Social inequality and access to higher education in Chile:

Exploring the discussion on *gratuidad*

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Content

Introduction

While the globally experienced increase in provision of higher education has enabled a large amount of low-income social groups to study, questions have emerged about whether this development has also been accompanied by growing equal access to such education.

In Latin America, the expansion of higher education has occurred within the last two to three decades, roughly during the same periods in which neoliberal policies started to be implemented. Currently, increased awareness is being raised about ongoing inequalities faced by students who attempt to accede university education. While the debate on the provision and access to higher education is not new, the changed political, social and economic context of many Latin American countries has triggered new observations about the reality of acceding education that has now become more accessible quantitatively. These new observations are original as they suggest linkages between present ongoing inequalities in acceding higher education on part of specific social groups, with the increased levels of socio-economic inequality that have emerged after the implementation of neoliberal policies. In Chile, the broadly known 2011 student movement forms an important and evident example of the manifestation of new questions and discontent about the current highly expanded education system, in which the possibilities of access are believed to have a direct link with the socio-economic class of potential students. This widely held belief has resulted in an appeal on part of the movement to implement universal free higher education, which has ever since caught the attention of institutional actors, experts on education, sociologists, political scientists, etc. due do the radical nature of the demands.

Consequently, the aim of this thesis is to critically analyse the significance of the 2011 student movement and its main demand for gratuity within the context of growing discussion about the potential impacts of socio-economic inequality. Particular focus will be paid to the different arguments made about the claim of the possible relationship between socio-economic inequality and access to higher education. By looking at the discourse of both the student movement and institutional actors, an answer will be sought to the following research question: *In what ways are the questions of access to quality higher education in Chile being related to issues of socio-economic inequality in the gratuity debate?*

While on the one hand a detailed description of the actors' main standpoints and positions will be needed in order to get a more complete overview of the discussion, the paper additionally aims at a careful evaluation of the most important arguments used in the gratuity debate. The used methodology therefore consists of a qualitative discourse analysis in which arguments of both key actors of the *gratuidad* debate will be tested on their strength by comparing them with their counter-arguments. The literature that will be used for this assessment will consist of a variety of secondary

academic articles written by political scientists, academia, experts and researchers on education, as well as primary literature provided by the key leaders of the student movement as well as institutional actors.

To provide the theoretical context in which the discussion on gratuity can be placed, the paper will start with a chapter on the most frequently observed key approaches that claim to explain the relationship between socio-economic inequality and access to higher education. In this same chapter attention will be paid to the reasons for the growing re-emergence of the discussion in general. This background knowledge will help to theoretically situate the evolved discussion in Chile.

The second chapter will set out the political-historical context in which the system and provision of higher education has been evolving in Chile. Particular focus will be paid to the impacts of three politically important periods that each has had significant and different consequences for the provision and equality of access to higher education. Understanding the historical development of higher education and its aspects will result of high importance when analyzing the gratuity debate, as arguments of both students and institutional actors often make reference to historical factors and conditions that have left an impact on the current educational system.

The third chapter will be dedicated to the case-study analysis in which the arguments and discourse of both the student movement and the institutional perspective will be evaluated, within the context of the gratuity debate. The chapter will provide the actors' most important viewpoints on the underlying significance and implications of the gratuity proposal and compare these to each other. Finally, the concluding section will shortly resume the key learnings of the three chapters and draw the most important linkages between the outcomes obtained in the case study and the general approaches to socio-economic inequality and access to education as outlined in chapter 1. Hence, the paper will situate Chile´s *gratuidad* debate in a global discussion on inequality in education, while simultaneously focus on the unique historic and social context from which the movement emerged.

Chapter 1

Assessing higher education and socio-economic inequality: A demarcation of approaches

In the light of globalization processes that have been going on in the last two decades, increasing attention is being paid to their effects on social, economic and political dimensions in both national and international contexts. More specifically, developments associated with globalization, such as the ever expanding free-market oriented nature of national economies, the dominance of neo-liberal ideology in policy-making and the political emancipation of multiple social groups across the globe in terms of legal recognition of their human rights, have opened up a broad scale of topics to scholars. Within the wide range of topics about the changing dynamics of economic and political systems and the emergence of new debates around issues of social justice and emancipation, the question of educational inequality and its relationship to socio-economic class is one that is discussed by scholars from a high variety of disciplines. In this introductory chapter attention will be paid to the underlying motives of why the discussion on inequality in education has re-emerged, and what the current approaches are that attempt to explain its relation with socio-economic inequality. While these approaches are numerous and scattered, focus will be made at three frequently observed main positions.

1.1 The re-emergence of the debate on educational and socio-economic inequality

The reason for the diverse provision of academic literature that examines the nature of the connection between educational and socio-economic inequality can partially be explained by the fact that academia from different disciplines provide different explanatory theories. Consequently, there is not yet a clear consensus between researchers on the main root-causes of inequality in higher education, and more specifically, on the extent to which these causes are linked to socio-economic class (Furlong & Cartmel, 2009: 35; Castro *et al*., 2017: 232).

However, when it comes to the timing, the renewed interest and need of investigating the dynamics between social and educational inequality can be attributed to at least four factors. First of all, with the globally scaled implementation of neoliberal policies, an increased general recognition has raised as to the negative effects of neo-liberalism on socio-economic inequality in terms of income distribution. Many scholars agree that the introduction of neo-liberalism in national political and

economic systems has caused countries to experience increased levels of income inequality, leading to stronger gaps between different social groups and classes (Harvey, 2005; Stiglitz, 2016; Selwyn, 2014). Higher or post-secondary education in particular is seen as one of the most important fields in which these gaps are visible, given the increased privatisation of higher education that makes access to it (more) dependent on the financial means of those interested in attendance. The wide-spread privatisation of higher education in various developed and developing countries has thus opened up the question of whether inequality in access to higher education can be linked to the economic means of potential students (Furlong & Cartmel, 2009: 18). This question is of particular interest in the case of Latin America, as the region is considered to be the world's most unequal one in terms of income distribution (Kennedy & Murray, 2012: 22). Even more specifically, questions about the link between privatisation and educational (in)equality have received particular attention in the case of Chile, as it has implemented neo-liberal policies in the most intense and consolidated way as compared to its regional counterparts (Levy, 2004, quoted in Brunner, 2008: 3).

Secondly, drawing upon this potential correlation between financial means and the possibility of people to gain access to their desired tertiary education in a neoliberal political system, examples have emerged of collective student protests against the mercantilization of higher education and its implications to its access and quality (Paredes, 2014: 3). In Latin America and even on a global scale, the 2006 and 2011 student protests in Chile are considered to be one of the most pressuring and impactful student movements in the region, during which thousands of students collectively protested against the neoliberal nature of the country's higher education system, converting themselves into a new group of actors with political agency (Cabalin, 2012: 226). In the light of protests like the Chilean ones, which nevertheless are unique and highly shaped by their national context, increased research started to emerge with the objective of comparing worldwide contestations to the privatisation of education on the part of the students. These researches aim at the examination of the key demands of students in various countries regarding their systems of higher education, which are in turn brought into relation with the levels of economic development of these countries.

Thirdly, given the widely recognized fact that the provision of higher education has drastically expanded in the last two decades, (Weis & Dolby, 2012; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009; Brunner & Uribe, 2007; Castro *et al.,* 2017) this has generated a new ground for debate regarding the expected effects of a radically increased amount of students being able to assist post-secondary education on issues of social equality.

Ultimately, increased attention has been paid to the role of access and quality of education in the development of socially equal and free societies in which education serves as a genuine way for individuals to empower themselves, be it socially and/or economically. From this social perspective, equal access to good quality education is seen as one of the most important tools that society has to

become more just and therefore more advanced (all from Nino, 2011: 353). From this point of view, there is a logic correlation between educational inequality and socio-economic inequality in a given society. This is an assumption that simultaneously argues that inequality in educational institutions should be regarded as an effective factor that increases and reproduces social inequality in the long-term as well (Castro et al., 2017: 230). Consequently, positioning access to quality education as a key determinant for establishing the level of development of a particular country, raises the importance of critically examining the impact of socio-economic class on the possibility to achieve quality higher education.

These four aspects that have led to a renewed interest in the topic of educational inequality, have already led to extensive discussions on national levels with the participation of policy makers, local academia and newly emerged actors such as students themselves. Nonetheless, scholars have been increasingly involved in carrying out international comparative research in which national experiences are being compared, while taking into account domestic economic and political contexts.

1.2 Socio-economic class and access to quality higher education: current approaches

In scholarly research there is an overall broad consensus that while the enrolment of young people in higher education has expanded substantially on a global scale, this development has not been accompanied by an equally impressive decrease in inequality in access to good quality higher education (Gentili, 2009; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009; Sverdlick *et al*., 2005; Gegel *et al*., 2015; Evans, 2002; Alon, 2009). However, beside this point of general coincidence, questions related to the explanation of the asymmetry between expansion on the one hand and continuous inequality on the other, generate differences in viewpoints. Socio-economic class and inequality in access to quality higher education are often discussed by authors who either a) strongly argue that there is a negative correlation between the two variables and neoliberal political systems, b) focus on concrete policies that hinder social inclusion in higher education without necessarily criticizing the fact that these are neo-liberal of nature, c) emphasize non-political but rather social factors that undermine the inclusion of under-represented groups in higher education, and ultimately, those who d) oppose the viewpoint that inequality in access to higher education is maintained or even re-produced. As a result, there is an increased complexity of ways in which education and class are being discussed, ranging from either more ideological to more pragmatic perspectives, on national or rather international levels and/or with emphasis on institutional and political factors of explanation, vs. socio-economic ones. The following section aims at exploring the various ways in which authors relate

socio-economic class to inequality in higher education. Attention will be paid to examples from countries that are considered highly developed in terms of their higher educational systems, such as the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as examples from Latin American countries whose historical and socio-economic contexts assimilate more to the country of this work's main focus and case study analysis – Chile. Consequently, general knowledge about the ways in which educational and social inequality are being discussed, will offer the possibility to critically position the case of Chile's 2011 student movement and gratuity debate into its regional if not global context.

