

### **Conversion and Transmission of Capital in a Migration Context: Ethnography with Migrant Families in Chile**

### **Conversión y transmisión de capital en un contexto migratorio: etnografía con familias migrantes en Chile**

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#### ABSTRACT

The article aims to analyze the different strategies of conversion and transmission of cultural capital that parents use in the family structure to provide immigrant children the tools that allow them to face problems associated with the migration process. Following the capital concept in their different states, this research is oriented to analyze through the families' daily life how its members transmit cultural capital to the children in the host country. This research uses a qualitative methodology, including interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, to obtain data and information about Latin American migrant families living in Santiago, Chile. The findings show differences not only in capital transmission strategies but also in the conversions that precede them.

*Keywords:* 1. migration, 2. family, 3. cultural capital, 4. Chile, 5. Latin America.

#### RESUMEN

El objetivo de este artículo es analizar las diferentes estrategias de conversión y transmisión de capital cultural que padres y madres utilizan en el seno familiar en virtud de proporcionar herramientas que permitan a niños y niñas inmigrantes enfrentar los problemas asociados al proceso migratorio. Se retoma el concepto de capital en sus diferentes estados para analizar a través de la vida diaria de las familias cómo sus miembros transmiten a hijos e hijas capital cultural en el país de acogida. Se trata de un trabajo cualitativo cuya obtención de datos fue a través de entrevistas y trabajo etnográfico con familias migrantes latinoamericanas radicadas en Santiago de Chile. Los hallazgos muestran diferencias no solamente en las estrategias de transmisión de capital, sino también en las conversiones que las anteceden.

*Palabras clave:* 1. migración, 2. familia, 3. capital cultural, 4. Chile, 5. América Latina.

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## INTRODUCTION

Braulia Da Silva tells us in her apartment “When we arrived in Chile everything was hard for us because we didn’t know the language. For my daughter it was complicated in school, as she only spoke Portuguese. We didn't know how people is here. We had to learn,” (B. Da Silva, personal communication, April 10, 2018) while her daughter, Sara, is listening to our conversation. The life of this Brazilian family happens in a small space with little decor, no books or magazines, or any piece of art. Only a television on top of a black table.

“With the passing time we learnt and got to know people. It was necessary to find a way to get ahead with what he had,” (B. Da Silva, personal communication, April 10, 2018) adds this mother. Some years passed and Braulia found a job, and Sara is now an outstanding student in her class. The case of this Brazilian family illustrates how migrants newly arrived in Chile find themselves in the need of adapting their knowledge to the characteristics of the place receiving them, to align their “incorporated history” to the “rules of the game” of the field they are at now.

What has been just described happens in a Latin American context wherein the mobilization of people is not likely to decrease, due to the economic gaps between countries (Bauman, 2016) on top of the social and political issues that from years now have resulted in an increase in violence and insecurity in some of the territories of this continent. In line of this, a number of authors directly link this constant flow of people to the globalization and integration of regional contexts (Begala, 2011; Castles, Miller, & de Hass, 2014), this pointing at the fact that migration will remain a majority personal and collective response, giving rise to migratory movements in the search for better living conditions (Navarrete, 2018; Nieto, 2014).

Particularly with the return of democracy in the 1990s, and the economic and financial stability compared to other countries of the region on top of its lax migration policies (Stefoni, 2003; Thayer, 2013; Torres Matus, 2019), Chile became one of the preferred destinations for Latin American migrants, which gradually resulted in economic, social, and political changes that forced an individual and contextual reconfiguring of Chilean society and institutions (Doña-Reveco, 2018; Doña-Reveco & Levinson, 2013).

From the onset of these migration flows, studies carried out mainly from academia have focused on analyzing different aspects of migration, such as the sociocultural inclusion of migrant communities from what transpires in different social environments: offices, supermarkets, public squares and education institutions (Baeza Virgilio, 2019; Imilan, Márquez, & Stefoni, 2016; Stefoni & Bonhomme, 2014). Other analyses have instead focused on discrimination and racism in social environments (CNN Chile, 2019; Tijoux-Merino, 2013), actions that have made affected students deploy different strategies aimed at counteracting discrimination attitudes inside Chilean education institutions (Webb & Alvarez, 2018).

Yet other lines of research focus on understanding the explanatory factors of rejection from the Chilean community towards migrant communities in labor and social contexts, their results showing how the negative impact arises at different levels depending on analysis categories such as education level, income, and social class (Doña-Reveco, 2016; González et al., 2017; Navarrete Yañez, 2017; Thayer, Córdova, & Ávalos, 2013). Additionally, migration policies have been explored after the massive arrival of people from Haiti, Venezuela, and the Dominican Republic (Calderón & Saffirio, 2017; Rojas Pedemonte, Amode, & Vázquez, 2017; Thayer, 2015; Torres Matus, 2019), also including the analysis of religious institutions and their capacity to function as a migrant support network (Aguirre, 2017; Orellana, 2016; Saldívar Arellano, 2019), in a context where most migrants entering Chilean territory lack employment (Thayer, 2015), housing, and access to public services such as education and health (Grande & García González, 2019; Ramírez, Rivera, Bernales, & Cabieses, 2019).

