

## Re-signifying and negotiating indigenous identity in university spaces: a qualitative study from Chile

Andrew Webb & Denisse Sepúlveda

To cite this article: Andrew Webb & Denisse Sepúlveda (2018): Re-signifying and negotiating indigenous identity in university spaces: a qualitative study from Chile, *Studies in Higher Education*, DOI: [10.1080/03075079.2018.1512568](https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1512568)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1512568>



Published online: 21 Aug 2018.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 63




View Crossmark data [↗](#)

---



# Re-signifying and negotiating indigenous identity in university spaces: a qualitative study from Chile

Andrew Webb <sup>a</sup> and Denisse Sepúlveda<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Instituto de Sociología, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago, Chile; <sup>b</sup>Sociology Department, University of Manchester, Manchester, UK

## ABSTRACT

This article draws on life history interviews with Indigenous university students in Chile to demonstrate the ways these young people re-signify and negotiate their participation in higher education. International scholarship has emphasized the unequal conditions for minority groups to access higher education, but attention also needs to be given to the ways students forge new identity pathways for themselves within these racialized environments. Our analysis utilizes LatCrit studies to emphasize how marginal and hybrid identities enable forms of resistance and counter-narratives to dominant (white) ideologies and assimilatory practices. We focus on the concept of community cultural wealth and the empowerment that aspirational and resistant capital can give to Indigenous youth, providing alternative motives for their studies in relation to the Indigenous communities to which they belong. The paper contributes to this scholarship by underscoring positive aspects of Indigenous student resistance and agency from an understudied context in Latin America.

## KEYWORDS

Indigenous; community cultural wealth; Latcrit studies; Chile; institutional racism

## Introduction

Educational spaces are powerful institutional catalysts for fostering *and* inhibiting ethnic identities. On the one hand, they can offer opportunities for linguistic and cultural diversity, civic participation and stimulants for multicultural values (Banks 2013). On the other, many educational systems located in post-colonial and white settler societies – even when they purport to be culturally inclusive – reproduce systemic racism, ethnic segregation and mono-cultural assimilation (McLaren 2007; Tomlinson 1998). International literature has rightly given greater attention to the latter, emphasizing that disproportionate desertion rates among ethnic minorities owe much to the whitened nationalist curricular, and the associations created by doing well in such a system (Fine 2001; Weaver 2001). The alienating effects of higher education – especially those known as predominantly white universities – result in underrepresentation of ethnic minorities who perceive these spaces as ‘not for them’ (Jones, Castellanos, and Cole 2002; Loo and Rolinson 1986). For those minority students who persist, educational experiences can be marginalizing and distressful. White privilege, in this way, affects not only ethnic minorities’ access to higher education, but also their experience of it.

However, attention should also to be paid to the ways students forge new identity pathways for themselves within these unequal environments. Whilst acknowledging that academia replicates and privileges Western epistemology (Smith 1999), we can also acknowledge the ways ethnic minority youth re-signify curricular content, and resist colonizing tendencies by developing politicized

identities that are empowering for their respective communities (Pidgeon 2008). Questions therefore need to be posed about motives for studying, what types of resources they draw on, and what strategies are employed to reach those goals whilst simultaneously meeting their educational obligations. These positive acts of resistance help move away from previous sociology of education literature that has emphasized the self-defeating nature of this agency, towards their transformational effects (Delgado Bernal 2001). In this article, we draw on LatCrit studies<sup>1</sup> to analyze research results from two separate research projects on Indigenous students in Chilean higher education, and demonstrate the ways these young people negotiate their participation in university life.