1.3 Neo-liberalism and socio-economic inequalities in access to quality higher education

One of the main streams of thought that attempt to evaluate the causes of still apparent unequal representations of social classes in higher education programmes, could be described as one that directly associates these with a neoliberal political system. In his research on the progress of the implementation of the right to education as established in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Gentili argues that in Latin America, the universalization of education and the quantitative expansion of institutions of higher education has been very impactful, especially for the poorest groups of society who broadly turned out to be of indigenous and, in some countries, afro-Latin origin (Gentili, 2009: 35). However, this expansion has occurred in a period of consolidation of neo-liberal policies accompanied by growing social-economic inequality rates, enhancing even more the already existing gaps between the poor, the middle-class and upper middle-classes in Latin American societies (Espinoza, 2017: 94). Especially in the case of Chile, the enhanced inequalities marked by income-distribution in particular, are believed to be highly reflected in higher education, as access to it has become increasingly dependent on the financial means of potential students to pay their tuition fees, given the fact that public expenditure on part of the state has drastically diminished (Espinoza, 2017: 93). In a recent data-analysis of 25 countries, Hout indicates that in those with a neoliberal political system, socio-economic inequality is indeed most visible in post-secondary education (Hout, 2007, in Arum et al. 2012: 16).

According to Gentili, the mercantilization of the value of higher education by the means of neoliberal policies of privatisation has changed the role of the state as Commonwealth provider to one that is merely occupied with the re-distribution of wrongly allocated subsidies, leading to developments of 'including exclusion' (Gentili, 2009: 20-21). Because of the limited role of the state as guarantor for equal access-opportunities for all young people interested in attaining post-secondary education, neoliberal states provide educational institutions with a strong autonomy that enables them to effectively exclude certain social groups, based on the simple lack of financial means to pay

tuition, or even based on other factors such as cultural background, ethnicity or gender (Idem: 33-34). As such, the processes of 'including exclusion' on behalf of educational institutions relate to their increased variety of means to effectively maintain certain social groups excluded from participating in quality higher education, particularly through requirements of financial means and levels of qualification, while simultaneously masking these methods of exclusion by referring to the existing assistance-possibilities (scholarships, loans, subsidies etc.) (Gentili, 2009: 20, 44; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009: 40). In other words, while the provision of educational institutions and enrolment in higher education has grown substantially, providing the poorest social classes of Latin America's poorest nations with opportunities never experienced before, exclusionary practices have not disappeared and educational institutions have found new ways in which they can choose their candidates based on certain criteria (Alon, 2014: 818). Such practices are also visible in the UK, as argued by Evans and Furlong & Cartmel. In their research on policy changes occurred during the period of massive expansion of universities in the UK, Furlong and Cartmel conclude that higher education in the country is highly stratified, due to policies that enable universities to select their candidates in a discriminative way in order to maintain its institutional reputation and 'academic standards' (Furlong & Cartmel, 2009: 2-3). The authors compare the UK's current inequalities in access to quality higher education with the strong division that existed in the 50' and 60' between the working class and middle class in attending secondary education, pointing out to the fact that even though universities of all types of reputations have seemingly become much more accessible, there is a very small representation of people from working-class and minority backgrounds visible in prestigious universities (Idem: 3).

Moreover, while expansion of post-secondary education has indeed led to higher numbers of enrolment, is has empowered social classes throughout the country in a very stratified way, while leaving the privileged position of middle and upper-middle classes intact, and in some cases even enhancing it by providing elite institutions tax benefits and promoting their reputation (Idem: 3,17, 18). Similar to what Gentili describes as a process of 'including exclusion' in Latin America, Furlong and Cartmel point out to a process of 'fairness and protectionism', in which neoliberal state policies enable universities to protect their unequal selection practices, serving as institutional 'gatekeepers', under the banner of fair meritocracy and preservation of academic standard (Furlong & Cartmel, 2009: 3,22). They further emphasize that effective masked exclusion holds for most other developed countries as well (Idem: 18). In his research on the evolution of class divide in tertiary education in the USA, Alon indicates a process of 'exclusion and adaptation', in which privileged students, their parents and selective universities effectively maintain their positions of power by adapting to the changed dynamics occurred under the massive expansion of higher education to all social strata of the country. They do so particularly by increasing required academic qualifica-

tions, knowing that academic results are still highly dependent on socio-economic status, and by increasing tuition fees (Alon, 2009: 735-736).

Nevertheless, while these criticisms seem to apply heavily to the exclusionary tactics of higher education institutions, the authors point out that it would be erroneous to view these as the main responsibility-holders of persistent inequality of access. As such, the processes of exclusion on part of these institutions are seen as a logical consequence of neoliberal privatisation policies that force universities to compete in order to survive, while simultaneously having to cope with a growing demand for access on the one hand, and maintenance of reputation on the other (Furlong & Cartmel, 2009: 22).

1.4 Neo-structuralist views: the potential of policy-design to influence socio-economic inequality in access to higher education

As a response to some of the visible inequalities mentioned in the previous section, there has been a widespread experience of neo-structuralist-like state funded educational reforms aimed at reducing inequality, often including the creation of observatory mechanisms for fair access, evaluation mechanisms for quality and the provision of financial aid (Bernasconi & Celis, 2017: 4). In the light of these developments, an increasing number of scholars emphasize the need to critically assess the capacity of specific reforms and policies to effectively reduce inequality, instead of revising which political ideology should be blamed for causing socio-economic inequality (Nino, 2011: 353). Authors and policy-makers belonging to this rather neo-structural stream of thought argue that the design of policies should be more adapted to the cultural and historical context of the country in order to be more effective (Sunkel & Zuleta, 1990: 47). As such, given the fact that inequalities in (higher) education have always existed to some degree, it is of more use to analyze the failures and/or potentials of specific measures coordinated to level class-divide in accessing higher education. In their comparative analysis on the relationship between the social composition of higher education students, the income-distribution system and the amount of available assistance policies in five Latin American countries, Sverdlick et al. point out to two factors that resulted to play a significant role in assessing educational equality: a) the policies of access on part of universities and b) governmental assistance policies aimed at including under-represented social groups in higher education (Sverdlick et al., 2005: 7, 9, 10). According to results obtained through the research, the governments of Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Mexico have been able to generate substantial impact on the alleviation of unequal access to higher education by designing well-targeted policy measures to assist those students still struggling with access issues (Idem: 9). In Chile, the period of

massive expansion of higher education and its privatisation has been accompanied by an increased democratisation of the system, incorporating students from the 60% poorest quintiles of the income distribution (Brunner & Uribe, 2007: 225).

Notwithstanding, as seen in other examples, there is no lack of recognition that this expansion has simultaneously enhanced the socio-economic differences of those postulating to universities in Chile (Idem, 2007: 226). According to Brunner, the relevance of socio-economic background becomes especially visible when students need to undergo selection procedures that establish their level of academic qualification, measured by the outcomes of a standardized test (Idem: 226). The weight of socio-economic background is here articulated in what Brunner calls the 'triple vinculación' effect, in which access to higher education becomes dependent on students' academic capabilities/results, which are highly dependent on the students' previous scholarly trajectories, of which the quality of the education they attended is in turn strongly related to the financial means and social background of their family. (Brunner & Uribe, 2007: 227; Brunner, 2008: 273). Inequality in access to higher education therefore finds it root-causes in earlier stages of a person's educational trajectory, shaping future education and career prospects in a differentiated way. As Brunner continues to argue, Chile's highly unequal society puts heavy pressure on educational institutions which have to cope with the re-compensation for the socio-economic inequalities of postulating students providing them equal access and standards of quality (Brunner, 2005: 9). In this task, governments ought to take on responsibility to design rightly allocated policies that target specific social groups and tackle the stages where socio-economic inequalities find their source. However, the design of intelligent policies is a complex matter that generates a high variety of opposing opinions on political and academic level. One of the most discussed educational reforms and assistance policies consider those of financial aid and increased expenditure on education. Here, scholars warn for misallocated financial aid and investment that ultimately ends up benefitting already privileged social groups, perpetuating unequal structures in the long term (Levin, 2011; Brunner, CNN interview 2011; Furlong & Cartmel, 2009). The discussions and perspectives on what role states should have in reducing access inequality based on socio-economic class, and what policies would be effective, is of great relevance in the case of Chile, as will be seen in the case-analysis chapter that concerns the gratuity debate.