It is logical to presume that different factors come together in the migration processes that Chile is currently undergoing, which are associated to local and global economy, to the flexibility of migration policies, as well as to social, political, and cultural problems mainly from the countries of origin (Novick, Stefoni Espinoza, & Hinojosa Gordonava, 2008; Rojas Pedemonte & Koechlin, 2017; Stefoni, 2003), which in turns makes it necessary to diversify the analyses related to the conceptual framework orienting research, as well as the methodological strategies to obtain data and information (Portes, 2000).

On these grounds, CEPAL (acronym in Spanish for the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) and OIT (acronym in Spanish for the International Labour Organization) identified Chile “among the countries in the region with the most increase in immigration in the period from 2010 to 2015: Chile (4.9% annually), Mexico (4.2%), Brazil (3.8%), Ecuador (3.6%), Suriname (3.4%), and Panama (3.3%)” (Velasco, Gontero, & Weller, 2017, p. 15). Up until 2014, the number of migrants in Chile was estimated to be 465,000 (González et al., 2017).

Lastly, from the 2017 population census and the administrative records of the Immigration and Migration Department (DEM, for its acronym in Spanish), it is calculated that just over 1.25 million foreigners were living in Chile until 2018 (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Departamento de Extranjería y Migración, 2019), concentrating mainly in Santiago, whereas a migrant minority decided to settle in cities dispersed throughout different regions in the country (Álvarez & Acosta, 2019).

This is how the question driving this article revolves around what type of strategies for the transmission of cultural capital are deployed by parents inside families, to provide children with the necessary tools to solve problems related to social inequality, discrimination, and negotiation in a migratory context.

The main technique employed for obtaining data in this qualitative study are ethnographic interviews, complemented with notes taken during observations sessions with the purpose

of achieving greater descriptive and analytical depth in terms of what people say and what actually do in their lives (Guerra Arias, 2006; Reyes, 2018). This effort also brings together ethnographic description, sociological analysis, and even, literary evocation to an extent, to reach the depths of Latin American migrant life through experience and interpretation.

The following section will bring forth the theoretical aspects driving the ethnography hereby (Hammersley, 1990), helping the author organize, summarize, and understand the inequalities (Wacquant, 2001) resulting from the migratory process. Then the methodological strategy that allowed obtaining data and information during the fieldwork will be presented; how access to schools and migrant families was carried out will be described, particularly emphasizing the role of the parents in the migratory process. Finally, a discussion on the results obtained from the testimonies of families and fieldwork will be presented, as well as the main conclusions derived from such.

## CULTURAL CAPITAL AND MIGRATION

International literature indicates that migrant families have differences in aspects related to education level, income, and religious beliefs, and so the strategies they develop and implement to convey tools, knowledge as cultural capital (Archer, 2009), to their children in order to face problems associated with the migration process are heterogeneous. Therefore, different studies emphasize the importance of the family unit and its own cultural capital in the undertaking of migration projects (Coe & Shani, 2015; Goldberg, 2010; Jamal Al-deen & Windle, 2016; McKay, 2005; Melgar Tísoc, 2014; Nakamura, 2010).

Although the concept of cultural capital has been defined and empirically employed in different ways by different authors (Chiang, 2018; Coleman, 1988; Davies & Rizk, 2017; DiMaggio, 1982; DiMaggio & Mohr, 1985), this study will subscribe to the views of Pierre Bourdieu (1987), according to which its potentiality is mainly derived from the possible links between this type of capital and the economic, social and symbolical resources of individuals, which when taken as a whole are in turn essential for the study of migration from the structure of the family.

Cultural capital is for Bourdieu (1986, 2001) the set of competencies and/or skills individuals possess, which when recognized on a given field translate into symbolic capital gains that can in turn be economically and/or socially capitalized. Cultural capital first appeared in the work of Bourdieu (1986) as a hypothesis useful to analyze the educational achievements of students considering the cultural contrasts of their families, and from there the author went to describe this type of capital as an analytical tool that makes it possible to understand the differences in the access to opportunities derived from inherited and/or acquired skills (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1996; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2005).

The foregoing allows for us to enter fully into the analysis of the differentiation of opportunities and privileged positioning in a given context or field based on the accumulated

capital of individuals. In view of this there are three forms of capital that constitute privileges and opportunities in a particular field: economic, social, and cultural capital, which are transformed and reinvented according to formal and informal rules, also to the individual interests and needs of the context (Bourdieu, 1986, 2001).

