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# Different Routes to University: Exploring Intersectional and Multi-Dimensional Social Mobility Under A Comparative Approach in Chile

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## Abstract

The article aims to cover a gap in research, including an ethnic dimension to explore the relationship between people's trajectories and their experiences at university. Drawing on a retrospective life-story approach, the article compares how 55 respondents of different social origins recount both their routes to university and their experiences at university. By adopting an intersectional lens of analysis, we argue that differential experiences at university affect people's trajectories of social mobility. Data from two qualitative studies are analysed in this article to explore how class and ethnic background, but also people's location in urban or rural areas and other aspects of their family situation, affected their educational routes to earning a university place. We argue for the subjective experience of social mobility as a process of achievement, but one fraught with numerous obstacles and challenges. This article shows that respondents from working-class social backgrounds encounter different barriers because of the lack of socioeconomic resources, previous educational disadvantages, class/ethnic discrimination, and family cultural background. Meanwhile, respondents from middle-class and upper-class backgrounds have to face different issues related to their families' expectations of maintaining their social status. Based on those findings, we suggest that research on social mobility needs to consider multiple and intersectional dimensions that frame an individual's life trajectories, instead of focusing on movements between fixed educational or occupational positions.

## Keywords

ethnicity, intersectionality, social class, social mobility

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## Introduction

In recent decades, education has been understood as a mechanism to transform and challenge social inequalities (Waller et al., 2014), though to others education has been seen as a mechanism which reproduces inequalities (Reay, 2017). A variety of government policies have attempted to promote access to higher education in Chile in order to stimulate social mobility, but in spite of this fact, access to university is still difficult for those from working-class backgrounds.

Expensive fees and long-term debts are two of the most important barriers that students face when they want to study for a university degree. According to the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2014), tuition fees for public institutions are higher than US$1500 in one-third of the countries with available data, and they reach more than US$5000 in Chile, Japan, Korea, and the United States. Therefore, there is a high degree of marginalisation of disadvantaged social groups and an increase in debt for those who gain access to higher education, creating a system that institutionalises inequality (OECD, 2014).

The problem is not only to do with access to university. Students from working-class backgrounds who can enrol at university still face difficulties that are the result of economic, cultural, and wider social inequalities. From that point of view, one of the main questions is whether education should be considered one of the principal vehicles for social mobility or not.

There is a long tradition of studies on social mobility which have conceptualised it as fixed movement between occupational or educational positions (Goldthorpe et al., 1980; Halsey et al., 1980). Leading another school of thought, Pierre Bourdieu has provided remarkable contributions to understanding associations between education and class inequalities under a multidimensional approach. This perspective has contributed by incorporating a multidimensional approach to the study of social mobility (Friedman, 2016; Lawler, 1999; Savage, 2015; Walkerdine, 2003) and demonstrating that social mobility is not merely a question of occupational transitions, but involves a much broader set of cultural, lifestyle, and identity issues. By incorporating a multidimensional approach, some studies have addressed how the education system creates more barriers for social mobility (Bathmaker et al., 2013; Boliver, 2016; Reay, 2017; Reay et al., 2009). In Chile, Méndez (2002) discusses the multidimensional perspective of social mobility, examining the strategies, values, and cultural practices that influence the process of social mobility.

There have been criticisms of Bourdieu's framework because of its failure to sufficiently acknowledge the significance of ethnicity and gender. According to Adkins (2004), Bourdieu's theory is based in terms of class and so is not always relevant for a feminist perspective. Rollock (2014) makes a similar argument in relation to racial inequalities and criticises the work of Bourdieu for not recognising how class locations, dispositions, and capitals are all inflected by race. Although the multidimensional approach helps us to understand social mobility trajectories with a more complex concept of social class, it is still necessary to include a perspective that takes gender and ethnicity in consideration. This article adopts an intersectional approach (Bhopal, 2016; Byrne, 2009; Crenshaw, 1989; Rollock et al., 2013) in order to examine the interconnected ways in which people's trajectories affect their experiences at university, as well

as their possibilities of social mobility. This is particularly important in the Chilean context, since the structure of inequalities in Chile is very complex. It requires a multidimensional analysis of the unequal social position of indigenous Mapuche people and women to understand their experiences of social mobility.