1.4.1 Social factors of exclusion

Apart from explanations that relate to financial and political factors, scholars also point out to social factors that perpetuate the exclusion of certain social groups in attaining higher education. These factors should be taken into account as it is often underestimated how much impact they have on whether students choose to attend higher education in the first place and whether they successfully complete it. Though scholars have not yet come to a consensus regarding the question of which factors, distinguishing between economic and social ones, are more relevant in explaining unequal social representation in higher education, many believe that social and economic reasons re-enforce each other, creating a vicious cycle of reproducing inequality. In the case of the UK research has indicated that while financial affordability does play a role in a student's possibility and will to access higher education, it is not a barrier that makes access completely impossible. Often equally important factors that influence access are, as already mentioned, weak quality of previous education, a lack of awareness and knowledge on educational opportunities and lack of aspirations. This type of aspects belongs to processes of self-selection among students from poorer socio-economic backgrounds, who in some cases do not associate themselves with attaining higher education, either based on cultural prejudices about the nature of university-education or a lack of self-esteem (all from Furlong & Cartmel, 2009: 29, 35). Similarly, in Latin America, the results of the analysis of 'Academic Access and Success for Vulnerable Groups in Situations of Risk in Latin America', have pointed out to factors such as self-perception and attribution and family situation as having a significant potential to (de)motivate young people to access higher education (Castro et al., 2016: 233, 235).

1.4.2 Diverging assumptions of educational inequality

In discussing the existing scholarship on the topic of socio-economic inequality and its relation to educational inequality, it is important to be aware of perspectives that critically evaluate the broad assumptions on these matters. In their analysis on the relationship between expansion and diversification of higher education and inequality of attendance of disadvantaged social groups, Arum et al. point out to what they perceive as a flaw in the widespread assumption that inequality is not decreasing (Arum et al. 2012: 15, 32). While they recognize that the increased privatisation of higher education has enhanced inequality of access due to higher tuition fees, they perceive the trend of radical expansion of higher education on the other hand as one that levels out the negative effects of the other (Idem: 32). In other words, the inclusive effect of expansion compensates the exclusive

effects of privatisation, meaning that the overall effect of privatising higher education on inequality is neutral (Idem: 32). From a closer perspective, the authors of the research indicate that while the privatisation of higher education has indeed created new forms of exclusion, it has also created new inclusive practices, which together with the including effects of expansion have created an overall equalizing effect on access to higher education, with an overall increase of opportunities for all social groups (Idem: 33, 34). Thus, the fact that higher education is more accessible to much larger parts of societies, even though privileged groups still maintain their advanced positions, is in itself a development that if anything, has only enhanced equality (Idem: 33). Authors from less pragmatic perspectives often argue against this type of reasoning, by stating that it is too weak of an argument to justify failures of a current situation by pointing out to how the situation was worse in the past (Gentili, 2009: 35). Nonetheless, those who argue against such ideological standpoint often point out to measures that have been or are already being implemented in order to combat issues of inequality, while further arguing that improvement is a gradual process (Paredes, 2014: 4).

As will be seen in the case-analysis, the four outlined mainstream perspectives on the relationship between socio-economic and educational inequality are all represented in the gratuity debate in Chile. Institutional actors that question the assumptions made about the existence and severity of inequality in access to higher education or who criticize ideological assumptions are also present.

Chapter 2

Inequality in access to higher education in Chile: An historical assessment

To better understand the dynamics of the current debate on inequality in higher education in Chile, it is of importance to analyze the historical context in which educational policies have evolved. While in this debate the discourse on issues of educational inequality is highly shaped by contemporary factors such as globalization and the policies of the current government that is in place, actors continue to point out to experiences from the past that often serve as the base of comparison with the present situation. In assessing how the issue of inequality in higher education has been addressed in the past, it results that mainly three periods of time, which are linked to roughly three types of governments, are of most significance. The aim of this chapter is to provide an historical outline of the extent of inequality in access to higher education by looking at how this issue was addressed in the policies set out by the two governments before 1973, during the military regime under Pinochet (1973-1990) and during the first decade of the Concertación period (1990-2000).[1]

2.1 Socio-economic inequality in higher education Frei and Allende, 1964-1973

While questions about the accessibility and participation in higher education had already started to emerge in political forums at the beginning of the twentieth century, it was the reform initiated under the government of President Eduardo Frei Montalva in 1967 that aimed at the implementation of structural changes in the educational system (Cox, 2005: 4). In the decades prior to his 'Reforma Educacional', the entire Chilean system of higher education consisted of merely eight universities, of which six were private and funded by the Catholic church and elitist groups; a combination that gave the system an highly traditional, oligarchic and exclusionary character (Brunner, 2011: 3). While almost entirely financed by the public sector, the system was marked by selective regulations concerning access, as can be derived from the fact that until 1967, only 55 thousand were attending higher education (Idem: 3).

[1] Though many of the educational policies of these governments were targeted at the dimensions of primary and secondary education as well, the scope of this work remains to focus on those policies that considered the system of higher education in particular. By 'the system', reference is thus made to the system of higher education instead of the general educational system.

As such, and within the context of the need for new forms of social and economic development, the Christian-democratic structuralist government that came into power in 1964 viewed education as one of the first and main policy dimensions through which it could effectively start to transform and modernize the society (Núñez, 1997 in Oliva, 2010: 312. The need to modernize the system of higher education was already being emphasized earlier by an emerging student movement that increasingly started to challenge the authoritarian profile of the universities and demand more participation in democratic decision making, as well as more opportunities for access (Brunner, 2008: 124, 125). As a response to these demands, the most important aims of Frei's reform were to expand and equalize the opportunities of accessing education of all levels (primary, secondary and post-secondary) (Oliva, 2010: 313) and the general opening up of universities to their surrounding society (Brunner, 2008: 125). Nonetheless, while the implementation of the reform had caused an overall increased enrolment in higher education and maintained it tuition-free, Frei's government did not contribute any structural changes to the relationship between the State and the system of higher education (Idem: 126) which continued to be marked by respect for the independence of universities and their *Libertad de Enseñanza* -Freedom of Education, (Oliva, 2010: 313), a concept that grants institutions of higher education considerable autonomy by giving them the right to provide diplomas and degrees according to their established norms (Oliva, 2008:210).

Though education in general continued to be viewed as one of the most important focal points of the government and public expenditure on it had risen substantially, the socio-economic context in which the reform was introduced explains why for many scholars the period of Frei's presidency can hardly be considered as one that has caused significant progress in making the access to higher education more equal. While Frei aimed at strengthening the inclusiveness, democratization, diversification and modernization of the system, the motives behind his reform were highly shaped by the need to foster the industrial, military and agrarian sector (Gimeno Sacristan, 1997, in Oliva, 2010: 314); a process for which it was necessary to count with the adequate amount of suitable personnel. The tight link between Frei's objectives of making access to higher education more equal and his simultaneous plans for accelerating economic development has a contradictory nature, as education was therefore primarily viewed in terms of its efficiency and utility instead of democratizing potential, by prioritizing one area above the other and adjusting educational programs to the needs of economic development (Oliva, 2010: 314; Oliva, 2008: 219). As such, and despite the expansionary effects of the 1967 reform, the system of higher education in the 60s remained highly bureaucratic and access continued to be strictly selective, depending on previous school performances (measured by a test for academic aptitude) and socio-cultural factors (Espinoza, 2002: 216-217).

The following presidency of Allende from 1970 to 1973 covers the second part of the reform, during which the socialist party Unidad Popular started to question the maintained closeness of universities and strive for a more unified system of higher education in terms of access and socio-economic representation of students (Brunner, 2008: 126-127). In his discourse Allende pointed out to the potential power of the higher education system to combat socio-economic inequalities by securing its gratuity, its internal diversification and by extending the access of education in general to communities (Castro, 1977, in Oliva, 2010: 314). The aim was to secure the already existing principles on higher education, such as the autonomy of the universities, gratuity, meritocratic-based access and the Freedom of Education, in the Political Constitution of the State (Constitución Política del Estado) (Brunner, 2008: 127). Particularly as a response to the rapidly increasing enrolment in primary and secondary education, the access to higher education had to be expanded significantly.This led to higher public expenditures for its finance and an increased amount of vacancies in universities to receive more students. As a result of the 1967 reform and its second part in particular, growth in enrolment in higher education had almost tripled, from 55 thousand students in 1967 to 145 thousand in 1973 (all from Brunner, 2008: 128). With the extension of higher education programs and vacancies to more different segments of the society, including the poorer ones, the internal representation of socio-economic classes within universities did become more diverse, as did the provision of academic programs, making the system slightly less elitist (Idem: 133-134). However, access to higher education continued to depend to a large extent on the socio-economic background of students (Idem: 187) as even seemingly meritocratic requirements of academic aptitude were eventually linked to the financial capability of parents to provide for past education. This triangle of dependencies between access to higher education, secondary-school results and socio-economic background is described by Brunner as a ´triple vinculación hacia atrás´ – a triple backward linkage and characterizes the way in which inequality of access is maintained throughout the period of both governments (Brunner & Uribe, 2007: 227).

2.2 Socio-economic inequality in higher education under the Pinochet regime, 1973-1990

Though progress in making access to higher education more equal and approachable was achieved during the 1967-1973 period, the changing political context soon led to a drastic de-composition of the system as a consequence of the coup d'état in 1973 that overthrew the government of Allende, making place for a military dictatorial regime led by Pinochet. As the new government was characterized by a strongly anti-communist stance, it criticized the fact that autonomous educational institutions had been 'converted' into powerful centres of political identification, expression, and 'com-

munist propaganda' (Brunner, 2008: 132, 137). As a consequence, the government implemented a structural change in the system by interfering directly with the internal organization of universities and their programs; a process for which the administrative authority of these institutions was forcibly abolished and replaced by the control of special rectors who were assigned from the government (Brunner, 2011: 4). The shift from universities being autonomous regarding their teaching programmes to a state-led control over their regulations went parallel with a significant decrease of public expenditure on higher education. Within the new political context, universities were forced to diminish their accessibility and interaction with the surrounding society, a combination that led to decreased enrolment figures and that brought back the exclusionary, isolated character of higher education to its pre-1967 levels (Brunner, 2011: 5). Nonetheless, while the new government had taken over the administrative regulatory rights of the universities and forced these to assimilate to the new socio-political and economic ideology (an anti-communist one), the conventional position of universities as recipients of standard government funding remained intact, and in reality they managed to preserve a degree of autonomy (Brunner, 2008: 141). During the first period of Pinochet's government, any development on improving the equality of access to higher education had come to a pause, as other policy areas, such as the implementation of radical changes in the country's economic system and the expansion of the military forces, received more priority.