The suitability of the cultural capital concept for the study of migration and the family is based on its constant dialogue with the other types of capital noted by Bourdieu (1987), under the premise that the analysis of migration process requires deepening into the economic, social, cultural, and even symbolic characteristics of migrants, considering the possible conversions that may take place between these types of capital with the purpose of accomplishing specific goals. Although the emphasis of this article is in the transmission of cultural capital inside the family, conversions between different types of capital are also essential in this work.

Similarly, it is important to note that the analysis of the “cultural capital transmission from the family environment” (Bourdieu, 2001, p. 138), based on the ideas of Bourdieu, also allows to understand, and measure the (cultural) resources of parents, which is essential in understanding the differences in the strategies deployed according to the capital they possess. On this, studies carried out with middle-class and working-class families have evidenced the differences in educational level and parental involvement according to the concept of cultural capital and have also highlighted the different ways in which this type of capital is activated by children in educational and social settings (Lareau, 2000, 2002, 2011).

To comprehensively understand these differences, Lareau and McNamara Horvat (1999) propose measuring cultural capital based on the vocabulary of parents, their interactions with teachers at school, their attendance to school and extracurricular events, as well as their participation in social networks that may favor the flow of information (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999). This analytical approach is particularly relevant in distinguishing between possession and activation of cultural capital (Lareau, 2002, 2011).

There is an important difference between possessing and activating capital resources. This is to say, people who own social and cultural capital may choose to activate this capital or not, depending on their abilities to activate this (social or cultural) capital (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999, p. 38).

The decision of activating/using the different types of capital is linked to the validity in relation to the field in which the individual is positioned, i.e., for capital to gain strength it must first be activated: “All people own social capital they can activate according to the rules of their field. However, both social and cultural capitals are not always worth the same. In order for them to be of worth they have to be activated” (Lareau & McNamara Horvat, 1999, p. 39).

It should be stressed that Bourdieu is the one who laid the foundations for the studies on the accumulation of cultural capital and its conversions among the other types of capital

(Bourdieu, 1986, 1987, 2001), illustrating possibilities such as that the economic capital could at a certain point be converted into cultural or social capital. On the other hand, the work by Lareau (2011) expands the possibilities of analysis by including the distinction between possession and activation, not only of cultural capital but also of social, economic, and symbolic capital.

All in all, this conceptual framework allows not only to analyze the different strategies for transmitting cultural capital that are implemented in the family environment, but also to understand the conversion processes between the different types of capital that take place throughout the entire process. The latter illustrates how various capitals are changing by achieving their own functioning in the place of reception, in a context where social interactions in the receiving country force migrant families to reinvent themselves, initially by means of activating their resources with the purpose of adjusting their capital (mainly cultural) to their new environment.

## METHODOLOGICAL STRATEGY

This methodological design deepens and permeates (without generalizing) in what is considered an urban ethnography: a type of research mainly based on the close observation of territories, people and institutions in real time and spaces in which the researcher positions himself or herself close by (or even inside) the social phenomenon to be studied, this with the purpose of detecting how and why those playing an active role therein act, think and feel the way they do (Auyero & Berti, 2013; Wacquant, 2003). This ethnographic work is presented here as the main methodological instrument.

Ten migrant families from Brazil, Venezuela,<sup>2</sup> Perú, and Ecuador participate in this research; these families arrived at Chile leaving behind the political, social and/or economic problems of their countries of origin. They reported some differences in education level, monthly income, number of children, migration status, motivation for migrating, and years of stay in Chile; there were also differences in their living conditions and mid-term perspectives as migrants.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, important similarities were also found, which allowed to analyze and understand how it is that capital conversion operates as a first step in the transmission of cultural capital in migratory contexts. For example, most of these families come from the middle class, their members having technical and/or university education, and some even are postgraduates, yet those degrees are not valid before Chilean institutions, and so it is impossible for them to practice professionally as they did in their countries of origin. Likewise, the migration process implied for these families losing the social capital they had

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<sup>2</sup> One Venezuelan-Spanish family is also included. The mother is from Venezuela while the father from Spain, and they arrived at Santiago, Chile, from Venezuela in February 2016.

<sup>3</sup> This characterization is based on the work by Annette Lareau (Lareau, 2011).

accumulated in their countries, this becoming a setback given that their migration project lacks support networks.

Meeting these families was possible thanks to the ethnographic work carried out in primary education institutions and the attendance to migrant support groups, where parents of enrolled students agreed to participate in this study, allowing access to their homes with the purpose of recording their everyday activities and conducting semi structured interviews. It should be noted that the visits to their houses/apartments/rooms took place at times proposed by families themselves, in an environment of trust and kindness, the conversation oftentimes happening over a cup of coffee, or some drink or dessert.

The topics addressed in these conversations (some more formal than others) revolved around the migration process (motivations and setbacks), family (its structure and parental involvement), capital (cultural, economic, and social), culture of origin (transmission and at times activation), and survival strategies (economics/finance, education, and health). The audio recordings of these stories were complemented with field notes taken at the time of visiting. The meetings with these families took place between March and December, 2018. The conversations on subject matters of interest we engaged in were fluent.