Drawing on qualitative data from two case studies in Chile, this article shows that unequal experiences of social mobility are particularly noticeable when we compare people of different trajectories, class positions, genders, and ethnic groups. The first group consists of 40 Mapuche people who live in Santiago and Temuco cities, from working-class backgrounds and are the first generation in their families with higher education qualifications. The second group consists of 15 schoolteachers who live and work in Santiago, from middle-class backgrounds, who are not the first generation in their families with higher education qualifications, and whose trajectories are socially stable or downwardly mobile. Despite the differences between the two groups, in both cases, the focus of analysis was the life trajectories of the participants. Comparing two such contrasting groups, with contrasts both in their mobility trajectories but also in their socioeconomic characteristics, helps to illuminate the impact of different dimensions of advantage and disadvantage on mobility trajectories, and demonstrates the importance of adopting an intersectional approach in order to fully understand these trajectories.

The central argument of this article is that individual routes to university and, therefore, different opportunities of social mobility are strongly connected to people's multidimensional trajectories. In this regard, the unequal experiences of social mobility need to be researched by exploring issues such as unequal living conditions since childhood, which are differential life experiences that result in unequal routes to university. This article shows that there are not only class differences, because gender and ethnic dimensions also play a role in different routes to social mobility. People who experience upward social mobility also experience intersectional class, gender, and ethnic discrimination during their entire trajectories. A focus on people's trajectories and an intersectional approach are required to understand conflicting relationships between education and social mobility.

## The education system in Chile

In Chile, a neoliberal economic and political model was adopted during the period of the military dictatorship (1973–1989), which gradually removed the state's social obligations to citizens, reduced public investment in services and welfare, and deregulated markets. Despite the return to democracy, this model still dominates Chilean society, resulting in widespread privatisation of the health and education sectors (Espinoza et al., 2013). Neoliberalism promotes ideas related to self-investment, the individualisation of social outcomes, and meritocratic understandings of social success (and failure). This has led to an increased perception of the importance of higher education for success in life.

Education in Chile has become a commodity and parents hold the responsibility for their children's education, while the state plays a secondary role (Cabalin, 2012). Because of extensive privatisation of the educational system, for 35 years students in Chile have paid fees if they wanted to attend university.

In terms of access, education in Chile has undergone significant progress, thanks to educational policies and the expansion of private institutions (Cabalin, 2012). According to the National Education Council (CNED, 2017), from 2005 to 2017 there was a 69% increase in student registration at universities. However, 'neoliberal policies have only increased the quantity of students, not the quality of education, and they have intensified social inequalities in education at every level' (Cabalin, 2012: 220).

Two important student movements occurred where the education system was strongly questioned. First, in 2006 (known as the Penguin Revolution) and later, in 2011 (known as the Chilean Winter). Students demanded that 'public education be strengthened, with the end of free-market education, and better conditions for poor students' (Cabalin, 2012: 224). Because of these events, a new educational reform was implemented in 2016. This reform allowed higher education free from tuition fees. However, this is restricted to students who are members of families belonging to the 60% with the lowest incomes and they must attend educational institutions that are part of the tuition-free reform.

Although there has been an improvement in access to higher education, structural inequalities in terms of class, gender, and ethnicity remain. The Mapuche Indigenous people are three times less likely to complete higher education than the non-Indigenous population (INE, 2012). For people who studied prior to 2016, another barrier was the cost of university fees, as students with below-average academic performance either had to pay the fees or seek a loan or scholarship to cover tuition and living costs. Although the tuition-free educational reform has addressed this gap, lower- and middle-class families still face economic barriers. Because of the lack of welfare, meritocratic values become the rule to follow, where individuals can build and invest in their own path with work and sacrifice.

## Exploring intersectional and multidimensional social mobility

This article draws on and contributes to sociological work on social mobility, intersectionality, and education. Traditionally, literature on these topics has critically discussed arguments such as education as a vehicle for social mobility by focusing on the relative chances of accessing schooling and the higher education system (Goldthorpe, 2007; Halsey et al., 1980; Jackson et al., 2007). This article endorses a rather different perspective by adopting both multidimensional (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990; Davey, 2012; Lareau, 1987; Reay et al., 2009) and intersectional approaches (Archer, 2007; Bhopal, 2016; Byrne, 2009; Rollock et al., 2013). In order to understand the complex and entangled transitions of people who experience structural inequalities, this article considers dimensions of ethnicity, gender, and discrimination.

