about Escola Eleva before the school opened. Raquel had learned about the school in a popular weekly magazine a few weeks prior. As she read the cover story, titled "Lemann's School," referring to one of Brazil's richest businessmen and Escola Eleva's main financial backer, Jorge Paulo Lemann (Cerqueira, 2016). Raquel had thought to herself, "another school for them, everything for them, for the Carioca[4] bourgeoisie." To her surprise, she went to the meeting and found herself in the home of a famous Brazilian actress, surrounded by other Brazilian celebrities who were debating the direction the school would take. What all the parents at the meeting had in common was that their children were all Black. They envisioned a school that combined racial and socioeconomic diversity, and wanted Raquel to be part of it, too. They asked her to consider applying for a Janelas Abertas scholarship to enroll her daughter at the school, understanding she could not afford the tuition. She told me she was skeptical but ultimately decided to give it a shot to "see what happens."

The scholarship granting access to Escola Eleva was regarded as one of the best in the country, confirmed by teachers like Cameron, who previously worked at the American School in Brasilia. There, he explained, "most of our students of color were the children of the cleaners, the cooks, the security guards." Escola Eleva's Director, Amaral Cunha, had worked at the American School in São Paulo, where he told me the scholarship program was small and not geared toward diversity and inclusion like the Janelas Abertas one. Cunha and other members of the school leadership were at the meeting with Raquel, and they were consciously thinking about how to make a difference with their new school. Cunha told me, "The fact that we are in a private school in Brazil, we are already part of a bubble, so I saw the [Janelas Abertas] program as one way of somehow breaking a little bit this bubble." Given the national backdrop of affirmative action (Almeida, 2015), the celebrities invested in creating a school for their Black children, Lemann's financial backing, and the courage of parents like Raquel to try something new, Escola Eleva was in a strong position to make a difference, at least at its own school.

I analyze the scholarship student experience in the context I have outlined, bringing into conversation the shared vision of those who believed in Escola Eleva's ability to challenge the status quo of Brazilian international schools that predominantly serve the white elite. Joined in a desire to support scholarship students' ability to study at the school through the material support of the scholarship, the members of the school community constitute a de/reterritorializing assemblage that resulted in unforeseen

[4] Residents of Rio de Janeiro.

outcomes. The findings have been organized thematically, highlighting some of the major outcomes from the scholarship students' stories. Across the board, the students acknowledged a direct financial benefit, alleviating tensions like having to provide lunch at home or buy a computer, which were included in the scholarship; therefore, it has been excluded from the findings. Instead, I focus on the indirect *affect*—defined by feelings, emotions, and an "immanent social force" (Dernikos et al., 2020, p. 16), that resulted in the interactions between scholarship students and others: confronting racism, fostering opportunities for organic economic solidarity, and (re)affirming identit(ies). A common thread in all the stories is that students turned toward, rather than away from, who they are.

Confronting racism

Sara told me, "I was determined to join that school," and she eventually did after two year-long rounds of applying for a scholarship. At the time, Sara's family was living in Rocinha, the largest favela in Rio de Janeiro, which is often associated with violence and precarity. Sara's mother was aware that her daughter might face challenges studying in a school where she would be a minority and prepared her for bullying, telling her, "Don't ever lower your head because you are a scholarship recipient. If anything happens, you don't have to submit to anything. You come to me, and we will solve it." Sara's mom wanted her to study at Escola Eleva, believing the experience would open new opportunities, but knew that moving from a public to an elite private school might also come with challenges.

Upon entering the school, Sara made friends and quickly became well-integrated, but her experience included difficult and new scenarios. Sara attended a birthday party, which prompted a student who was not invited to lash out. The other student, who was white and paid tuition, sent a message to the birthday girl, cursing Sara for being Black and poor. Sara called her mom and notified the middle school principal. Even though the incident had occurred outside school, he treated it as a school matter, defending Sara and calling in the mother of the other student to discuss what had happened. The principal's actions went beyond simply fulfilling his role; he was moved by what happened and determined to show Sara his institutional and personal support.

Sara knew she belonged at the school, but she had also learned from other students in a process of negotiating their identities and belonging in an unfamiliar elite space. She was close to Carolina, another scholarship student from the same grade who was also Black. One day, a classmate sent a photo to the class's WhatsApp group of African children with a racist message. Sara "knew it was wrong," but didn't know exactly why. Carolina immediately replied, calling out the behavior, and Sara attributes her quick response to a desire to "go deeper" in understanding her own identity. Before entering the school, Sara rarely reflected on her blackness. At Escola Eleva, she came to understand her race affectively, feeling it as core to her identity and a source of pride. The relationship between Sara and Carolina, beyond representing solidarity, signifies a united front against social closure—in this case, the discomfort and disrespect of a racist comment—that elite students have been entitled to.