When it comes to the duration of these visits, it was originally planned for them to span for an hour, yet the time set for them was always exceeded in practice. The wellbeing of individuals was ensured in this space, in such a way that when a sensitive subject was brought about, they were given the opportunity to address it to their comfort, so as to keep the ethical factor on top on any interest pertaining data collection.

## INVISIBLE POVERTY

“My friend, bring to your family a piece of bread. I have two. I give it to you, and I will not take no for an answer” (J. Madero, personal communication, April 20, 2018), said Juan at the end of the Migrantes Somos Todos (MST, acronym in Spanish for We Are All Migrants) group activities; this group provides support to migrants who just arrived at Santiago, Chile. People in this group lack strong networks or bonds (Granovetter, 1983) who might support them in their integration process. Walking down the crowded streets of the capital, the migrant from Venezuela will look around in quick glances, maybe stopping briefly to think for a while: “I know no one who can help me; there are jobs, but they always require a work permit,” (J. Madero, personal communication, April 20, 2018), he says after requesting information on available jobs in a warehouse. He keeps his good mood in face of the negative response, and jokes about how hard it is to live in Santiago.

The smile on the face Juan fades away, though, overwhelmed by the lack of housing and employment. “I know things are not easy, but I will not give up until getting a job. So, tell me if you hear about any” (J. Madero, personal communication, April 20, 2018). For a couple of years now, the access to decent jobs became hard in Santiago, just as it happened

with housing, firstly due to low availability, and secondly “because how expensive it is. You don’t make enough money and savings from Venezuela run out” (J. Madero, personal communication, April 20, 2018).

The situation Mercedes finds herself in is similar, as she lacks support networks and counts on very little capital that she brought from Venezuela; still, she smiles and jokes around. Although the situation in her home is apparently stable, the reality of things is different: a two-rooms apartment, kitchen, living room, and space for a dining table; no decor, nothing ornamenting the walls. No family portraits either, nor books or magazines. Only her willingness to “make it happen despite the psychological and maybe even psychiatric issues I have” (M. Gutiérrez, personal communication, May 15, 2018), as this mother states.

One aspect that is highly noticeable in this Venezuelan home is the fact that everything revolves around Sebastián, the only son of Mercedes. Although the absence of any books or magazines stands out, something that is traditionally used to measure the cultural capital of families (Fismen, Samdal, & Torsheim, 2012), this stands in contrast with the large amount of teaching materials used by Mercedes, who is a lawyer, to work with her son, who achieved excellent grades in class and proved to have a proclivity for language learning. “It does not matter what happens to me. I might be sad or depressed. Anxious. But my son has to keep leading a normal life. We always review a day before what he will practice in class the next day, so his performance is good,” (M. Gutiérrez, personal communication, May 15, 2018), she explains, as she shows her son maps of different Latin American countries, and tools to design and build a prototype cart, as part of a school assignment.

For the mentioned migrant families, life in Venezuela was calm before the attacks in which their lives were in danger. Leaving home in the morning, making a first stop to get some coffee or having breakfast at some restaurant, planning the holidays in some beach in Mexico, traveling to Panama, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, or the United States. “We did not know anyone nor anything about the country, and so Chile was never in the map for us to live or for the holidays” (M. Gutiérrez, personal communication, May 15, 2018), because she knew things were not simple, as there were also hardships and poverty, as she is experiencing with her family. Nonetheless, her poverty is different from the one traditionally understood as such. “I have money, but from savings. We are not making any here. Money is running out, and we know no one who can help us. It is hard” (M. Gutiérrez, personal communication, May 15, 2018), she notes. This family is waiting for political asylum, and so they cannot return to Venezuela until migration authorities decide on the case.

The cases of Juan and Mercedes are similar in regards of what here will be termed “invisible poverty,” that which is practically impossible to understand without having access to the homes, family dynamics, conversations among family members and information to be compared with, for example, reported education levels or home income. This way, this “invisible poverty” under which these Latin American migrant families live, reflect the

precarities associated to social capital. That is to say, this concept of “invisible poverty” allows associating poverty not solely to the economic hardships derived from the migration process, but also to the lack family and social support networks in the receiving country. In this sense, some of the participating families arrived in Chile without any support.

We decided to migrate to Chile with no prior knowledge. Without any family or so. I worked part time. My husband had a full-time job when we first got here. My job was in telemarketing, and that does not pay well. It was hard at the beginning. There was no income (I. Duran, personal communication, June 01, 2018).

The absence of relatives and friends who may support the migrant project of the participating families makes the situation more complex “We know people, but no one really close. We have no support” admits Mercedes (M. Gutiérrez, personal communication, May 15, 2018). “Everything was hard when we arrived here. Money ran out. My partner left me and I had no one. Also, I didn’t speak Spanish, only Portuguese,” (B. Da Silva, personal communication, April 10, 2018), tells this Brazilian mother at her apartment where she lives with two daughters and a cat.