However, confronted with the pressing demands for accessing higher education on part of students graduated from secondary education, the government realized there was a need to pay attention to the question of higher education after a period of stagnated development. In 1981, the newly established political ideology of radical neo-liberalism under Pinochet's regime led to the implementation of widespread reforms that entailed the entire social and economic dimension of policy areas, such as health, social housing and education. The neoliberal perception of development was aimed to be applied to all government policies and to radically alter the relationship between the State, market and society. The experimental establishment of neo-liberalism as main political ideology entailed, amongst other implications, the privatization of nearly all state-led enterprises, organizations and state-funded social services, as well as opening up Chile's economy to foreign investors. The central belief that the market should guide the provision of goods and services based on demand and that the prices and quality of these services would this way be kept in an adequate balance, also reached the dimension of higher education. The government now started to criticize the traditional oligarchic position of the few universities, and their autonomy was perceived as an obstacle for the further expansion and diversification of the higher-educational system, as well as the creation of new establishments of higher education (Idem: 157). The most crucial point of critique considered the fact that universities had continued to receive monthly standard funding on part of the State, which according to the principles of neo-liberalism, had a deteriorating effect on the com-

petition between the institutions and consequently, the quality of their programs (Idem: 157). The passive position of universities that was based on their high levels of autonomy and guaranteed funding stood in contrast with the fundaments of neo-liberalism regarding social and economic development.

As a consequence, in 1981, one year after the new foundations of Chile's political and economic system had been safeguarded in a new Constitution, the government initiated a reform known as ´gran reforma educativa neoliberal´ – ´the great neoliberal educational reform´, (Oliva, 2008: 221) which consisted of structural changes that would be implemented in the system of higher education. Regarding the issue of inequality of access, three of these changes had an impact on this. Firstly, the reform aimed at the quantitative expansion and diversification of higher education by creating new universities, as well as institutes of technology and professional ones. Secondly, the system had to become privatised and public expenditure would drastically decrease, meaning that from now on students would have to finance their education from their own economic means, supported by their families. Thirdly, the reform aimed at the decentralization of the until then two public universities (González & Espinoza, 2011: 111) in order to reduce their autonomous power (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002: 445).

The privatisation of the system, together with the creation of two additional types of institutions of higher education, had the objective of stimulating the establishment of new private universities and institutes (Brunner, 2008: 159). The increased competition between universities (and other higher education institutes) that this measure would cause, would develop the incentive of making quality education an important value; a factor for which the student as consumer could opt for if wanted (Brunner, 2011: 5). The shift from higher education being controlled internally and by the State towards being controlled by market forces, encompassing the policies of privatisation and self-financing, has had a significant impact on the extent of equality of access due to several factors.

First of all, the policy of privatization had led to a rapid expansion of new private establishments of higher education, as regulations considering the requirements for opening up such institution and the quality of programs it would have to provide, were minimal (idem.). In concrete numbers, during the 1980-1990 period, 40 private universities without government funding were established, and 161 private professional and technical institutes (Espinoza, 2002: 220). Quantitative access to higher education had therefore increased considerably.

In terms of quality however, it is important to note that, similarly to what could be seen in previous governments, many institutions of higher education under the military regime were ideologically affiliated to the ruling political elites, which had a deteriorating impact on the diversity of social class-based representation, as certain social classes were privileged in accessing education. Another point of similarity with the previous governments is that the development of higher education corre-

sponded to the then desired plans for economic development, which were characterized by a rapid process of export-oriented industrialization (Torres & Schugurensky, 2002: 444) causing the educational system to once again be utilized for its potential to create the adequate personnel for a new type of economy. This resulted in a provision of careers mainly focused on general economic integration, of which the quality often highly depended on the particular educational institution (Brunner 1988, in Torres & Schugurensky, 2002: 444).

The second factor considers the altered relationship between the State and society. The State's perception of education changed, from being first seen as a public right that ought to be guaranteed by the government, towards education as a private right that ought to be protected only if threatened (Gobierno de Chile, 1974, in Oliva, 2010: 316). Within this changed paradigm, government's expenditure on higher education between 1981 and 1988 decreased from $171 million to $115 million respectively (Schiefelbein 1990, in Torres & Schugurensky, 2002: 444), and limited itself to the provision of subsidies, loans and scholarships where needed, though compared to the high demands for access, these resulted to be quite insignificant in terms of effectively supporting those in need (Brunner, 2011: 6).

Thirdly, for the access to public universities, which now received significantly less funding and therefore had to start to charge tuition fees as well (though lower ones than those of private institutions), the government maintained the system of admission based on the academic aptitude test (Prueba de Aptitud Académica). However, obtaining the minimal score for this test was *not* a requirement in order to access private institutions (Brunner, 2008: 185)

The meaning of these factors for the extent of equal access to higher education, and to universities in particular, is then as follows. While the quantitative access to higher education had risen rapidly and students could now opt for different types of it, the amount of variables on which access depended on, rose as well. On one side of the spectrum, the admission to public universities continued to largely depend on the social and cultural class of students and their previous academic performance and accumulated capabilities that were measured by the aptitude test (Idem: 186). For the admission to private institutions on the other hand, access naturally became dependent on the economic means of students. The new mechanism of exclusion, namely that of financial affordability, led to a significant segmentation of enrolment based on socio-economic class, both in private and public universities, thereby increasing social inequality in accessing higher education (Bellei, 2007: 19). In other words, while the policies implemented during the second period of the military regime (1981-1990) caused notable quantitative growth in enrolment, this growth was not distributed proportionally across all socio-economic classes of society (Espinoza, 2002: 283). It were mainly the upper-middle and upper income classes who benefitted from the expansion of private institutions of higher education (Ministerio de Planificación y Cooperación, 1996, in Espinoza, 2002: 283). In

terms of the quality of education, the low requirements set out by the government for opening new private universities and institutions, led to a highly scattered distribution of good quality programs (Bellei, 2007: 19). The high differences in quality had an effect of further prompting socio-economic inequalities in higher education, as good quality programs became yet another 'good' that students could opt for depending on their financial possibilities.

2.3 Socio-economic inequality in higher education during the Concertación period, 1990-2010

After Pinochet's military regime came to an end due to a national referendum issued in 1988, political power was taken over by a coalition of several centre-left and one liberal right-wing party, (Brunner, 2008: 199) under the presidency of Aylwin (1990-1994). The government aimed at the restoration of democracy in the country and had taken over political control over a society marked by increased socio-economic inequalities and socio-political division. In the period of two decades that would follow, the main objectives of the governments considered the reduction of drastic socio-economic inequalities and the democratization of the political arena, which would be legally safeguarded by the implementation of new laws and regulations. Aylwin's government, together with the three subsequent ones, is named as the Coalition of Parties for Democracy -la Concertación de Partidos por la Democracia- (Lagos, 2008: 33), which explains why the political system between 1990 and 2010 is framed as one of Concertación.

Characterized as a neo-structural government, the discourse of the Concertación expressed a new vision of social and economic development that would distinguish itself from its previous interpretations by being more pragmatic. On the one hand, the new government planned to proceed with previously-made neoliberal policies that had positively affected economic growth and capital accumulation (Taylor, 2006, in Kennedy & Murray, 2012: 31). However, after having recognized the damaging effects of letting socio-economic issues be entirely led by the market, the government aimed at the creation of social institutions that would support the development of a socially more equal society, moving away from strict orthodox neo-liberalism (Idem.). As a result, the motto of the Concertación became 'growth with equity', (Kennedy & Murray, 2012: 31) in which the neoliberal political ideology would be maintained, but nevertheless accompanied by the State as an actor that would control the reach of market-led outcomes for social dimensions such as health, housing and education.

Confronted with the inequalities in access to higher education, the new government sought to implement legal changes in the system, proposing one that would be based on a 'mixed coordination' (coordinación mixta), in which the relationship between the state, market and institutions

would become more balanced out (Brunner, 2008: 204). Within this coordination, it initiated a series of objectives aimed at the democratization of higher education. Amongst others, it sought to a) take back some control over setting out the requirements for building new private institutions, b) increase the public expenditure on higher education, c) dedicate more expenditure on the provision of scholarships, loans and other means of financial assistance, d) establish a standard system aimed at the control of the quality of educational programmes and e) to provide information on the possibilities to access higher education and the existence of financial assistance for lower socio-economic classes (Brunner, 2011: 6-7).

From 1994 onwards, following president Frei Ruiz-Tagle (1994-2000) further strengthened the policies initiated by Aylwin and established the Program for the Improvement of the Equity and Quality of Higher Education (*MECESUP),* which counted with substantial government funding (Brunner, 2008: 211).