Earlier that same year, Carolina had organized a series of workshops on racial literacy that she held during study hall once a week. She had found a close ally in one of the few Black teachers at the school, a teaching assistant named Pedro, who helped her organize the workshop to discuss issues of race and racism. She told me of taking on this task, "When you're a scholarship recipient, life demands more maturity because your reality doesn't hide reality, you know?" Camila, a high school History teacher, told me that Carolina often asks to sit in her empty classroom, finding solace in her teacher's company. Camila, though white and middle-class, is not from the south zone neighborhood where the school is located, and she previously taught in public schools. Both Pedro and Camila sensed Carolina's need for companionship and acted in ways to let her know her presence at the school mattered and that she was not alone.

For a persuasive writing assignment in 2022, Carolina delivered a speech about the importance of the Janelas Abertas program, which was already under threat. She shared the story of how her mother and sister had accessed higher education via affirmative action and how it had changed their lives. Carolina called upon her classmates to reflect on how they all benefitted from Janelas Abertas, saying, "Scholarship students need the private school, it's true, but the private school also needs the scholarship students." Carolina's vocal belonging to the school shows the ways she connected to others through a shared understanding of what it means to engage with "reality."

These examples from Sara and Carolina reveal how a minority of fellow students disagreed with the inclusion of scholarship students, standing outside of the assemblage that believed in making Escola Eleva a racially and socioeconomically diverse school. Sara and Carolina's steadfast understanding of their belonging to the school allowed others to plug into deterritorialization, challenging notions of elite schools as exclusionary spaces. The incidents in this section highlighted Sara and Carolina's processes of becoming through understanding their belonging at the school, while also fostering dialogue around and denouncing racist acts.

Economic Solidarity

The scholarship affords students comfortable access to the school, but it does not grant recipients the same lifestyle outside of school. Ana, who now studies law, was a high school junior in 2019 and wanted to attend a two-week summer exchange program, a common experience for Escola Eleva students. She applied to a program at Cambridge, was accepted, and earned a scholarship, but it only covered 60% of the cost. The school's college counselor encouraged her to create an online fundraising page after she explained she could not afford the remaining cost. Ana told me that the Escola Eleva community enthusiastically helped her raise the money for the summer program. She was surprised by the outpouring of support, especially from people she did not know, like a mother she had never met who bought her flight with miles. She had already met her fundraising goal when she received a text message from two famous Black actors who were parents at the school. Despite never meeting, they told Ana, "We want to be part of it." They donated £1,000, giving Ana an extra cushion, something her classmates would likely have to cover unexpected

costs abroad. The school counselor's quick thinking and the school community's enthusiastic support in this example are indicative of how diverse school actors united in their desire to support the Janelas Abertas scholarship students' belonging, including extending material support beyond the scholarship. This signifies a flexible and adaptable assemblage that remakes itself and the school as opportunities arise.

Examples of other organic forms of economic solidarity from the school community emerged in my interviews. Daniel worried he would have trouble making friends when he joined Escola Eleva in the sixth grade. He was also from Rocinha, like Sara, and had difficulty telling his classmates where he was from. He told me that changed with time, "I lost this fear of not telling people where I came from. Rocinha is a really good favela, it's like the biggest favela in Latin America." That year, Daniel established a solid group of friends who collectively surprised him with a PlayStation at the end of the sixth grade. Daniel told me he had spent time playing PlayStation at their homes, but the gesture was a way for him to be included in his own home. It gave him the chance to socialize with his classmates outside of school, just like they do. This example shows how bonding through shared play was also bolstered by going beyond the scholarship. Both Ana and Daniel's experiences were only possible given the access they gained to the school through the scholarship-school community assemblage's movement and adaptability to the unforeseen, contributing to the shared understanding of what it means to find organic, localized solutions to social inequality.

(Re)affirming identit(ies)

I met with Luiza over Zoom to discuss her experience at the school. Now graduated, she told me that she had been afraid to be seen as "the girl who had a scholarship," saying, "I didn't want that to define me." When the scholarship program was suspended, Luiza had one year left before graduating. She was angry that a foreign education group had suspended the program, stressing, "Janelas Abertas exists because there is a social and political context in Brazil where things need to be done to make our environment equal." She realized she had been taking the wrong approach in hiding her scholarship status, recognizing "how political that was" and "how important it was for people to know." Luiza decided to befriend some younger scholarship students and placed newfound value on her scholarship. Her feeling of anger led her to action, and her shift in thinking shows an internal process of recognizing herself as a scholarship student and recognizing the importance of the scholarship program for the entire school.

Roberta was one of Luiza's younger friends who also recognized the significance of her presence at the school. She had come to Escola Eleva as a sophomore in 2022, the last year the scholarships were granted, after spending two years without classes because her public school did not provide distance learning during the pandemic. At the time, Roberta's dream was to "get out of Brazil" and study engineering in the US. She thought Escola Eleva would prepare her for that, but to her surprise, she realized there were other possibilities she had not considered before studying there. Through a friendship with a classmate who planned to study cinema, Roberta realized that cinema was also her passion. She knew her reality was far different from her friend,

the son of two actors, but he was insistent, telling her, "It's unacceptable for a person like you not to go into cinema," and bargaining, "I have the means and you have the ideas." Roberta came to terms with the fact that perhaps her earlier dream of studying in the US was not what she truly wanted, and she found value in staying close to her family and Brazil's rich cinematic tradition, which she had always loved.