The apparent stability in which some families live is provided by the economic capital/savings brought from their countries of origin. In economic terms, if this resource would be lacking, then there would be no difference from the poverty experienced by native families; that is why analyzing the experiences of migrants considering the concept of “invisible poverty” sheds light on the complex situation brought about not only by the lack of economic and social capital, but also the need of initiating a capital conversion process, mainly of the cultural type, given its invalidity in Chile.

In this sense, migrant families have had to start economic activities, sometimes informally, to generate economic capital: “In Venezuela I’m a lawyer. Here I make sandwiches and desserts” (M. Gutiérrez, personal communication, May 15, 2018). “In Brazil, I’m a professional in International Business, yet in Chile I’m just a specialist in tourism” (B. Da Silva, personal communication, April 10, 2018). “I have an engineering degree. Here, I work part-time at a department store” (G. Ochoa, personal communication, April 5, 2018); “I have a degree in Chemical Engineering. Here (in Chile), I only do social service at a church” (A. Pérez, personal communication, May 28, 2018). “My husband has a technical degree in car repair. Here, he works at a coffee shop and drives an Uber” (I. Duran, personal communication, June 01, 2018). “In Peru, my husband was a cop. He had to adapt here, and he works as a security guard” (K. Chong, personal communication, May 18, 2018).

These cases highlight how crucial it is to adapt or convert cultural capital to the receiving country, that is to say, to achieve this now that they are in a context other than the country where it was accumulated. Although most of the interviewed families are university graduates or highly educated, their knowledge and skills cannot be put into practice without a prior validation process which, according to testimonies, involves time and money.

In the case of the Da Silva family, the conversion of capital implied learning Spanish and its associated slang, which at the beginning made it difficult for a first job to be obtained, as it also did for enrolling Sara into school. “I had to clean houses. Outdoors. Back then I only worked in Brazilian homes. Now I am way better positioned” (B. Da Silva, personal communication, April 10, 2018).

Overcoming “invisible poverty” implies not only reinventing oneself in terms of profession to, for example, being able to access the Chilean labor market, but also other aspects such as language, social codes, and formal and informal rules that make sociocultural adaptation and insertion easier for Latin American migrant families settled in Chile.

Also taking into account that Chilean migration policy impacts on all the aforementioned, it took these families at least three years after arriving at Chile for them to be able to begin implementing their migration project as it was originally intended, which shows that time is of the essence. In this sense, “waiting time” (Auyero, 2011, 2012) as it relates to stay permits, employment, and their associated advantages, emerges from empiric work as a contextual “variable” (Lareau, 2012) that makes migrant families look for alternative ways in which to adapt their capital to better face setbacks.

#### WAITING TIME

According to the Chilean Immigration and Migration Department (DEM for its acronym in Spanish), it takes almost six months before a Temporary Visa can be obtained. This period being longer in the case of Permanent Stay, which can take almost one year (Bellolio, 2018), including the approval of a permit to work in any field within the country. It is precisely problems with access to formal employment that was reported by another interviewed family. Because of this context, Paola has been unable to normalize the migration status of her children, and the Ministry of Education had to help them enroll in a local school despite lacking the necessary paperwork. “We have waited for so long. Sometimes we don’t even know what we are supposed to do with all these changes. But we work in the meanwhile. Lots of working. My hands ache” (P. Rubio, personal communication, April 08, 2018), she tells us as she shows how her hands have been injured by the cleaning products she employs at work.

Pouring some coffee, “with plenty of sugar, he will not like it if it's not sweet” (P. Rubio, personal communication, April 08, 2018), she is sorry that her youngest child, who attends the classroom where the ethnography was carried out, experienced behavioral changes and psychological issues after leaving Venezuela. “Ever since we arrived, he behaves differently. I don’t have his documents so I can’t take him to a specialist. We still have to wait” (P. Rubio, personal communication, April 08, 2018), she adds, while her older daughter is with us.

The situation coincides with that of other families interviewed. “My husband still can’t find a job. We are waiting for that. We still have some saving but we have to be careful and navigate through this situation if we want to achieve our goals. We look for the cheapest stuff in supermarkets and we use public transportation very little” (J. Pereira, personal communication, May 11, 2018).

Also, there are cases of families who, while living in their country of origin, had many of these problems solved. However, driven by the nostalgia of being far away has made them take the decision to return to their country of origin, wherein their resolve in committing to a migration project to leave again their country of origin was strengthened. Such is the case of Karla and Daniel, who left Peru due to economic problems:

We lost our Permanent Stay when we left for three years. We are getting the Temporary (Visa) again. And I can’t get a job without papers. Not long ago my son... he got sick, and I took him to the hospital, but they didn’t let him in as he doesn’t have insurance (K. Chong, personal communication, May 18, 2018).