However, due to the fact that the 1981 constitution had been kept in place and that therefore, the fundaments of the higher education system had their origin in the dictatorial period, it is frequently argued that the new Concertación governments merely maintained the status quo when regarding issues of educational inequality (Oliva, 2010: 317). Even more, some observe that the continuation of privatization of higher education has actually fostered socio-economic inequality, based on differences in the quality of programs that now function as a new factor of exclusion (Espinoza, 2002: 313). While often the most privileged socio-economic groups are capable to be selected for high-quality education in public universities due to their past educational experience, lower income groups are rather limited to the option of low-quality private education, as it does not require the same strict proves of academic aptitude (Levy, 1991 in Espinoza, 2002: 313). Therefore, as argued by Cabrera, if it was not for the high qualitative differentiation that had emerged after the 1981 reform, the relationship between access to higher education and socio-economic background would not be so unequal. Following this reasoning, combined with the fact that each progressive new opportunity for attending higher education also applied to already privileged students, educational inequality during the Concertación could be considered as 'effectively maintained' (Cabrera, 2017: 110-111).

As can be derived from the following table, numbers that support the argument of maintained inequality indicate that indeed, students from the highest socio-economic segments were over-represented in institutions of higher education in the period between 1987 and 1998 (Espinoza, 2002: 289, 290).

Percentage of youth attending higher education per income quintile in given years

Income quintile	1987	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998
I	3.7	4.0	4.8	5.1	6.7	6.1
II	5.5	7.4	7.4	7.1	10.9	11.5
III	9.2	12.2	11.5	14.9	17.5	17.0
IV	20.0	22.1	21.3	28.2	31.7	31.5
V	44.6	41.5	40.3	51.2	57.7	58.8

Source: Espinoza, 2002: 290.

While it is true that youth from all income-quintiles has experienced growth in enrolment, this growth has not been proportional and has, as seen previously, mostly benefitted upper classes (Idem.).

Nonetheless, while the expanded access had benefitted the highest socio-economic classes in particular, an aspect already visible in the times before the 1981 reform, the Concertación period distinguished itself from the former governments in that it provided significant financial assistance to lower income groups (especially the first two quintiles), incrementing drastically their opportunities to attend higher education, to unprecedented levels (Brunner, 2011: 8). Within the period of 1990-2006, students from the lowest socio-economic backgrounds had come to be represented from 4% to 16% respectively, a progress that has been enabled mainly because of the increased provision of scholarships and options of financial assistance (González & Espinoza, 2011: 114).

Chapter 3

Questioning the link between socio-economic inequality and access to higher education in the *gratuidad* debate since 2011

Though the governments of the Concertación could be characterized as ones that have implemented measures aimed at the equalization and democratization of access to higher education, the period from 1990 onwards has experienced increased expressions of dissatisfaction on part of then future and present students. The establishment of democracy had enabled the possibility for society to articulate needs and demands and (re)initiate debates on social thematic. Within this context, the stage had also been opened for students and other involved actors to address the still visible shortcomings if not main problems of the higher education system, which did not seem to diminish despite of the radical expansion and diversification of its provision and the democratization of the country's government. While the first broadly known protest occurred in 2006 on part of college alumni and future students, dissatisfaction with the system has been most prominently expressed in 2011 by a widely organized student movement, whose actions have reached global attention. While the appeals and propositions of the movement related to a widespread number of identified problems with the higher education system, one of the most controversial demands considered the guaranteed provision of free higher education for all. As will be seen in this chapter, the movement's demand for *gratuidad* has triggered a debate in which the access to higher education is linked to questions about socio-economic inequality in Chile, reflecting a variety of key-perspectives on the potential extent of such relation. The aim of this section is to analyze the discourse and arguments used by the main actors of the *gratuidad* debate, namely the student movement and the government, and to examine how these actors view the underlying significance and role of free higher education for socio-economic inequality. The first part will address the student movement's perspective, whereas the second part will discuss *gratuidad* from an institutional perspective, including some practical insights on the viability and implications of the measure.

3.1 *Gratuidad* and the transformation of the neoliberal nature of Chile's political system

The context of the emergence of the 2011 student movement is often traced back to different past events and periods. On the one hand, some argue that the college students' initiated protest of 2006 under Bachelet's first government, named as the ‘Pinguin Revolution’, caused a deepening of the

overall dissatisfaction of students in general. The main demands of implementing reforms to the constitutional organic law of education (Ley Orgánica Constitucional de Enseñanza, LOCE*)*, the provision of free public transport for educational purposes and the lowering of the costs to inscribe for the academic aptitude test (PSU), initially seemed to be considered by the presidential assesor council for quality of education (Consejo Asesor Presidencial para la Calidad de la Educación) (Aguirre & Agustin, 2015: 153). However, the demands resulted in not being incorporated in the final legislative project of the council (Idem, p.154). The lack of the desired changes triggered discontent while simultaneously an increased awareness on the shortcomings of the higher education system, as well as a renewed interest in questioning the role of the state in the provision of the right to education. On the other hand, it is often argued that critiques on the system can be traced back to the beginning of the Concertación period in 1990, and that these reached their peak in 2011.

Initiated the 12 of may 2011, the Chilean student movement organized in a widespread protest march in the capital Santiago, bringing together approximately 20 thousand of people (Idem: 154), including not only students but also college alumni, professors, family-members, independent workers and students of elite private institutions (Larrabure and Torchia, 2016: 257). Organized primarily by the confederation of students of Chile, Confederación de Estudiantes de Chile *(*Confech*)*, which gathers the student representatives of state-led traditional universities, and particular individual leaders like Camila Vallejo and Giorgio Jackson (who were representing the two most popular prestigious universities) the movement started with protests articulating primarily economic demands that considered the then current financing system and the provision of scholarships (Aguirre & Agustin, 2015: 154). Two months after the first protests, which did not receive any significant reaction from the government then led by Piñera for the first time, the student movement started to express not only economic demands, but also to a large extent political ones (Idem.). In July, in cooperation with the association of teachers (Colegio de Profesores) and the coordinating council of college students, the Confech introduced a document with propositions and guidelines for creating a social contract for the Chilean education system ("Bases para un Acuerdo Social por la Educación Chilena") (Nummi, 2011: 24). Though the contract touched upon a variety of issues such as decentralization, regional administration, scholarly environment, communal and cultural diverse participation, (Idem.) the specific demands that considered the topic of equalization and democratization of access to higher education resulted in being the most controversial ones.

Focusing on the theme of finance and equal access to quality higher education, the Confech listed as one of its main demands that the academic aptitude test PSU was to be eliminated, and that studying at public institutions and universities were to become free of any tuition fees for all [1] (Demandas Confech, 2011). With the introduction of their demand for *gratuidad* in particular, the movement had initiated a multi-participatory debate on a national level, as it soon became clear that

their vision of how the system of higher education should work, reflected not only economic motives but especially political ones. In other words, though the proposal of universal gratuity appealed to a change in the government's financing system of higher education, the movement proclaimed that there is a direct link between the demand and the general issue of socio-economic inequality and injustice in the country. As such, a discussion was created that went beyond economic terms.

By referring to examples of ongoing socio-economic inequality in areas such as healthcare and labour, beside the area of education, the students successfully generated a discourse of shared obstacles with other segments of society and acquired a broadly based network of social support (Laraburre & Torchia, 2015: 257). As a consequence, the politicization of the *gratuidad* proposal converted the student movement in an important political actor. The discourse of connecting problems of the higher education system to socio-economic inequality was based on the following main arguments and standpoints.

First of all, when looking at the still ongoing financial obstacles that students have been encountering to access higher education, the movement argued that the Concertación governments had done little apart from maintaining the status quo of educational legislation (Aguirre & Agustin, 2013: 158). In this argument, reference is not only made to the lack of response to the 2006 protests, but more generally to the continuation of embracing neo-liberalism as main political and economic ideology in the government. Though the movement's leaders were initially against any political self-definition and cooperation with other political parties (although ideologically they were strongly connected to the political left and the communist party) (Laraburre & Torchia, 2015: 252) the movement viewed neo-liberalism in particular as the main source of socio-economic inequality, which from their perspective had profoundly affected the area of education. Perceived as the main 'playground' of the neoliberal political system, (Vallejo, 2012: 121) the area of higher education (as well as basic and secondary education) and the reality of its functioning reflected the extent of broader socio-economic wellbeing of the country. From this perspective, neo-liberalism and its core

[1] Though the proposal of free higher education became later on modified by the Confech, suggesting that free education should be guaranteed for the first three income quintiles in particular, while the fourth and fifth quintiles would obtain more financial assistance in forms of scholarships, the original demand opted for its universal character, meaning that every student attending public higher education should be able to do so without any costs.

principals of privatization and mercantilization had shifted the perception of access to education as a social right into one of a mere commodity, rather a privilege, which consequently led to the high levels of social based inequality due to high levels of economic inequality (Espinoza, 2017: 194). The argument of the deterring effects of neoliberal ideology for equal access to higher education was able to gain significant back up within the context of continuous high levels of income inequality in Chile experienced by the majority of society. In fact, it resulted that the access to higher education had become even more dependent on students' income than it was in 1990, (Cabrera, 2017: 107) shortly after the end of Pinochet's dictatorship. Simultaneously, while income inequality was maintained and had even become higher than its levels in 1960 (Kennedy & Murray, 2012: 32) , tuition costs had grown by 60% during the last 12 years, leading to an average annual cost of studying that constitutes roughly 40% of the income of families in the first three quintiles (Fontaine, 2011, in Larrabure & Torchia, 2016: 253). The annual tuition fee (which consisted of US$ 6150) represented the world's most expensive one in 2011 (Idem.). Additionally, the government's expenditure on public education continued to be significantly lower than what was dedicated to the private sector, and no significant changes had been implemented in this area since 1981 (Espinoza, 2017: 195). In 2009, expenditure to higher education in general consisted of merely 0,3% of the country's GDP, compared to an average of 1,3% in developed countries (Aguirre & Agustin, 2015: 148). These factors thus continued to affect access to higher education, despite the measures that were taken by Christian-democratic and socialist governments during the Concertación period, which included a substantial inversion of funds into the previously mentioned Mecesup *(*program for better quality and equality in higher education) in 1998 and reforms to the legislation of basic and secondary education in 2009 by Bachelet. Though it is important to note that during this same period general poverty levels have been reduced significantly, this has not been the case for income inequality levels (Vallejo, 2012: 129).