## Approaches to multidimensional social mobility and education

Pierre Bourdieu has provided a substantial impact in the study of class inequalities in education with his widely recognised work on 'cultural reproduction theory'. This approach responds to the social reproduction theory, which focused on the role of schooling in reproducing economic inequalities. Bourdieu argues that education system

reproduces the culture of the dominant class, which is socialised into their children at an early age, enabling them to succeed. The problem is that middle-class students' achievement is assumed to be based on their merit or talent and what appears 'natural' is determined by social conditions. Bourdieu maintains that education is the principal mechanism of symbolic violence as the dominant culture is imposed and misrecognised as legitimate, whereas working-class knowledge is marginalised (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990).

Drawing on Bourdieu's work, recent studies have adopted a multidimensional approach to examine how social capital, cultural capital, and habitus affect students' experiences in the school system (Davey, 2009; Lareau, 1987; Reay, 2004). Such existing work highlights the role of cultural and social capital as reproducing class differences (Addison and Mountford, 2015; Bathmaker et al., 2013), prompting advantages in middle-class and upper-class students studying at elite universities (Brown et al., 2016) and disadvantages in the case of working-class students (Lehmann, 2009). Diane Reay's work has provided significant evidence about working-class students' experiences at university. Her research has explored experiences of fitting in and standing out in university (Reay et al., 2009, 2010), showing how working-class students, besides dealing with academic difficulties, have to face numerous class barriers at university. With a focus on the experiences of non-traditional applicants to higher education, Reay et al., (2001) shows intersection between class and race as affecting non-traditional applicants' possibilities of choosing a university (Reay et al., 2001: 855).

Previous works have made a notable contribution to addressing multidimensional experiences of inequalities in education systems. However, inequalities are even more apparent when adopting a focus on the notion of trajectories. From a Bourdieusian perspective, the notion of trajectories – as the evolution of the compositions and volumes of multiple capitals over time (Bourdieu, 1984: 84) – can easily be linked to the notion of class as a multidimensional construct. While the notion of multidimensional class focuses on the existence of different capitals, the concept of trajectory centres on how all those capitals shift over time. We consider previous empirical works (Miles et al., 2011; Savage and Flemmen, 2019), which suggest that a focus on trajectories is required to examine subjective narratives of social mobility. Although the multidimensional character of class analysis and social mobility has been discussed in these studies, most empirical studies of mobility have focused on only one dimension of people's trajectories (such as career trajectories). In contrast, this article examines the multidimensional nature of people's subjective mobility, exploring how trajectories are understood as multidimensional and non-linear constructs from which issues of ethnicity, gender, and discriminatory dimensions emerge to frame their narratives of social mobility in an interlinked and more open way.

## Intersectionality approaches

In this article, intersectionality is understood as an analytical model, in which relational social dimensions such as class, gender, ethnicity, and discrimination are all in engagement with each other. This approach is adopted to reveal the complexity of the different dimensions of social inequalities. The term intersectionality was used for the first time by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) when she showed how exclusion is a complex situation

that is not only related to class, gender, or race, but is a situation of structural disadvantage that involves all of these dimensions.

Although it has been comparatively less explored, some studies have adopted an intersectional approach to examine differences of gender or race as impacting individual educational opportunities (Archer, 2007; Bhopal, 2016; Byrne, 2009; Ingram, 2011; Jackson, 2012). Those studies have shown the interrelation of categories of gender, class, and race – instead of them being isolated – as specific conditions of disadvantage (or advantage) in education systems. With a focus on higher education, current evidence shows tensions experienced by minority ethnic students in UK universities (Dyson et al., 2008). Nevertheless, especially in the case of women, they are able to use their social and ethnic capital to access the financial support required to be successful in higher education (Bhopal, 2016).

We also considered the intersectionality approach proposed by Rollock and colleagues (2014, 2013, 2014, 2015), which has focused on the upward social mobility experience of ethnic minorities in higher education. This work suggests that ethnicity and gender are essential components for analysis of the complex inequalities experienced by socially mobile black professionals. Their theoretical framework is based on Bourdieu (1984) and Critical Race Theory, and demonstrates the complex, multifaceted, and contradictory nature of race inequality, which must be analysed in terms of several capitals that work differently according to race (Rollock, 2012). On the basis of Rollock's work, we argue that intersectionality is central to the analysis of experiences of social mobility, which emphasises that it is impossible to understand the experience of minorities being middle-class without addressing the role of race, gender, and racism. This article extends Rollock's perspective, arguing that Mapuche and teachers share classed, gendered, and raced strategies in order to deal with the barriers of inequalities and discriminations they face in their divergent experiences of social mobility.