It is here where the time and lack of economic capital factors meet, in such a way that initiating the substantial part of the migration project will depend on the resolution of migration procedures and so on the access to paid activities to give start to the substantial part of the migration project. It should also be brought to attention that, besides Chilean migration policy, there are those who start working without the corresponding permits, as in the case of Daniel, Karla’s husband, who works in construction and did so without the required papers until recently.

The process of conversion or adaptation of the different forms of capital that precede transmission, particularly of a cultural nature, is nested between that poverty rendered invisible by the economic capital with which migrant families arrive at their destinations, and the waiting time resulting from the late resolution of their migration status. Said otherwise, “invisible poverty” mainly understood as the lack of economic and social capital, together with the waiting time for the resolution of migration permits, coexist in a context wherein migrant families must convert/adapt their cultural capital if they want to be functional in their destinations.

From this it is possible to state that within the migration phenomenon there is the possibility that when the cultural capital of an individual leaves the environment where such capital was produced and/or accumulated, discrepancies will arise that will make its use different or render it null in terms of how it was used in the space where it was produced, as alluded in various works by Bourdieu (Bourdieu, 1997, 2002; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1996; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 2005). It is here where capital conversion takes a leading role for migrant families living in Chile.

## CAPITAL CONVERSION

Through empirical work it was evidenced that the capital of migrants is of little value when it comes to its prior utility in their country of origin; it should be noted that migrant families must convert their capital with the purpose of adapting it to their new social, economic and cultural conditions. The case of Martín and Anahís stands out, as they own a small customer service training company: “What happens is that in this country, unlike the country where we come from (Ecuador), customer service is one its main weaknesses. I used to do other things. It just happens that this is what worked for us in Santiago” (M. Romo, personal communication, April 28, 2018), says Martín while he shares food and drinks with his family in the common area of his apartment, located in downtown Santiago.

The case of Martín inevitably raises the question of how these capital conversions take place at the destinations wherein all odds appear to be against migrants, given the characteristics of the social structure and of the very field in which they find themselves.

I cannot sign a contract. It is what it is, take it or leave it, they say. You find yourself in the dilemma of having to take a job where there is no stability nor any guarantee, social security. At another time I visited an employer who had accepted already, it was a good job, but then at the end I thought out loud and said, “Thank God!” So, this person heard and asked me to leave the office and told the secretary not to let me in anymore. I’m a believer in the Catholic Church (M. Romo, personal communication, April 28, 2018).

I’m a graduate from Business School. My husband is a certified Mechanic. Life is expensive here, it is difficult. Being unable to do something else, we studied the possibility of buying this coffee shop and after a long process we did it (I. Durán, personal communication, June 01, 2018).

In these cases, the conversion of capital took several years, taking place from private scenarios, as part of projects that included the entire family. In this process, the wait time for the Chilean government to revolve its immigration procedures was crucial, because at the time they decided not to undertake any activity before having the corresponding work permits.

I didn’t work for months. Shortly after I began to work making *piñatas*. I was not making good money so I got another job as a waitress, but without a contract. My husband got me a job as cleaning staff in a building. This is really different from what I used to do in Venezuela, I was a teacher. I graduated from university. I have a degree in Education. We had a business, buying and selling gold, a jewelry. My husband has a degree in Business, but he doesn’t practice (P. Rubio, personal communication, April 08, 2018).

An initiative by MST group opened the doors for Paola to adapt her cultural capital as pertaining her university education as a teacher in the Chilean context. From initiatives by non-governmental organizations and the social pressure exerted by groups similar to MST, the local school attended by her son organized training sessions for professionally educated

migrants experiencing labor integration problems. That is how this Venezuelan migrant began a process that was still in course at the moment of writing this article, given that “all of this takes time, it has been a huge effort” (P. Rubio, personal communication, April 08, 2018).

Although this adaptation of capital is not yet fully implemented, which would be reflected in labor insertion, the aim of Paola is for that cultural capital that has aided her in assessing her own son when it comes to behavioral changes associated to the migration process, which in turn allow her to obtain higher income, as well as to regularize her migration status before the law.

In other words, those networks that have been developing as of late, particularly in Santiago by parents whose children share social spaces such as schools, serve as a starting point to initiate the process of capital conversion that usually begins with the adaptation of cultural capital at the migrant destination. As in the case of Paola, other migrants participating with MST described arriving in Chile expecting to be able to put in practice their prior knowledge in order to compensate for and recover some of the economic capital spent in moving from their country of origin.

On the other hand, *capital conversion* also manifests in the form of opportunities in private scenarios, as it happened to Martín Romo and his wife Anahís López, whose capital conversion process began in a more intuitive manner and from the intimacy of their home. This couple from Ecuador, after working for a number of companies where they were abused, decided for entrepreneurship with an idea that emerged from what they perceive as a “weakness of most Chilean companies” (A. López, personal communication, April 28, 2018): customer care. This is exhaustively pointed out by this Ecuadorian family:

I had to reinvent myself from there, try to create a company. We achieved that now. We are standing on more solid ground now. We have discovered that Chile where people consume and sell; the possibility of growing and having access to credit. Your life changes, totally. Our business is an agency focused on events. Everything involved in logistics and customer care (M. Romo, personal communication, April 28, 2018).