As such, the student movement accused the Concertación governments that had the task of generating 'growth with equity' (Kennedy & Murray, 2012: 31) for being too passive in their approach towards issues of inequality in higher education and for neglecting ongoing demands from students in the past decades (Foweraker, 1995, in Nummi, 2011: 40). Even more, the movement argued that by their measures the Concertación governments had been enabling and enforcing neoliberal approaches towards higher education that had been inherited from the dictatorial period, for while some of these seemed emancipatory, none of them diminished the neoliberal, privatized character of higher education (Nummi, 2011: 1). In other words, while the movement aimed at the elimination of the structural causes underlying socio-economic inequality in access to higher education, which they believed to be the neoliberal policies of privatization, the Concertación governments were

criticized for their neo-structural approach that only targeted the symptoms of such inequality in a superficial way (Kennedy & Murray, 2012: 33).

From an ideological perspective, the student movement therefore positioned itself not only against the in 2011 ruling right-wing government of Piñera, but also against the left opposition (Laraburre & Torchia, 2015: 252). The clear protest against any cooperation with the government signalled the movement's strong opposition towards the political power-relations that, in its discourse, had been favouring an ideology funded upon inequality since the beginning of the dictatorial period in 1973 (Vallejo, 2012: 129). Specific arguments considering this statement about inherited inequality from the dictatorship referred to the so called Leyes Orgánicas, organic laws, that had been implemented in the Constitution of 1981 and that strongly limited the possibility to further democratize the system of higher education by safeguarding the neoliberal approach to it. (Aguirre & Agustín, 2015: 153) Vallejo refers to the *´Libertad de Enseñanza´* (article 19:23) in particular (Vallejo, 2012: 68) as it establishes the neoliberal view on education by granting parents the right to choose possible education for their children and by granting more privilege to private education (Oliva, 2008: 209, 211). Accordingly, the result of this dominating legislative context was reflected in the measures of the Concertación governments. An important example of such measure that has been highly criticized by the movement was the State-Guaranteed Student Loan (CAE) initiated by Lagos during his presidency (2000-2006) that had led to a drastic growth in student debts (Menz, 2018: 48). The movement illustrated the effect of such neoliberal policies on reproducing socio-economic inequality in the country in the long run, by pointing out to the fact that the increased provision of loans and credits had caused students to be in debt even during decades after their graduation, (Paredes, 2014: 3) putting most pressure on students from households from the lowest income quintiles. Moreover, while the CAE loan was dedicated to low-income students who could access higher education based on merit, the movement pointed out to the particular problem of granting loans based on testing academic aptitude. By stressing the negative impact of low quality past education (basic and secondary) on a student's future possibilities to pass such aptitude tests, the movement opposed the CAE as it was accused of reinforcing unequal access to higher education(Vallejo, 2012: 70). This same argument holds for the opposition to the PSU aptitude test, for which a student needs to receive a certain amount of minimum points in order to get access to higher education. As mentioned earlier, while such minimum is required by mostly high quality public universities, a significant amount of often lower quality private universities does not require such minimums or has less strict ones. These factors then contribute to a sharper class based division of students attending a type of higher education, as it is frequently observed that lower-income students, due to a 'lack of academic aptitude', are left with the choice of attending expensive, lower-quality private institutions that will additionally leave them with high debts and uncertain future

labour opportunities (Larrabure & Torchia, 2016: 254). The argument is reinforced by looking at a variety of statistics on scholarly results of different socio-economic groups attending either private or municipal high schools. In the case of the latter, approximately 93,2% of students were not capable of achieving enough points on the PSU test to attend higher education in a public university (data from 2004) (Idem: 254).

As such, the standardized evaluations of knowledge and capacities, together with programs that provide financial assistance based on merit, not only reflect but also reinforce socio-economic inequality, as the chances of revealing merit are strongly connected to the student's past educational experiences which are often of low quality for low income groups(Vallejo, 2012: 124-125).

This argument was further enforced by stressing the precocity of labour that neo-liberalism had caused in the country, since graduating from higher education had not resulted in guaranteed labour possibilities in the studied area. On the contrary, research on employment statistics carried out by the national institute of youth (Instituto Nacional de Juventud) in 2011 showed that approximately 60% of professional graduates were not working in their area of study. Beside mere economic reasons, the causes for such scenario can also, if not especially, be found in further social class-based discrimination and exclusion in the labour area, which in Chile results to be higher compared to other countries of the region (González & Espinoza, 2011: 119).

All together, these factors were in turn also proving to often discourage lower-income potential students to engage in higher education, as the costs of studying have often surpassed the possible benefits from it, creating this way a vicious circle in which elite based social groups are over-represented in higher education and simultaneously benefit most from it in the future.

Based upon these acknowledgements, the student movement argued that the gratuity of higher education (in public universities) together with the abolishment of the PSU would be the most adequate first step in making access more equal, as it would at least provide students with an universal opportunity of acceding the education of their choice without the additional worries about finance and previously developed academic aptitude (Menz, 2018: 58). As the measure would not only affect individual students but also to a large extent their families, who until now been responsible for financing aprox. 80% of all public universities, (Vallejo, 2012: 53) the movement argues that it would have a diminishing impact on general socio-economic inequality in the country in the long run.

Notwithstanding, while reading further into the demands and arguments presented by the students in 2011, there is a strong emphasis on the more general aim of the movement to change the neoliberal perception of development. As argued by one of the movement's most prominent leaders Vallejo, the manifestation of socio-economic inequality is highly visible in the area of education, but not less in dimensions such as healthcare, labour, housing and the democratic government. The

change of the State's role that occurred during the dictatorship, from one that needs to guarantee social welfare to one of a mere subsidiary character, together with the institutional and legal apparatus that has been created in order to support such role, is in Vallejo's view the culprit of rising precarity and socio-economic inequality in the country (all from Vallejo, 2012: 129). The anti-neoliberal stance of the movement is moreover evident when looking at its propositions of how to finance gratuity of higher education, which accordingly could be enabled by nationalizing the country's natural resources and by implementing a tax reform (Larrabure & Torchia, 2016: 259; Demandas Confech, 2011). As such, the direct appeal to the policies of privatisation demonstrates the lack of acceptance of the government's legitimacy and that of its institutions that not only comes from the area of education and of students, but also from other social areas and groups (Aguirre & Agustín, 2015: 156; Vallejo, 2012: 117). Ultimately, by evidencing their ideological viewpoints while simultaneously providing alternative propositions for a new approach to higher education, the movement has obtained a reputation that distinguishes it from past student mobilizations (Chavez et al., 2014: 42; Aguirre & Agustin, 2015: 147).

3.2 Effectiveness and viability of implementing free higher education for all: The pragmatic institutional perspective

When in July 2011 the students started to express political demands and shortly after introduced their plan of propositions, the ruling government of Piñera ultimately responded with a series of dialogues with the movement's leaders. However, while the representatives of the students were emphasizing the need to change the system of higher education and the underlying ideology it has been established on, the government showed a relative interest in rather adjusting the current system and possibly implement changes for improvement (Diego, 2011, in Nummi, 2011: 24-25). Though short-term measures were taken, such as the assignment of the new Minister of Education Bulnes, who established a new round of dialogues and proposed to implement several changes in constitutional legislation on education (Nummi, 2011: 25), the movement rejected further cooperation with political parties as it did not see serious considerations of its demands.

Notwithstanding, the proposition of implementing gratuity and abolishing the PSU test had generated a multi-stakeholder debate between civil society (including the students), institutional representatives and academia, as the propositions triggered further questioning about the impact of socio-economic inequality on access to higher education, as well as to other social services. On the one hand, discussions on the student's demands focus on the practical aspects of these, analyzing their viability and effectiveness by asking questions about possible ways of financing gratuity and alter-

native ways of selecting students for higher education according to their profile. On the other, the topic is also frequently approached from its ideological perspective and the demands are seen as rather symbolic aspects of deeper, underlying motives of the student mobilizations. Before engaging in a discussion related to the student movement and its propositions, the institutional perspective emphasizes the need to first establish from which level the topic ought to be approached, as arguments for the ideological and practical implications differ in character and combining them can deter the quality and clarity of discussion (Paredes, 2014: 9). Nonetheless, the institutional response to the students' demands has touched upon both the moral and practical dimension.