Indigenous peoples in Chile constitute approximately 9% of the national population, and the Mapuche are the largest of the eight groups currently recognized (84.4%) (Ministerio de Desarrollo Social 2013). Despite longstanding inequalities across a range of social factors such as family income, health, years of education, educational outcomes, and access to quality schooling, the numbers of Indigenous young people attending postsecondary education are increasing. A 2013 national study carried out in 87,240 homes found that 66% of non-Indigenous young people between the ages 18 and 29 who had completed secondary education were attending a post-secondary educational institute, compared to 64% Indigenous (INJUV 2015). The absence of intercultural education at secondary or tertiary levels<sup>2</sup> in Chile has been a point of contention, particularly for ethno-nationalist Indigenous organizations whose political demands include the creation of an Indigenous university. Advances since 2000 have been made at primary levels, but unlike cases in Latin America where Indigenous movements have been successful in obtaining intercultural universities (see Martín-Díaz 2017; Schmelkes 2009), Chile's governments have remained resistant. Instead, affirmative action policies have sought to increase access to the nationalist higher education system (Webb 2015). Although these initiatives appear to be working by improving retention levels among Indigenous students (Navarette, Candia and Puchi 2013), we suggest access to these higher education institutes does not equate to similar lived experiences to the non-Indigenous. Rather, it is pressing to understand the motives and negotiations that Indigenous students utilize during their studies.

This article contributes, in the first instance, to addressing a lack of national scholarship available on Indigenous students' experience of Chilean higher education. To date, research exists on Indigenous residences for students (Álamos and Furnaro 2012), affirmative action policies and accessibility of higher education (Alvarado et al. 2010; Gonzalez and Sáiz 2007) but little about Indigenous students' experiences of university life (Webb *Forthcoming*). Secondly, we engage with international literature to move beyond 'gap gazing' (whether access to higher education, retention, or educational outcomes) to consider more positive aspects of Indigenous student agency. Whilst an emphasis on unequal education conditions for Indigenous youth is vital, this focus must be complemented by the resilience, resourcefulness and re-signification that these young people give to their university lives, if deficit perspectives are to be avoided (Delgado Bernal 2001). LatCrit studies has tended to be overly-focused on North American contexts, hence an example from a Latin American case study helps diversify this scholarship. Additionally, we include an analysis of the ways Social Science and Humanities curricular – despite being culturally unresponsive to Indigenous peoples – can also be transformed so as to be empowering for them.

Below we consider the importance of Indigenous identity as constituting a fundamentally specific form of ethnic identity, before addressing the effects of nationalist education systems and difficulties surrounding Indigenous youth identities in these contexts. We follow this with a summary of the two research projects and samples, before continuing with a discussion of the results.

## Indigenous youth identity construction

Much of what has been written about young people's ethnic identities has been written from psycho-social and development perspectives (see Arnett 2007). These approaches have usefully emphasized acculturation tendencies and strategies utilized by youth during specific transitional periods and

according to social status, self-esteem and self-concept stability. Adolescence is viewed as a period of self-awareness and experimentation; a new-found freedom to become something 'other' than what was previously ascribed (Hutnik 1991). Social identity theory has been especially influential in detailing the circumstantial and more fluid aspects of multiple identity formation among youth groupings, especially in contexts of racial discrimination. However, these perspectives tend to emphasize individual-level differences and be overly-focused on youth who are 'at risk' or 'vulnerable' (Wyn and White 1997). Critical studies scholarship has complemented this work by questioning to what extent youth agency is delimited by everyday contexts of adult-centered social environments containing institutional norms and constraints. These theories propose that meaning-making processes and agency among youth are not so much linear or developmental issues, as they are cultural and political contexts. To understand youth identities, attention needs to be paid to the environments in which young people participate and the micro-politics required to navigate these spaces.

The political context of being Indigenous, for example is not identical to that of other ethnic minorities. Although they may share a number of similar disadvantages, the former are generally politically disempowered, have a shared history of suffering colonial conquest, and are deprived of their autonomy over ancestral territories (Eriksen 2002). Additionally, the meaning of being Indigenous is contested owing to strenuous relations with international law, transnational companies, non-governmental organizations, and sovereign states (Corntassel 2003), denying or controlling the right to self-identify as native. Marker (2000) has observed that being Indigenous creates distinctive senses of place and belonging to certain spaces, which, as we demonstrate, give new purpose to the educational activities of the young people involved in the research.