Roberta told me about another white male classmate, whom she considers her best friend. She explained, "The thing that makes us friends with each other is being so different," repeating for emphasis, "so different." For Roberta, money had been a big problem in her life, but she never felt a lack of love, the exact opposite of her friend's reality. She reflected on the lesson she learned, telling me, "It's ignorant to think that poor people are all the same and it's ignorant to think that rich people are all the same." Roberta affirmed her ability to learn from those drastically different from her and acknowledged that they had much to learn from her as well. Roberta's mother reflected on her daughter's upcoming graduation, saying Roberta's presence at Escola Eleva was "moving people to think differently, to understand differently." She was reminded of a quote often attributed to Angela Davis that says, "When Black women win victories, it's a boost for virtually every segment of society." She was proud of Roberta's becoming while at Eleva and the way she impacted others.

Not only did Roberta and Luiza find solidarity with one another, but they also learned about themselves from and with other non-scholarship students, a process that others noticed and recognized as unique to that space and time. This had material impacts, changing Luiza's orientation toward her identity as a scholarship student and Roberta's trajectory post-Eleva. It also affected the students' understanding of inequality in Brazil and differences across race and class.

Discussion

The findings show how the students' narratives reveal the ways they were part of a de/reterritorializing assemblage that challenged traditional notions of elite schools as exclusionary spaces. The students' situated belonging, found in themselves and through the support of classmates, teachers, and family, required the school to respond in a variety of unpredictable material and immaterial ways. In answering the research question—*How did the Janelas Abertas scholarship affect the lives of the students who received it?*—The findings tell both individual and collective stories, rooted in the lived experiences of the scholarship students. I have shown how the de/reterritorializing assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) actively unsettled and resettled ways of doing elite schooling through confronting racism, fostering economic solidarity, and reaffirming students' identities. These analytical categories created space for critically understanding how Janelas Abertas shaped individual subjectivity and the shared experience of Escola Eleva from 2017 to 2022.

The findings showed instances of tuition-paying students, elite parents, or teachers supporting the scholarship students, not based on claims to meritocracy or reproducing privilege (Gaztambide-Fernández, 2009; Khan, 2011), but based on a desire to make the Janelas Abertas program work not only for the students it served

during a specific time, but for themselves, too. Furthermore, the student narratives showed the ways they understood their importance to the school through conscious declarations and unconscious feelings and perceptions they felt in their interactions with others and themselves. This showed the ways the students were neither passive markers of diversity nor non-white tokens (Gaztambide-Fernández & Angod, 2019). Throughout the findings, the school community's affectability—the potential to be moved by that which occurs beyond oneself and pertaining to exteriority (DeLanda, 2006; Ferreira da Silva, 2007)—was on display, showing that it was not just the scholarship students who were impacted, but also their classmates, teachers, and families. This is an important critique of Enlightenment-based thinking at the core of difference and *othering* (Wynter, 2003). The study highlighted a shared human experience from the students' perspective.

This study adds the case of Escola Eleva and the Janela Abertas scholarship program to the literature on internal dynamics of international elite schools, offering a counterexample to ways of doing elite education, grounded in a desire to combat racial and social inequality at the school level. It also addresses a gap in ethnographic accounts of a private school in Rio de Janeiro and student perspectives on diversity in elite contexts. Integral to the findings and the ethnographic method was deeply contextualizing the school's founding in a shifting educational landscape in Brazil (Günel & Watanabe, 2024), challenging a racialized center-periphery dynamic (Windle, 2022), contributing to ongoing dialogue exposing centuries of structural racism, and discrediting the myth that Brazil is a racial democracy (Almeida, 2015). Further research on scholarship programs that prioritize socioeconomic and racial diversity in elite schools is necessary, particularly in non-US contexts, to understand how specific local histories and education policies shape scholarship students' experiences.

Conclusion

This study challenges dominant narratives about elite schooling by analyzing how racially and socioeconomically diverse scholarship students both shaped and were shaped by the Escola Eleva school community. Applying an assemblage theory (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) framework, I analyzed how the scholarship students were not the only ones affected by the Janelas Abertas program. Instead, the findings highlight the ways parents, teachers, and students exercised relational power (Foucault, 1978) to de/reterritorialize the meaning of their school as one committed to diversity, enacted through the material support of a robust scholarship that served over 100 students between 2017 and 2022.

This study is important for the field of international education to understand the adaptability of K-12 international schools to meet the needs of their localized contexts and realities. A key takeaway from this study is the urgent need to dedicate more resources to support the robust inclusion of scholarship students, such as those featured in this study, who shaped the school's identity while also affirming their own. Efforts are also necessary to promote diversity not only in student bodies but in teaching staff and school leadership. Finally, equipping and funding public schools to

attract students away from private schools is also an important pathway for imagining a future that does not depend on the de/reterritorialization of elite schools, but equitable and accessible schooling for all.

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Acknowledgement
This work was in part supported by a Lemann Fellowship and a summer research grant from the International and Transcultural Studies Department at Teachers College, Columbia University.

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