To begin with the ideological appeals of the movement against neo-liberalism and the privatisation of what ought to be guaranteed social services, the institutional reaction is characterized by the distinction it makes between universal and non-universal social rights. While the student movement perceives the right of equal access to higher education as an absolute right (Maldonado & Casar, 2008, in Menz, 2018: 75-76) that needs to be safeguarded and provided by the State , institutional actors point out to their disagreement with such assumption. As such, they argue that the perception of education, and higher education in particular as an universal good is rather utopian and incorrect, as it is not a naturally produced good (Paredes, 2014: 5). The provision of education necessarily includes and requires economic resources that a particular actor needs to provide and invested effort and time on part of those who teach; factors that contribute to its non-natural character and which therefore make it impossible to perceive it as an absolute, unlimited right that can be guaranteed unconditionally. Nonetheless, as further argued by institutional actors, this perception does not diminish the acknowledgement of education as one of the most important engines of development and social welfare, and discussing its provision should be done by referring to education as a relative right of high priority (all from Paredes, 2014: 5)

This difference in the ideological and judicial perception of education naturally changes the way in which institutional actors discuss the gratuity and anti-PSU propositions and quickly shifts the point of focus to the practical implications of the proposed measures. Apart from arguing that the State does not count with sufficient resources to finance universal gratuity (Menz, 2018: 40; Espinoza & Urzúa, 2014 in Paredes, 2014: 7) there is a general critique that the movement's propositions are contradictory in nature (Brunner, 2014, *El Mercurio*). This argument relates to the movement's broad assumptions about gratuity as a part of the solution to overall socio-economic inequality in the country. As argued by several institutional actors, including academic experts on issues of education, the measure of gratuity would in fact enhance socio-economic inequality (Menz, 2018: 50; Laraburre & Torchia, 2015: 260; Brunner, 2014; Paredes, 2014: 8; Beyer & Cox, 2011: 1) due to the following reasons.

In the first place, if the application of gratuity for students from all income groups would be paid with common general taxes, there is little discussion left as to the unequal effects such measure would have on existing socio-economic inequality (Paredes, 2014: 5; Brunner, 2014, *El Mercurio*). In this scenario, the students from high-income quintiles, who are three times more represented in higher education (Paredes, 2014: 8), would receive the same financial treatment as those from lower income quintiles, enabling them to maintain their material wealth and in fact accumulate it as they would not have to spend the high costs for studying. Indeed, out of the total financial amount that would be dedicated to provide gratuity, the highest income quintile would receive approx. 24%, while for the lowest quintile this percentage would be eight times less, namely 3% (Brunner, 2014, *El Mercurio*). The relative benefit of studying for free would therefore financially empower the already rich several times more than lower income students, this way enforcing the existing vicious circle of socio-economic inequality. In other words, a large part of financial resources that originally is meant for the alleviation of economic obstacles of the poor, will be in fact spend on the rich (Paredes, 2014: 8).

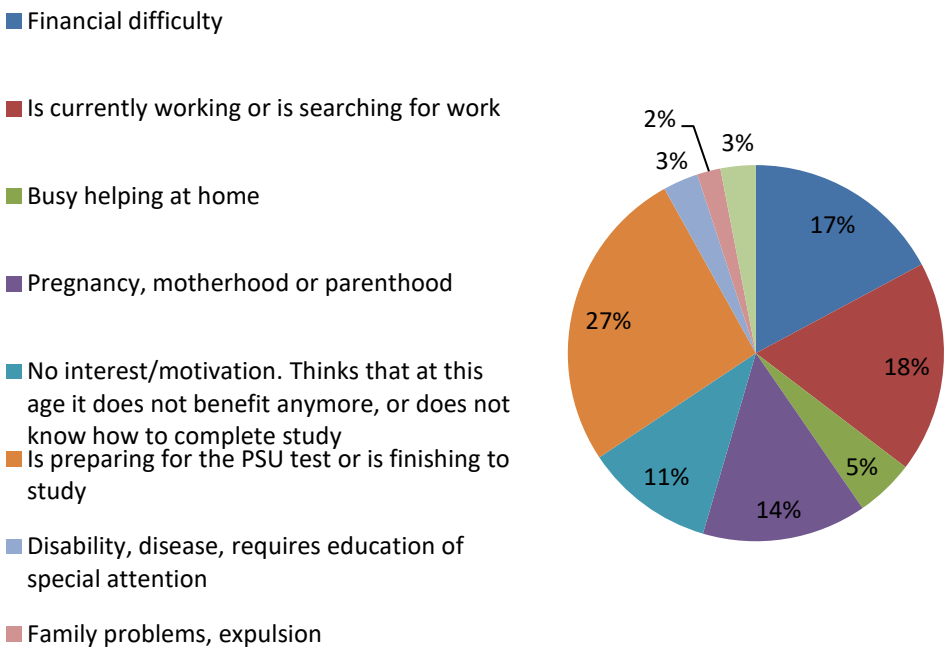
Secondly, implementing universal free education for public universities only, something that the movement had initially aimed for, would create a type of institutional discrimination that would be of high disadvantage for lower income students (Menz, 2018: 42). Limiting gratuity to public institutions would mean that the current high amounts of equally vulnerable, low income students studying at private universities or other establishments of higher education would be omitted, leading to the creation of more gaps between social classes and within them(Idem: 51).

After the introduction of these arguments, proponents of *gratuidad* responded with a possible consideration of implementing progressive taxes to finance gratuity instead of general ones, which would ultimately benefit and empower the most vulnerable students in a better way (Paredes, 2014: 8). Institutional actors warn however, that such proposition again proves to be based on mistaken assumptions, this time about the practical and judicial aspects of the taxation system in the country. As it is prohibited by the Constitution to link taxes to expenditure, any change in the structure of taxation, whether making it more progressive or equalized, will not necessarily control and guarantee what the taxes will be spend on in particular (Idem: 8). The implementation of a progressive taxation system would therefore not assure that low-income students would benefit more from gratuity than high-income students.

Thirdly, perhaps the most important argument of the institutional perspective against gratuity is one that goes beyond questions about practical viability, and suggests that the measure is in fact misplaced in the first place. When looking at the ultimate goals of the student movement, which are, amongst others, the diminishment of socio-economic inequality and equal access and opportunity for all social groups to engage in higher education, institutional actors point out that the proposed

measure is not the most efficient one to serve its purpose (Brunner, 2014, *El Mercurio)* and that more attention should be paid to analyse the underlying causes of this unequal access (Beyer & Cox, 2011: 1). The outcomes of a 2009 National Socio-Economic Characterization Survey (CASEN; translation from Ministry of Finance) that researched the reasons for which young people from the lowest quintile did not attend higher education, enhance the strength of this institutional argument. While the general discourse of the student movement related the unequal access to higher education mainly to lack of affordability on part of low-income students, the survey shows that this reason in fact makes up for 17% out of the total amount of reasons (Beyer & Cox, 2011: 8). As can be seen in the following graph that summarizes the final outcomes, other equally decisive reasons for which lowest-income students do not participate in higher education are that young people are busy working or searching for work (18%), are still preparing for the PSU test (26%), are not interested and/or motivated to study (11%) or because of pregnancy and/or parenthood (14%) (Idem: 7) .

Answered reasons for not studying according to youth from the lowest income quintile



Source: Beyer & Cox, 2011: 7.

Another factor that is not receiving enough attention according to several observers, is the impact of socio-economic segregation that already occurs in the basic stages of the education-trajectory (Paredes, 2014: 8) during which choices can be made between attending either private or municipal establishments. While the student movement appears to be well aware of the problem that low quality primary and secondary education causes for future opportunities to access higher education, institutional actors criticize that the proposed measures of the movement do not target this issue sufficiently. As such, while the movement aims for the abolishment of the PSU test, the institutional perspective points out that perhaps the test itself is not as problematic as are the underlying causes for the fact that many low-income students fail it. Research on the dependency between PSU results and the quality and type of previously attended establishments of primary and secondary education shows a strong link between the two variables (Idem). According to the institutional perspective, these factors strongly demonstrate that instead of implementing gratuity of higher education, action should be directed and focalised differently, and more effort should be put in researching underlying factors and periods that are most decisive for the vulnerability of potential students.

Additionally, while the problems of unequal access to higher education based on socio-economic class are recognized in the institutional area, observers point out that frequent accusations related to the neoliberal character of the Chilean education system lack a comparative context. In the discourse that favours gratuity, comparisons are often made with developed countries that either provide a system of free or highly subsidized and financially supported higher education, such as the Netherlands, Sweden, Norway and France. However, what these comparisons regularly do not take into account is that the provision itself of higher education in Chile has expanded at a rate that such countries have never experienced. While the almost tripled increase (from 20% to 70%) of the number of students attending higher education occurred within a time span of approx. 25 to 40 years in the mentioned European countries, this same growth occurred in Chile within the last 20 years. As such, what makes this comparison interesting is that Chile obtained highly similar levels of provision of higher education, in a shorter amount of time, with significantly lower GDP levels than those of the model European countries (Paredes, 2014: 7). The argument that is therefore derived from this context is that, from a financial point of view, universal gratuity is far from 'ready' to be implemented as it cannot make up to the rapid growth of engagement in higher education (Espinoza y Urzúa, 2014, in Paredes, 2014: 7).

Further arguments consider the already taken measures on part of the government aimed at the improvement of equal access to higher education. While in 1990 only 17% of the government's expenditure on education was dedicated to financial assistance for students, in 2012 this percentage is 71,2%, enabling more than a half of lowest-quintile students to finance their higher education. The increased public expenditure on financial assistance together with previously undertaken measures

for the control of the education's quality suggest that incentives to reduce inequality in access have already been existent before 2011, and that the government's objectives are not incompatible with the underlying objectives of the movement (all from Paredes, 2014: 4).