Equally important is that expressions of indigeneity are not limited to static folkloric or traditional traits, nor do all Indigenous people experience cultural identity equally, but are constructed, multi-faceted and incomplete processes of belonging (Weaver 2001). For example, young Indigenous people may experience a shared sense of history, spirituality, ancestral knowledge and native language, but hold these in tension with urban migration, global youth culture, post-colonial exclusionary experiences of civic life, and emergent forms of political identity (Wexler 2009). Hybrid forms of Indigenous identity are common, often incorporating national or Western culture, and involve moments of resistance and acts of re-signification (Hare and Pidgeon 2011). For Indigenous youth this can correspond to developing a mestiza identity, meaning, 'living with ambivalence while balancing opposing powers' (Delgado Bernal 2001, 626). These identities are developed from the margins, or borderlands, creating forms of resistance and strategies to dominant (white) ideologies and assimilatory practices. This is the case in educational spaces where young people spend much of their time.

## Indigenous capital in education

Finding cultural relevance in educational spaces is particularly challenging for Indigenous youth. Teachers are seldom trained to foment culturally responsive pedagogies among their students or staff (Castagno and Brayboy 2008). Marker (2004) has demonstrated the strains that this places on Indigenous students' identity, such as the devaluing of their world views and place-based knowledges, displacing their native language, and requirements to acquire new value and moral orientations. Even in contexts where such world-visions or linguistic competencies do not differ greatly from non-Indigenous peers, racial discrimination is still a considerable factor affecting many ethnic minorities in higher education. The racialized nature of organized educational spaces (Barajas and Ronkvist 2007) and the microaggressions experienced in everyday school life (Huber and Solorzano 2015) lead to issues such as peer rejection, segregation, lowered teacher expectations, and racialized disciplining.

This notwithstanding, Indigenous youth still find ways of staying in education. Previous literature on Indigenous youth and 'successful' academic trajectories suggest that positive ethnic identity is a vital component. LaFromboise, Coleman, and Gerton (1993) and Ogbu (1992) argue that a belief in the efficacy of their own culture and language is required alongside adaptability to the majority culture (including Eurocentric academia). Huffman (2001) suggests bicultural perspectives are

misleading since they tend to suggest minority culture is lost or hybridized during adaptations to majority culture. Instead the author proposes that transculturality – as a process by which new cultural skills and understandings are obtained to participate effectively in different contexts without radically altering their own identity – is a key determinant of academic success (See also Okagaki, Helling, and Bingham 2009).

LatCrit scholarship, in particular, has been used to identify the counter-narratives and strategies employed to resist racializing experiences. Solorzano and Delgado Bernal, for example, argue that minority youths' reactions to racist schooling often involve 'internal transformational resistance' (Solorzano and Delgado Bernal 2001). The authors suggest that outwardly 'conformist' behavior to cultural norms (apparent assimilation into white majority educational spaces) tells us little about the internal processes of protest or resistance. That is, students may be fully aware of injustices operating within the education system, choose to remain silent and abide by them in order to obtain their beneficial outcomes, but remain motivated by alternate ends. As noted by Pidgeon (2008), what Indigenous youth define as successful experiences of higher education may not obey the same criteria as those established by neoliberal Western establishments (credentials, personal merit, human development, career advancement, financial benefits): 'Higher education is valued for capacity building within Aboriginal nations toward their goals of self-government and self-determination ... empowerment of self and community, decolonization and self-determination' (2008, 340). The author suggests this equates to, in Bourdieu's terminology, a clash of habitus and alternate capital (indigenous capital) that radically contrasts how Indigenous students – compared to non-Indigenous – experience higher education establishments and relate to others within them. The author claims that it is likely they will have to contend with symbolic violence that extends beyond socioeconomic criteria – to exclude them on account of not possessing the values and knowledge of the elite – to also exclude ethnic and Indigenous forms of knowing. This doubly discriminatory experience makes remaining in university a more arduous and emotionally taxing experience.