## Subjective class and social mobility in Chile

Although a considerable work on subjective class and social mobility is situated in European societies, there is appreciable qualitative research on class analysis and social mobility in Chile (Araujo, 2013; Barozet, 2006; Castillo, 2016; Guzmán et al., 2017; Méndez, 2002, 2008; Mac-Clure and Barozet, 2016). Those works have made a noticeable contribution to examining notions such as perceptions of inequalities, social mobility barriers, and class identities. This article falls within this line of research on class identities and social mobility situated in Chile that addresses the multifaceted and complex nature of these constructs.

In terms of social mobility, research has provided some evidence of multidimensional subjective experiences of social mobility in the Chilean context. María Luisa Méndez (2008) draws on the concept of trajectories and shows that both social and spatial trajectories have a key role in framing differential class identities, as well as shaping differences and tensions among the middle class. Besides differential trajectories, symbolic barriers have also a key role in subjective experiences of social mobility, particularly in terms of affecting the experiences of those with upwardly mobile trajectories (Castillo, 2016), providing further evidence of the multidimensional nature of social mobility.

Research on subjective social inequalities has also made a contribution to the field of social stratification in Chile and provides a framework for this article, by noting certain divergences between objective (economic) inequalities and subjective inequalities (Araujo, 2013, 2019; Castillo, 2012). Emmanuelle Barozet and other scholars have examined discourses legitimising inequalities (Guzmán et al., 2017; Mac-Clure and Barozet, 2016), showing how ordinary people describe an unequal society and what sort of arguments emerge from people's narratives to justify or criticise social inequalities. An intersectional approach is recognisable in here, as this examines how people's representations of inequalities are framed by differential positions in terms of gender and class (Guzmán et al., 2017).

Previous studies in Chile offer empirical evidence of the salience of multidimensional inequalities in ordinary people's narratives. This article suggests complex processes of class formations are not solely grounded in economic differences. Symbolic barriers and differential access to social capital and socio-spatial capital have a key role in the processes of class formation in Chile. All of the studies reviewed in this section have addressed the relevance of diversifying the dimensions involved in the study of social mobility. By drawing on this body of research, the work presented here offers an approach more focused on social mobility and intersectionality, with a focus on ethnicity, but also incorporating other key dimensions such as gender.

## Methodology

This article is based on data collected from two different studies that explore subjective social mobility in Chile. Although they have different aims and case studies, these two studies share methodological similarities. They are qualitative studies that have adopted an open-ended approach to subjective social mobility with fieldwork conducted in 2015. Both groups examined offer narratives of their trajectories of social mobility, focusing on the barriers and tensions encountered and experienced during this process. The sample of respondents in the first study experienced upward social mobility and the sample in the second study had socially immobile or downwardly mobile intergenerational trajectories, which allow us to compare the two groups and explore – under an intersectional and multidimensional approach – the relationship between people's trajectories and their unequal experiences at university.

The first study examines how Mapuche people who are the first generation in their families to attend university perceive their life trajectories and their experiences of upward social mobility. The research examines how the respondents negotiate their identities through their life trajectories. Life history, as a methodological option of this research, aimed to capture participants' perceptions and their understanding of the social context in which they are involved. Following this approach, the respondents are able to choose how they want to recount their stories of mobility and the consequences for their identities.

This study incorporated semi-structured interviews as a research technique. The interviews focused on biographical issues, with the interview questions being structured according to the order of the life course, while also giving the participants the opportunity to construct their own narratives. The sample focused on people with at least one Mapuche surname, who identify as Mapuche, who have a working-class origin, who have higher education qualifications, and people who live in the Metropolitan and Araucanía regions.

The fieldwork started in July 2015 and finished in February 2016. The fieldwork comprised 40 interviews, 20 in the Metropolitan region, and 20 in the Araucanía region, of which 23 were with men and 17 with woman.

The second study explored how varied understandings of social mobility emerge from teachers' narratives of their trajectories. This research examines how teachers of different class origins recount social mobility as an experience which ties with life-course shifts and historical transitions, and is shaped through a range of interpersonal and temporary comparisons.