It took us three years to capitalize on the idea. We found a niche, being that the Chilean does not provide good customer service. Small things that we realized are necessary and people take too long doing them. So, we capitalized on those aspects. I went through very harsh experiences as a worker. I was mistreated (A. López, personal communication, April 28, 2018).

From the experiences of these families, at least two ways in which cultural capital conversion is undertaken can be identified. On the one hand, we can find the efforts made in private scenarios (home), as it happened with Martín and Anahís when they established their customer service company; it also happened so with Sergio and Isabel with the coffee shop they bought with their saving from Venezuela. For these two families, these initiatives where

the beginning of a reshaping of their migration project from the way it was originally planned for years in their country of origin.

On the other hand, capital conversion can also be undertaken in spaces considered public, such as the sessions of the MST support group, in which any migrant or volunteer can participate. These sessions serve as a network of sorts wherein social capital (Bourdieu, 1987) plays an important role, being their main operative support. The same applies to those who arrive in Chile without any bonds, as it happened to most families participating in this study; the support group alleviates the problems derived from “invisible poverty” by allowing migrants to at least accumulate social capital.

Although economic problems are temporarily held back with saving brought over from countries of origin, waiting times, and capital conversion, are characteristics of international migration that could be understood individually, it is important to note that in order to achieve comprehensive understanding they can better be analyzed altogether, as these aspects sometimes fuse together and present themselves at the same time and space wherein the theoretical map (Desmond, 2014) will help shed light on the lines dividing them.

#### CULTURAL CAPITAL TRANSMISSION

Capital conversion, mainly that of the cultural sort, taking place in public and private scenarios as carried out by migrants is the step that precedes the transmission of cultural capital from the family environment, deemed by Bourdieu (2001) as the best investment in terms of education and the most socially effective one. There are different strategies for the transmission/cultivation of cultural capital to and among children within the family structure (Lareau, 2002, 2011); dynamics in school, after-school programs, chores at home, as well as other activities pertaining the level of parental involvement can be counted among them (Lareau, 2000).

Along these lines, the main concern of the interviewed migrant families relates to the transmission of the culture from their places of origin in a Chilean context, same that is perceived as barely favorable due to the contrasting characteristics derived from cultural differences. “Now when they are young is when one should be strict about it” (J. Madero, personal communication, April 20, 2018) said Juan jokingly during an MST session. For these families, values and the use of language are important aspects in the formation of their children, as explicitly noted in the testimonies:

Here people are more open-minded, and we must adapt. I try to make it so that when my kids see something different, they think about it. Our Venezuelan values are always more important, and are very different from the values here. I don't like Chilean youths. I can't see my children turning into teens here (Y. Blanco, personal communication, June 17, 2018).

I don't want her to lose her roots. We speak Portuguese at home. I want her to have that Brazilian spirit and joy, that loveliness. She lives Brazil, we surround ourselves with Brazilian families. Chile is a very male chauvinist country and I come from a very liberal country. I don't want this for my daughters (B. Da Silva, personal communication, April 10, 2018).

When it comes to values, I find Chilean children to be very disrespectful. Over there in Peru you don't hear kids yelling their parents or raising their voice to authorities such as principals or teachers (K. Chong, personal communication, May 18, 2018).

For Yesenia, Braulia, and Karla, the values of their country of origin are the basis for the education of their children, in the face of how complex it is to be a migrant in Chile. Being aware of the fact that family is an essential part in developing cultural capital, these families maintain constant communication with people who share their nationality, given that they are unable to visit their country of origin; they do so not with the purpose of isolating themselves from Chilean society, but indeed aiming at spending the greater possible amount of time with those who partake of their culture and traditions.

The analysis derived from this suggests that even if migrant networks are activated to plan and execute migration projects, once migrants settle in the destination countries these networks are reactivated, so that by means of the contact with other migrant families it becomes easier for their own values, ways, and traditions to take root in their children more efficiently, as mentioned by a Venezuelan mother:

For the New Year's celebration my son and I went over to Julio's mom, a kid from his class. The mom and I became friends and have bonded very good. She very supportive towards me (P. Rubio, personal communication, April 08, 2018).

These strategies are more common among low-income families whose economic situation will not allow for them to travel their countries of origin, nor sending their children there for a season. Nonetheless, here the activation of social capital serves to remedy such setbacks, which would otherwise impact negatively on the transmission of cultural capital.

For an example, a case similar to the strategy of Braulia and Yesenia is that of Karla and Daniel, who frequently attend a Peruvian dance group, besides participating in sports activities. The decision to join this type of activity was made after suffering acts of discrimination by Chileans:

They (her children) were discriminated against by a Chilean lady only for being Peruvian. You can tell (they are Peruvian) by looking at them, and I didn't like how she spoke to them. So, we better do something else, such as going to soccer matches on Saturdays (K. Chong, personal communication, May 18, 2018).