In these cases, indigenous capital, or community cultural wealth (Yosso 2005), can be a vital tool for resisting inequalities. Yosso argues that Bourdieu's concepts of capital are too individually focused, leading to unwarranted deficit theories attributed to any person without the desired cultural assets; usually lower socioeconomic, non-white and non-male sections of society. Instead, community cultural wealth – those attributes valued from within a specific community, provide important sources to sustain individuals in contexts of inequality and to empower them from the margins: 'transgressive knowledges can value the presence and voices of People of Color, and can re-envision the margins as places empowered by transformative resistance' (Yosso 2005, 70). The author names aspirational capital and resistant capital as two specific forms (among others) that communities draw on to provide coping strategies, resilience and to nurture a 'culture of possibility' for the future in spite of institutional racism and inequality. In the results section, we consider how these play a role in re-signifying Indigenous students' university experience, answering two central research questions:

- (1) In what ways are higher education spaces used to foment Indigenous identity?
- (2) What resources and strategies do the young people draw on to give sense to their studies?

## Methods

### Participants

Data from two qualitative research projects are analyzed in this paper to understand the meanings Indigenous youth attribute to their participation in higher education. The first of these conducted life history interviews during a three month period in 2017 with 26 Mapuche post-secondary students studying in Santiago, from working-class backgrounds. Participants are aged between 18 and 27, 12 are female, 14 are male and 22 are mixed-race (they have one Mapuche surname and one Chilean surname),<sup>3</sup> whilst 4 participants have paternal and maternal Mapuche surnames. The

broader project aimed to understand the strategies employed by first-generation Indigenous students to reach and stay in university, and the key institutional actors involved in facilitating this process, throughout their educational trajectories. From this sample, eight participants spoke explicitly about aspirational and resistant capital that drew on indigenous community wealth, and are cited in this paper. Other aspects of indigenous cultural wealth (such as navigational capital and social capital) were also mentioned, but are discussed in a separate paper.

Complimentary data is taken from a second project, based on PhD research in which 40 life histories were conducted, 20 interviews from the Metropolitan region and 20 from the Araucanía region (Mapuche ancestral homeland). Like the first project, all the participants of this research have working-class origins, and are aged between 21 and 57 years, 18 are female and 22 are male, and each was attending or had attended university at the time of the research (2015–2016). The thesis aimed to identify and understand the consequences of upward social mobility among Mapuche people and how they negotiated their class and Indigenous identities during university and their working life. Of the 40 participants, 25 spoke generally about some form of indigenous capital to make sense of their studies. Due to space limitations, five of these participants are cited from the Araucanía region in order to broaden the range of geographical backgrounds and ages among the participants who are cited. The names used in this article are all pseudonyms.

## Method

Life history interviews are a widely-used method, giving precedence to subjectivity and story-telling. Atkinson (2002) has argued that stories are intrinsic to who we are, and that telling them give meaning to our lives and connect us to our roots. They work because they draw on experiences and contexts that are assumed to be intelligible to others, thereby confirming shared meanings, but also because people want to share them. Criticisms of this method have laid claim to life history interviews being fanciful or merely generating randomly recalled events (see Dyson 2003). However, since past events cannot be observed first-hand, this method moves away from naïve realist attempts to provide an objective or direct account of people's actions. Instead, constructivist epistemologies are preferred, retrospectively getting inside those events deemed significant or memorable by the participants themselves (Page 2014). From this perspective, data are produced rather than presented, and people's biographies are fashioned through double-interpretation; the meanings attributed to certain contexts and experiences by the interviewee and subsequently (during the interview and analysis) through the interviewer's understandings (Pillow 2003).