Chilean teachers provide a useful case study to explore everyday understandings of social mobility. Teachers are also a useful case study group in order to investigate the nature of people's accounts of their life trajectories in Chile. There are notable differences in terms of working conditions and social position between teachers working for public schools, private subsidised schools, and private schools (Cabezas et al., 2011; Mizala et al., 2000), which enables comparison between upwardly and downwardly socially mobile teachers, as well as comparisons with socially immobile teachers. Despite those diverse trajectories, we note that teachers share a broad occupational status. It is therefore possible to examine how teachers, as an occupational group, might perceive their social position differently.

This research proposed a life history approach, which allows us to examine how teachers understand their trajectories as a representation of their life stories. As this research looks at how teachers account for their main transitions, a research strategy with two techniques, in-depth interviews, and timelining, was the most suitable strategy. Incorporating both an interview and asking participants to draw a graphical timeline helped to access different emphases in their assessments of their life stories.

A total of 41 teachers (28 women and 13 men) who live in Santiago participated in this research. The purposive sampling strategy targeted both occupationally, intergenerationally mobile and immobile teachers in public, private, and subsidised private schools. The fieldwork was conducted between May and October 2015.

The analysis presented in this article draws on a sub-sample of teachers in order to facilitate comparisons with the previous group. This sub-sample is composed of 15 male and female teachers who live and work in Santiago and who are not the first generation in their families with higher education qualifications. They have either socially immobile or downwardly mobile intergenerational trajectories. We selected this sub-sample in order to contrast the divergent experiences of those who experience social immobility or social downward mobility with the experiences of those who experience upward social mobility.

The findings of this article compare the two samples of respondents in order to show differential trajectories between the two groups. Under a comparative approach, this article highlights dissimilar and unequal routes and experiences at university among different social, gender, and ethnic groups within Chilean society.

## Inequalities from early years: educational disadvantages versus favourable life conditions

In order to examine the respondents' experiences of social inequalities and their sense of social mobility, it is necessary to examine how they construct narratives of their entire trajectories and how most of the challenges that they face are associated with structural

barriers. In this respect, the first issue that emerges from the respondents' narratives is that unequal routes to university and then unequal experiences of social mobility are deeply associated with their unequal living conditions since childhood.

Despite attending university and achieving an experience of social mobility, respondents from working-class social backgrounds have different trajectories compared with respondents from middle-class backgrounds. Diverse factors influence how they can experience their route to university, with those who experience disadvantages being distinguished from those who do not.

There are respondents who experienced considerable inequalities during the period of their schooling, particularly those who attended rural schools and identify as Mapuche (seven respondents), due to the lack of schools in rural areas and the paucity of quality and resources at school. For that reason, people who live in rural areas have to attend the closest school, which is often at a significant distance. Take the case of Eduardo:

> I studied in a primary school in my community [. . .] then I went to the town to continue secondary school and then I went to Temuco [. . .] The first year I was at a boarding school, but I didn't like it because it was very cold, I was hungry, and I wanted to be with my family. So I was only there for one year and in the second year I was living at home [. . .] from my home to my school it's 3 kilometres. (Eduardo, school teacher, 30 years, Mapuche)

Here, the intersection of rurality, geographical distance, and a lack of cultural, social, and economic capitals negatively influenced the trajectory of Eduardo, where structural barriers challenged him from his early years. In line with Rollock's (2012) argument that minorities are racialised and occupy a liminal space of alterity, Mapuche people who live in poor rural areas and with a lack of capitals do not have the same tools and spaces as non-Mapuche people.

However, nearly all of the 12 respondents with stable socially mobile trajectories remember their childhood as a period of comfort. They acknowledge enjoying a cosy and sheltered lifestyle. Finances were never a concern for this group of participants when they were children. As Juan's quote shows, this situation of advantage is associated with a better economic position, but he also recognises that his parents' economic resources were a means of accessing private education and cultural capital since his early years:

> We had a very normal life, quite happy [. . .] Financially we never had a big problem. My dad always had a job, he was the breadwinner. We [Juan and his sister] had everything. I could always go to school. My parents were always able to buy everything I needed for school. (Juan, school teacher, 45 years)

From this sort of narrative, it is notable that this group of participants is in a situation of advantage compared to the previous group. This advantage is not related solely to economic and cultural capital, but is also related to the fact that this group do not identify themselves as Mapuche people. Byrne (2006) highlights, 'how white people are positioned within processes of racialisation even when they may not explicitly articulate their whiteness' (p. 3). As we can see in this group, White/mestiza privilege is not consciously articulated through an ethnic process or, as Nayak (2003) points out, 'the normalcy of whiteness as ordinary, monotonous or humdrum' (p. 140).