Ultimately, regarding the strategy of the students and the manifestation of their demands in form of large-scale protests, it is argued that this method is to some extent contradictory with the movement's aims of democratizing the political arena of the country and the claims about its capacity of representing overall society. While the right to protest certainly forms part of a democracy, using a vote during elections to express one's desired vision of further development is more democratic than to exert pressure during organized protests. As students encounter themselves with more possibilities (time-wise especially) to engage in such protests compared to other social groups (as for example workers, indigenous groups, parents, the elderly, etc.) it is questionable to what extent they in fact represent society's demands in general (all from Navia, 2012, *La Tercera*). This observation about the movement´s strategy and claim of being a collective manifestation is another example that reflects the discrepancy between the movement´s method and final objectives.

Conclusions

In order to answer the question about the ways in which access to higher education is related to issues of socio-economic inequality in the *gratuitad* debate, this thesis has first looked at the frequently identified theoretical approaches to such discussion and the reasons for its emergence. The increased academic interest for the topic can be attributed to the rising discussion on the impacts of widespread neoliberal policies on socio-economic inequality. Additionally, it is related to the relatively simultaneous emergence of student protests against policies of privatisation, as seen in many Latin American countries. While in almost the entire region the provision of higher education has expanded drastically, this had also created expectations related to more equal access to such education; expectations that are now increasingly being compared to outcomes in practice. Lastly, new attention is being paid to higher education from a sociological perspective, as questions are being asked about its role and the importance of its quality in developing more socially equal and emancipated societies.

As has been seen, there is a vast amount of literature on the relationship between social inequality and access to higher education in which authors argue that the shift to neoliberal ideology in the political arena has had a deteriorating effect on equal access. From this perspective, the privatization of higher education has made access highly dependent on the financial means from potential students, whose economic situation often reflects their social class in a given society. Some authors further argue that despite the expanded provision, the mercantilization of higher education and the implementation of new access-regulations serve as a new tool for the elite to socially exclude certain classes in engaging in education. A divergent approach is that of neo-structuralist authors who do not attribute the problems of unequal access to neo-liberalism as ideology, but rather to misplaced and un-intelligent policymaking that does not provide enough assistance to economically vulnerable social groups. Apart from these two main points of view, several observers point out that unequal access to higher education is additionally often influenced by social and psychological factors such self-perception, motivation and belief in the benefits of studying. Lastly, particular authors argue that the assumptions about the existence of high inequality in access to higher education are in fact not correct, stating that the radically expanded quantitative provision of education compensates for potential inequality in its accessibility.

In the following two chapters the focus has been laid on the Chilean context, by looking at how access and provision of higher education has been developing since before the dictatorial period until the emergence of the 2011 student movement. While higher education under the two governments of Frei and Allende was free of costs and specific reforms had been implemented to further

diversify and democratize education in general, access was still highly limited mainly because of the lack of enough provision and the continued bureaucratic character of the universities. During the second half of the dictatorial period, public expenditure on higher education had diminished drastically and the system had become privatised, leading to a rapid growth of private universities and institutions. As such, while the provision of higher education had been expanded significantly, access had now become more than ever dependent on the financial means of students, apart from their academic aptitude. During the following two decades of the Concertación widespread reforms had been implemented to assist economically vulnerable students with scholarships and loans. Furthermore, additional measures were taken to improve control over the quality of education in general. Nonetheless, while in the period between 1990-2012 public expenditure on financial assistance for higher education had risen from 17% to approx. 71%, widespread discontent with the obstacles of acceding higher education had culminated in 2011 into the student movement. The students-led discourse perceives the mercantilization of public universities and the costs of studying as a violation of the right to education, and consequently appeal for cost-less higher education. Though the movement had received significant societal back up coming from diverse social groups and had managed to exert political pressure, institutional actors have pointed out to the inherent arguments of the movement and provided critiques on their strength, efficiency and effectiveness.

When looking at the general approaches towards the topic (as presented in chapter 1) there is a strong link between the discourse that relates neoliberal policies to higher inequality in access, with the discourse of the student movement. In the discussion of gratuity, one of the main arguments considers the impact of precarity and growing income inequality that has increased in Chile after the implementation of neoliberal policies during the dictatorial period. What can be seen is that despite the expanded supply, access to higher education has become increasingly more dependent on the financial means of students, which is evidently reflected in the diversity in class-representation. As the majority of students continues to be from a high socio-economic background, there is little discussion left as to which socio-economic groups (measured by the income-quintiles) have benefitted most from the privatisation and expansion of higher education. Considering the significance of higher education and its role in society as an engine of development, the approach that disfavours neo-liberalism argues that the mercantilization of studying, together with the implementation of new access-requirements based on merit, enhances socio-economic inequality in the long run, as specific social groups are intentionally left out and excluded to the opportunities that education would grant them. Such viewpoint is to a large extent shared by the student movement, as beside aiming for gratuity, an additional demand was made to abolish the academic aptitude test. The PSU is seen as an obstacle for many lower-income students in acceding higher education, as their previously obtained educational experience is often not sufficient to achieve enough points to study in

the university of choice. As it are mainly the public universities of good quality that require a specific minimum of PSU points, the options of these students are limited to expensive, lower quality private institutions that moreover increase the risk of ending up with high debts and insecure opportunities in the labour market. As such, the movement argues that the aptitude test serves as a tool of social exclusion, as it not only reflects the social circumstances from which a student originally comes from, but also effectively limits certain students' possibilities to participate in higher education and its future benefits. This way a vicious circle of socio-economic inequality is created.

Nonetheless, the assumptions made by the student movement have been critically evaluated from the institutional perspective. The observations made by institutional actors and experts on education resemble the neo-structuralist approach to the topic, as they do not discuss issues of inequality in ideological terms but rather practical ones. By stressing that the proposed measure of gratuity would not solve but rather exacerbate the problems of inequality in access to education, and that neo-liberalism is not the main cause for such problems, the majority of these authors emphasize the need to pay more attention to the underlying social mechanisms that recreate socio-economic inequalities and to look at how specific policies could be designed in a more efficient way to benefit those most in need. Potential comparisons with how accessible education was in the non-neoliberal period under Frei and Allende weaken the movement's argument of neo-liberalism as main source of inequality, as the education system of those times was highly elitist and exclusionary, despite gratuity. Notwithstanding, the institutional perspective does not neglect the further enhancement of educational inequality since after the dictatorial period (though with some exceptions where it is argued that this inequality has in fact diminished as expanded provision has compensated any inequality in access). However, it ascribes issues of inequality to factors that go beyond the financial status of young students, such as, amongst others, the experienced low quality of primary and secondary education. In general words, while the discourse of the student movement is characterized by its aim to change the ideology on which the political and educational system is build on, the institutional perspective favours the implementation of gradual improvements in policy making, without necessarily changing the foundations it has been based on.

As for the overall impact of the movement on the political agenda after 2011, the student protests have influenced the election of centre-leftist Bachelet in 2013, who has implemented reforms slightly in line with the students' demands, as since her presidency 50% of the most vulnerable students have been provided with free education in public universities (Cortés, 2017: 81-82).

Whether one favours to approach the topic from an ideological or rather pragmatic view, the 2011 student movement has shed light on socio-economic inequality in education as has not been done before, and as most probably would not have been done within the institutional arena. Notwithstanding, this paper´s analysis reflects the complex nature of the student conflict and its signifi-

cance in various dimensions. On the one hand, the movement´s discourse rightfully indicates the still ongoing shortcomings and educational policies that form obstacles for students in acceding higher education. The manifestation of such discontent is a necessary and natural aspect of a functioning democracy and has the potential to further emancipate certain social groups by generating more attention to their problems and demands. None the less, thinking about socio-economic inequality in ideological terms has caused the student movement to build their idea of a solution upon flawed assumptions about the underlying causes of inequality. By focusing on neo-liberalism as the only source of socio-economic inequality, the movement commits the error of not taking into account the country´s historical context. In comparing the current possibilities of acceding higher education with those from the period before the dictatorship, it is of no doubt that despite ongoing inequalities, studying has become possible for many low-income students that previously would never have such opportunity. The radically expanded provision of higher education, as a result of privatization policies, has made that the majority part of today´s low-income students are the first generation of their families to have this possibility. Though this argument does not mean to count against the movement´s aim to raise awareness about ongoing inequalities in education, it does mean to point out the weakness in the movement´s underlying assumptions about the causes of inequality. While the movement aims for practical measures that in its opinion would alleviate the effects of inequality, such as making higher education free of costs and eliminating the PSU tests, this appears to be an approach that is focused on eliminating symptoms rather than underlying causes of a problem.

However, whether looking at the arguments of the student movement or those from the institutional perspective, there is a crucial factor in the *gratuidad* debate that has not been considered by any of the actors. In thinking about the underlying causes of ongoing socio-economic inequality, surprisingly no attention has been paid to the self-perpetuating mentality of racism and classism that is continuously present in Chile. Patterns of social exclusion are visible in the political, social and cultural dimension and continue to reflect old class-structures funded upon intense socio-economic inequality. As such, it is highly questionable whether gratuity of higher education, or any change in policymaking, would prove to be a solution to the root problem. While symptoms of inequality could be alleviated in the area of higher education, these would not be of great value if the future circumstances and nature of the labour market is highly socially exclusionary. Identically, the process of making higher education more accessible and equal must necessarily take into account the mechanisms of social differentiation and exclusion that already occur in the area of primary and secondary education as well. In general, the objective of a socio-economically more just society has to be reached primarily by shifting overall mindsets that inherently are still very classist. Therefore, it is to be hoped that in the near future more attention will be paid to this missing aspect of the de-

bate, for by including the dimension of underlying classism and racism, more efficient solutions could be expected.

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