Interviewees are active in constructing narratives, since they are not asked to answer questions, but to reflect upon and reconstruct their lives. Accuracy does not depend on whether events are presented in a more favorable light, or whether they give emphasis to what they think the interviewer wants to hear, to the extent that it is their story. Instead, the participant should feel sufficiently comfortable or free to relate those aspects important to her/him. Likewise, the intentionality of the interviewer, determining the interview agenda (acknowledging that even open-ended questions about their life still obey this dynamic) (Rapley 2001), does not detract from qualitatively rich data that can be accumulated about social contexts and people's meaningful interpretations of them. In this way, story-telling should be seen as a dialogic process of mutual exchanges of social representations; the teller will adapt her/his story according to what s/he thinks the listener shares or understands (Dyson 2003). This dialogical reciprocation should be carefully distinguished from equating life histories with 'the *researcher's* story of their lives' (Limerick, Burgess-Limerick, and Grace, 1996, 458, italics in original). Life history interviews have the potential to relate a social function of biographies, as well as the social processes that constitute them (Rosenthal 1993), and it is the latter that our research sought to gauge, as a reflection of narrative about real events and experiences. This method also accords with LatCrit studies' emphasis on (counter) story-telling and family biographies (Sleeter and Delgado Bernal 2004).

## Analysis

Thematic coding was used to categorize participants' narratives. In order to answer the research questions, the authors actively sought out meaningful collective patterns from across the life narratives so as to understand the ways their biographies had been shaped by educational social processes. Thematic analysis is one of the most widely used but least recognized approaches to analyzing data, since it is not tied to one specific epistemology or theoretical position (Roulston 2001). One reason for its lack of recognition has been the status obtained by grounded theory within the social sciences, which is one of the most frequently cited methodologies, but rarely followed through all its rigorous stages (open, axial and selective coding) and to a conclusion of 'generating' new theories (Braun and Clarke 2006). Thematic coding does not seek to work from a purely inductive theory-generating method of analysis, but rather acknowledges the relevance of pre-existing theoretical frameworks that provide a guiding principle for thematic development (Braun and Clarke 2006). In this sense, the research explicitly acknowledges the active role of the researcher's interpretation and presentation of particular data which, though representing the sample, does not extend beyond those interviewed. The fragments presented in this paper are those that are most relevant to the Community Cultural Wealth Model (Yosso 2005) of aspirational and resistant capital.

## Results and discussion

### *Aspirational capital*

Among the sample, almost every participant spoke of parental aspirations as a driving force behind them becoming the first-generation from their family to attend university. Many narrated that this socialization had been present in their households since an early age. Almost without exception, their parents work in manual labor and blue collar employment, having incomplete secondary education qualifications. The incentives driving these aspirations, as might be expected, are personal motives of social mobility having lived most of their lives in marginal neighborhoods of Santiago, and experiencing family poverty. However, the narratives discussed in this section gravitate round cultural community wealth which, unlike income, is abundant in extended familial contexts (Yosso 2005). Hopes for the future, within these families, extend beyond individualistic motives. Seeking educational excellence, in Sayen's case, was inspired by her people's cause:

[My parents] never considered the possibility of vocational education because my mum thought it leaves you at a certain level, social level, so it had to be a Science and Humanities track. My brother went to university first, when I was in 9th grade, so there was expectation I should do the same. Since we had always been active as Mapuche, and were educated this way, we knew our studies had to be useful for the Mapuche people. (Sayen, 20 years old, Primary Teacher, project 1)

Ailin's family had always emphasized the importance of actively identifying as Mapuche. Her father, although Chilean, identifies very strongly with the political cause of the Mapuche people, and was the main instigator of Ailin's choice of university course, providing the aspirational capital to enter university with different expectations:

I wanted to study to be a teacher, and I told my dad that I wasn't too interested in Law, but my dad said it was an opportunity, to imagine what I could do with it. He said, 'you can't think about working for some company, use your studies as a tool ... your family needs someone who can defend them.' There aren't as many Mapuche lawyers as there should be, so he told me that had to be my focus for studying; not be a corporate lawyer, but to be a Mapuche lawyer, and that was why my family had supported me the way they had. (24 years old, Law, project 1)

In both of these cases, parental involvement was central to developing aspirations that went beyond individual mobility. However, other participants described alternate routes to developing broader

community goals. Gabriela, for example, narrated how she resisted more 'self-centered' aspirations on account of the difficulties she perceived in her community:

My mum, since I was young, told me I'd go to university, and that I mustn't end up like her, killing herself working for a tiny salary. She told me to be a lawyer, but I didn't feel called to that, I always wanted to study something related to helping my people. I want to go to the South when I finish and help my people; those with few resources, because there are many Mapuche people with precarious health issues. (Gabriela, 20 years old, Obstacles, project 1)

Other participants came from homes where parents did not self-identify as Indigenous or have outside contact with Indigenous communities, meaning there was little opportunity to foster the same kinds of aspirational capital. However, upon entering university, some of the young people awoke to the political implications of being Indigenous. Horacio, for example, began to see its significance through developing critical analysis techniques in Sociology, and to detach it from the negative associations that his home life had created:

My father told me I was lazy because I was Mapuche, and used to beat me for it, and I reached a point where I was convinced that was true. I think studying sociology compensated for that a lot in terms of developing a political identity, of knowing who I was, and I started to go to Mapuche marches. Not socially, mind you, I wouldn't put on traditional headdress, but I do go to the marches. In that way it changed my outlook. (Horacio, 30, Sociology, project 1)

Similarly, Rúbén claimed that studying social sciences provided tools to advance political projects, despite the university course being inadequately designed in regard to Indigenous knowledges:

I knew nothing about Mapuche culture, beyond what I saw on television and some family traditions ... I always had a sense that I was different to others, but then I started to study Anthropology which gave me tools to take forward a process of vindication. It taught me to value being different. I think that was its contribution, more than teaching me any kind of cultural knowledge or worldview. (Rubén, 26, Anthropology, project 1)

These examples contribute an under-examined aspect of agency and resilience. Critical thinking can be developed within mono-cultural whitened education contexts that attempt to assimilate or exclude Indigenous epistemologies and knowledges. Aspirational capital, in these cases, was developed by interacting with university spaces, suggesting they can be (unintentionally) empowering for Indigenous youth to the extent that they provide new networks and ways of seeing the world. Hybrid identities can be developed to co-opt these colonial knowledges, and are intended to be used to serve the interests of minority populations rather than develop human capital for the interests of the global economy (Pidgeon 2008).

Both Angelica and Loreta were explicit about the pivotal role that university played in enabling them to see beyond public perceptions of Mapuche culture, and were able to develop their interests in gender issues using the skills and resources made available through their institutions:

I had always heard people speaking so badly about the Mapuche, but at university I started to get interested. So I started to investigate, and realize I am Mapuche; that it isn't just a surname, but that it's about maintaining a culture. Since I like textiles, I started to do *witral*, Mapuche weaving, and to learn about its meaning for Mapuche women. (Angélica, 25, Design, project 2)

It was important to me not just to get a university certificate, but also to see certain problematics that interested me, and the need to understand issues more clearly, like gender among the Mapuche. If it hadn't been for the university, I don't know what route I would have taken to learn about that, because I learnt it all there. (Loreta, 23, Linguistics, project 2)

Isabel's experience at university was markedly different to what she learnt at school, allowing her to develop an interest in studying Mapuzungun (native Mapuche language). This eventually opened doors for Isabel to continue studying a Master's degree and to become a research assistant with a professor working on similar issues:

I always saw the Mapuche as belonging to the past, because that's what schools teach. But in my third year [of university] they gave us different options for our seminary presentation. There was one on the Mapuche and I



said, 'well I'm Mapuche and I've never explored this.' What's more I didn't fancy any of the other options. That's when I started getting involved, and it's gone on in stages. Then I started to feel obliged to study Mapuzungun. That experience has helped me see the Mapuche world as something diverse rather than static. (Isabel, 25, Linguistics, project 1)

In all the cases cited in this section the Indigenous students give new meaning to studying at university. Every participant had experienced racial discrimination at one level of education or another (primary to tertiary) but each managed to create a 'culture of possibility' within these deeply unequal systems (Yosso 2005, 78). A vital element of this has been to re-signify the goal of studying, and personal responses to the curricular content of the courses given (Pidgeon 2008). This wealth goes beyond individualistic meritocracy and social mobility, toward challenging the social injustice faced by Indigenous peoples. The students involved in this research look to transform their communities, rather than leave them behind.