Previous literature has argued that working-class students are disadvantaged at university (Bathmaker et al., 2013; Lehmann, 2009; Reay et al., 2009, 2010), but retrospective accounts of two groups of participants' life stories show that those disadvantages are not only manifested when students arrive at university. A comparative focus on two groups of participants makes those differences even clearer. While the first group of participants mention disadvantages related to lack of resources and ethnicity, the second group of participants refer to opportunities and advantages since their childhood. These findings provide primary evidence about the relevance of examining questions of social mobility and social inequalities (in a broader sense) by looking at their whole individual trajectories, rather than focusing on one single point in time.

## Different kinds of family support

This article argues that social mobility is a multidimensional experience, not only because it involves the movement of different sorts of capitals, but because there are also movements in different sorts of fields. In other words, if people have different trajectories in terms of social mobility, this is not purely the result of advantages and disadvantages in the education system, so we also need to examine other fields – such as the domestic space – which reinforce advantages and disadvantages. This section shows that parents have an important role in preparing their children for the possibility of university, even though some of them lack cultural and educational capital.

Indigenous respondents (40) had similar experiences associated with the lack of social and cultural capital of their parents and this affected how the respondents faced the new challenge to attend university. Take the case of Victor:

> I considered it [university] a difficult stage, because it was a challenge, because it was discovering or experimenting in a way that nobody in your family had done before. It was difficult with my parents because. I compared myself with other classmates whose parents had attended university [. . .] My classmates could ask their parents. However, in my case, I couldn't ask them, they were looking at me and wishing me good luck. So, I had to seek advice from others and continue to progress in the unknown. (Victor, accountant, 28 years, Mapuche)

The parents were able to give only emotional support, because they could not predict what difficulties the respondents might have. Byrne (2009) argues that students from working-class backgrounds have problems distributing their capitals, which they need in order to improve their social positions. Therefore, from a multidimensional perspective, many of the respondents realised about and on a personal level identified their different economic, social, and cultural capitals compared with their classmates and their parents, where the majority are not of the working-classes and do not have a Mapuche background:

> I don't know if they wanted to or not, but I really know that for them it wasn't an option. In fact, they choose a technical school for me. The idea was that I would have a technical qualification and start working, because the university was something out of reach. My father is a carpenter, my mother is a housewife [. . .] They thought that was the best that they could offer me at that time. (Diego, Engineer, 26 years, Mapuche)

We can see that the aspirations of the parents differ from the aspirations of the respondents. Due to the increase in the cultural capital of the respondents, their aspirations started to change when they saw the possibility of attending university, which produces tensions regarding their projects and goals for the future. Gillborn et al. (2012) argues that there are lower academic expectations for minorities, despite their social class background. However, in this case, the social class background of respondents intersected with their Indigenous identities, complicating the situation even further. The lack of middle-class aspirations and the lack of social, economic, and cultural capital from their parents made their option to attend university more difficult, due to the fact that this is a social field with which their parents and families are not familiar.

Participants with stable trajectories acknowledge that they deal with high expectations from their parents, but also from other family and non-family members since they were children. This is the case of Camilo:

> For my parents education was very important. I did study in a private-subsidised school in the countryside. This is a very good school, a faith-based school, a boys' school. You had to study and work hard to get a degree. So, if you liked maths you had to be an engineer, and if you liked humanities you had to be a lawyer, and if you liked biology you had to be a medical doctor. There wasn't any other possibility. (Camilo, 35 years, school teacher)

As we can see here, pressure during the interviewees' early years is very clear. Middle-class parents are able to provide economic, cultural, and social capital, but they also deploy diverse strategies such as enrolling their children in private schools, having an active participation in school life, and influencing their children's career decisions (Bathmaker et al., 2013; Brown et al., 2016; Reay, 2004). It has been argued that both parents and school also exert pressure to attempt to narrow students' attending university 'as a classed practice for the reproduction of middle class privilege' (Davey, 2012: 508). The findings of this article advance these arguments, showing that parents and schools' strategies are not always successful, especially when we look at the trajectories of people who decided to pursue a career as a teacher, an occupation that is neither socially nor economically highly rewarded, thus their possibilities of reproducing social advantage are limited.