The sports activity that Karla refers to takes place on Saturdays in downtown Santiago, where all involved are exclusively migrant; the players, among them her husband, are construction workers from Peru, Bolivia, Colombia, and Ecuador. "It's space where

everyone brings their families. We laugh and have a good time. If it's not the soccer matches, we do nothing else during the week" (K. Chong, personal communication, May 18, 2018).

Summarizing, economic deprivation is a factor impacting on the way that parents transmit their culture. That is to say, given the lack of economic capital that would allow their children access to after-school activities as other children have, this Peruvian family decided to make use of the possibilities available to them.

For example, despite the little economic capital at home, Mario is first place in his class, showing particular inclination towards literature and fiction. The strategy implemented by Karla and Daniel to support their child is printing fiction stories and watching documentaries every week, which has favored the student, as what is learned at home is later used in school; these are the type of practices that Lareau has termed activation of cultural capital (Lareau, 2002). In other words, what children learn within the family they then put into practice in public spaces.

In their turn, families earning better salaries implement strategies of a different kind in order to transmit their cultural capital; they characterize by being less apprehensive when compared to those implemented by vulnerable families. Meaning, children enroll in the Boy Scouts, martial arts, and language classes individually, that is, without any adult (parents) being directly involved. Conversely, participating in Peruvian folk dance groups, meeting with Brazilian nationals or attending soccer matches are the kind of activities that families carry out together without spaces where minors can interact without adult participation, which then translates into greater apprehension towards their strategies of cultural capital transmission.

Another important difference is that migration projects developed by Latin American families with greater capital accumulation, both cultural and economic, are reflected in the participation of their children in decision making. This means that the participation of the minors grows in relevance as migration projects unfold, and information filters among family members fade away. An example of this is how Isabela and Sergio let their daughter and son know about the social, economic, and political problems in Venezuela, and about the advantages of living in a country like Chile, which in turn transpires to the political discourse of the minors employed both in school and at the coffee shop where much of their family life takes place:

I always try to nurture this family ideal, that it is about all of us. That we are involved. If we migrate, we migrate together. The four of us belong to each other. So basically, those are the values that we want to pass onto our children. We are not isolated; we are a group. Our family (S. Alonso, personal communication, May 17, 2018).

On the other hand, the use of language is a category of analysis which also varies depending on accumulated capital. Unlike the Venezuelan family, where formal language allows for all members to actively participate in conversations, families such as that of Karla

and Daniel leave aside minors from conversations where topics associated with the social and economic hardships of the household are addressed, to “protect the children from everything that can harm them. They have no reason for knowing about the bad things going on” (K. Chong, personal communication, August 08, 2018).

Summarizing, from the experiences and interpretations of the migrant families participating in this study it can be stated that the cultural capital transmission strategies employed by these families to achieve fulfilling lives in the countries of arrival are diverse, they also depend on the accumulation of economic and social capital. Likewise, and according to the testimonies, these transmission strategies are different in structure and operation from those deployed in their countries of origin, yet they still aim at the same goal initially strived towards, which is mainly linked to instilling and reproducing family values.

## CONCLUSIONS

From the analysis presented in this article it can be stated that the transmission of cultural capital undergoes changes from the onset of family migration projects, which implies discarding the idea of cultivating this type of capital in children following the same practices and dynamics made use of in their country of origin. It must also be taken into account that the lack of social capital and the problems arising from limited economic capital are relevant aspects in the context wherein the everyday lives of these families unfold.

That is how the strategies for the transmission of cultural capital implemented by the migrant families interviewed who lived in Chile also relate to the activation of their social capital, for example, by networking mainly with people who share their national origin, culture, and ways, as in the cases of Braulia sharing with friends coming from Brazil, and the Peruvian folk dance groups attended to by the son of Karla and Daniel.

Another difference pertains the apprehension level under which parents implement said strategies. On the one hand, activities such as learning languages, practicing martial arts, or belonging to groups such as the Boy Scouts, are themselves efforts through which children develop and socialize in more individual ways without adult interference. On the other hand, frequently attending sports events, reading, and watching documentaries are activities carried out in the family and supervised by the parents, which means less freedom for migrant minors.

To sum up, immigration in Chile allows one to enter into an analysis not only aimed at understanding the phenomenon of international migration in Latin America in a more empirical and descriptive manner, but also illustrates deeper analyses on how is it that migrants find themselves in the need of converting their capital, at times from public scenarios and at times from private ones, with the purpose of achieving functionality, said conversions being mediated by various situations at different levels. Ultimately, delving into the phenomenon of migration from notions of capital allows one to perceive how migrants

accumulate, convert, transmit, and more importantly, how they activate, their resources in terms of knowledge in the country of arrival, setting a mark for future research.

Translation: Fernando Llanas

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