Participants with stable trajectories recognise that family economic capital, but particularly cultural capital, has framed their trajectories since their early years:

> I think my cultural capital has remained stable over time [. . .] I always had high cultural capital because I have had the possibility [. . .] Maybe my family hasn't always had a lot of money, but it's a family that has always valued studying; my family has been able to see [other realities], my family has been able to travel, a family with high cultural capital. (Nancy, 23 years, school teacher)

Nancy, like other participants included in this group, recognises that her family has provided her with high cultural capital as regards the possibility of travelling, obtaining knowledge about the world, and promoting the idea that studying is an issue of value. Such findings echo previous research that show mobilisation of high stocks of cultural capital in the domestic space as a means of prompting advantages in education (Bathmaker et al., 2013; Lareau, 1987; Reay, 2004). Moreover, Bathmaker et al. (2013) reveal that

while some students are aware of their advantage as result of the cultivation of cultural capital in the family, other middle-class students take it for granted and seem less aware of their privileges. In the case of teachers, however, cultural capital emerges – from this group of participants – as a central asset that is likely to be passed on from one (older) generation to younger generations (Méndez and Gayo, 2018). The next quote shows the case of Nancy whose 'inherited' social capital is mobilised in order to obtain opportunities that boost her teaching career:

> I was looking for an internship and I hadn't found any school with internship jobs available. So my dad posted on Facebook something like 'my daughter needs to work as an intern teacher' and a friend of my dad replied 'I know someone who works for Santos University' I met that person, who worked for the learning centre at the university, and she offered me a job as a teacher. (Nancy, 23 years, school teacher)

The findings in this section follow previous research that argues for the salience of family cultural capital in reinforcing educational inequalities and broader class differences (Forbes and Lingard, 2015; Lareau, 1987; Reay, 2004). Despite differences in terms of cultural capital, parents from both working-class and middle-class families try to do their best in order to ensure the 'best' for their children. However, in doing so, they all raise expectations for their children's future careers.

## Experiences of social mobility and the interrelation of ethnic, class, and gender discrimination

The discussion about differential inequalities takes on more complexity by adopting not only a multidimensional, but also an intersectional approach to explore people's individual understanding of their trajectories. Respondents who experience upward, downward, and stable social mobility experienced discrimination at different times during their trajectories. Experiences of discrimination are interrelated with their experiences of social mobility. Here, we have the case of Teodoro who experienced upward social mobility:

> My best memories in that period of time were almost all of Mapuche people and the rural area, but I experienced things there, because boys are crueller, they said 'te dio la indiada' [roughly translated as 'you behaved like an Indian'] that I heard. (Teodoro, teacher, 25 years, Mapuche)

Although Teodoro said that in that period of time he had his best memories at the boarding school, he suffered from ethnic discrimination. The popular phrase 'te dio la indiada' is used when non-Mapuche people want to suggest that Mapuches are irrational and potentially aggressive and they have to be careful. This exemplifies stigmatisation many Indigenous people have experienced from childhood and which accompanies them throughout their life trajectories. For this reason, many use strategies like Teodoro to normalise the situation, in order to reduce and manage both the personal and external influence of discrimination.

The case of Paulina shows how ethnic and gender discrimination intersected. She recently moved to Santiago to seek better professional options. However, her experience in work was not particularly positive:

> In my job there are almost only men, so I felt different, because I'm a woman and Mapuche, so that was too much [. . .] At the beginning, they were nosey about my life, like my personal life, more or less, my sentimental life. I don't know, I felt uncomfortable. It was like, I'm Mapuche and a woman [. . .] there were other women in my job, Spanish, from lots of places, and I felt a little bit different. Maybe they had gone through this process before, but because I was new, I had to go through that. (Paulina, IT engineer, 26 years, Mapuche)

Paulina experienced harassment in the workplace for being woman and a Mapuche, which meant that she felt out of place in her new social locations, feeling, in Bourdieu's terms, like a 'fish out of water' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). She never used the word discrimination, but on many occasions, she reiterated that she felt different, strange, or unwelcome in her job. The respondents' experiences of discrimination show the symbolic barriers that they had to face in being a Mapuche professional and the tensions of managing 'to be middle-class' while also being Mapuche and a woman.

In the case of teachers with socially stable trajectories, they did not suffer experiences of discrimination during their early years. However, discrimination has become an issue for them since they decided on a teaching career and even more so after they started working as a teacher. Although teaching is a professional occupation, it is highly devalued in Chile. In this context, low wages and poor working conditions, as well as the loss of status and class position that affects the teaching career in Chile (De Lomnitz and Melnick, 1998) frame a sense of declining trajectory in the sample. Consequently, the lack of social recognition for the teaching occupation restricts any possibility of social mobility for teachers who come from middle-class families:

> I think that you can't move socially upwards being a teacher in Chile. I think that people look down on you because they think 'you're just a teacher'. (Camilo, 35 years, school teacher)

The situation is even worse in the case of female teachers who deal with barriers to social mobility not only as teachers but also as women. Feminist scholars such as Valerie Walkerdine (2003) and Stephanie Lawler (1999) highlight the persistence of barriers and the costs of social mobility that affect working-class women. In the same vein, Claudia's account also shows the persistence of explicit forms of discrimination resulting in lack of opportunities as a problem that affects middle-class women as well:

> Many schools didn't contract me because I'm a single mother [. . .] Most of the schools that offer better wages are faith-based schools and as a single mother I didn't have any chance to work there. My friends said that I shouldn't mention the fact that I have a daughter. But, when you have a kid, they can get ill, you have to stay at home and you can't lie all the time. I don't want to lie. (Claudia, 40 years, school teacher)

The experiences of Camilo and Claudia (and others) show that inequalities in Chile are related to an intersectional and multidimensional perspective. Each of the above quotes demonstrates that different experiences of social mobility are associated with people's individual trajectories. Although they have achieved an educational parity through attending and succeeding at university, their experiences of inequalities and injustices are present throughout their lives. The findings show that both

multidimensional and intersectional experiences of inequalities require an intertemporal lens of analysis. This article focuses on unequal routes to university, but in order to understand the bases of those unequal routes, it is necessary to examine how inequalities frame people's trajectories from their early years to adulthood.

## Conclusion

In Chile, it is a fact that increasing numbers of people have access to university. This is due to a generalised meritocratic discourse in which entering university generates great changes in the economy and family culture, as well as the neoliberal marketisation of education. For this reason, although university fees are expensive, people go into debt or make an effort to obtain a scholarship to pay the fees. However, the experience of accessing and completing a degree course at university does not cease to be difficult, resulting in unequal opportunities of social mobility. This article argues that the subjective experiences of social mobility are framed by individual experiences throughout people's whole lifetimes. Issues such as unequal living conditions since childhood or differential *life* experiences result in unequal routes to university and different opportunities of social mobility both during and after ostensibly successful *educational* experiences.

The findings of this article show that the problem of inequality and, hence, the lack of access to social mobility is not solved solely by promoting access to university. Access to university is one of many obstacles that Indigenous people from working-class families have to face in order to have upward social mobility trajectories. We have demonstrated that the problem here is not merely unequal access, but also experiences at university. People have different experiences at university and different routes to social mobility depending on the kind of experiences that frame their entire trajectories. On one hand, we can see that upwardly socially mobile respondents overcame barriers and challenges associated with dimensions such as rurality, ethnicity, and lack of cultural and economic capital from their families that made their route to university even more difficult. On the other hand, respondents of stable social mobility feel they have been in a position of privilege since their early years, but this position has been threatened since they started working in an economically and socially devalued occupation in Chile.

The empirical findings of this article suggest that we should advance with incorporating both a multidimensional and intersectional approach to social mobility in accordance with people's actual multifaceted experiences of living in an unequal space. In our view, research on subjective social mobility should focus on the intersectional and multidimensional approach in order to highlight that there are not solely economic limitations and challenges that people have to face in their trajectories to university. We also have to consider barriers related to ethnicity, as well as cultural, social, and symbolic capital.

Finally, this article provides evidence to understand the magnitude of the problem of racial discrimination and inequality in Chile. This article has focused on the education system as a first lens of analysis, but we suggest that it would be helpful to conduct further research on minorities' experience of university in Chile. It is necessary to address the structural disadvantages within universities by understanding how university policies, rules, and practices include (or exclude) minorities in these processes.

More research in this area would allow exploration of the idea that education does not always promote social mobility, if we adopt an intersectional lens to understand social mobility with its different edges. The education system should take care of the different barriers people face. Social mobility may be by definition a class problem, but moving forward investigation of it must necessarily include different factors, including but not limited to, race, gender, and ethnicity, especially when considered among such a historically diverse population as that of Chile.

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