### **Resistant capital**

Research participants were also critical of the whitened spaces of the university and sought to resist its assimilatory and invisibilizing tendencies. The strategies invoked by the young people varied; from internal resilience, embodied oppositional behavior, to collective organization and protest (Solorzano and Yosso 2001). Two examples of more marginal and individually embodied resistance came from Ailin, and Teodoro who sought to transform their university experience by approaching individual professors about acquiring new knowledges. Despite their failures to change the system, they remain critical and alert to the whitened privileges of university spaces.

Ailin, cited earlier, was critical of professors' unwillingness to teach on Indigenous legal issues, and their lack of responsiveness to her queries, compared to Chilean peers:

Having to listen to how they [lecturers] speak about the Mapuche people is really tough, but also how they bypass it. For example, they only cover Indigenous property in one class, they say it's not a seizable asset, then that's it. So if you go and ask them about it afterwards, they say it's not their area of expertise. I'm interested in that, and they just told me to go look up the law such and such. But if another student goes and asks about problems of inheritance, they say send me an email, we'll talk it over. I think all this talk about pluri-culturalism in Chile is a farce, just a total lie ... We really need a Mapuche university, because this papering over the cracks isn't going to change anything. It's all colonial.

Teodoro was equally discerning about the inadequacies of his teacher training, given that his own intentions to inspire young people to understand the socio-political and cultural context in which he lives and works were not matched by his university, located in the same area:

I think we live out racism and discrimination in structural ways. It's not necessary for them to call you an indian or little Mapuche. At university we demanded that they teach us on Mapuche history, because we are studying to be History teachers at a university in the Araucanía! They told us the course organization is too complex to be changed, there aren't the lecturers or money to do it. Public universities boast about quality, located in Mapuche territory, but with teachers who don't have a clue about Mapuche history. That's just abnormal ... We come out of the university as monocultural teachers following a state discourse. (Teodoro, 25, History Teacher, project 2)

Rodiz was more successful in achieving a degree of individual resistance on her course. Coming from a mountainous Indigenous community (*Pehuenche*) in southern Chile, and being the granddaughter of the community's leader (*lonko*), she had been actively involved in cultural practices all her life. These 'pedagogies of the home' (Delgado Bernal 2001, 624), meant that upon entering university, Rodiz felt comfortable presenting herself as Mapuche to all institutional staff and peers, managing to promote some basic Indigenous linguistic capital in these spaces:

My course mates have never had a Mapuche peer from a community before; there are some with Mapuche surnames but who don't know anything [about their culture], so I was a novelty. I remember on the first day presenting myself and a girl said to me, *mari mari lagmien* (Mapuche greeting) and I replied the same back, and she said we were going to be friends, that she wanted to be my friend, and we are building a great relationship. All my

course-mates asked me stuff, they greet me in Mapuzungun, and they are all from Santiago, none of them are Mapuche. The majority of the teachers know what I'm about, they ask me my opinion, my perspective. (20, Public Administration, project 1)

Whilst gaining recognition from peers and professors was important to Rodiz, she considered it necessary to oppose the Western protocol of university during her exams, thereby resisting its colonizing tendencies:

For the final coursework we had to hand in a report on gaps in the constitution. My course-mates suggested the Mapuche conflict, and that's what we did. But I said to my professor, 'for me formal dress is not what you call formal dress, and I want to come to the exam in my traditional clothes.' He was fascinated by the idea and agreed, then I said, 'and another thing, if I'm going to speak about this issue, I want to do it in my native language.' He looked at me for a long time then said, 'excellent, do it.'

Rodiz managed to validate her beliefs and knowledge within a predominantly white university space. Despite the absence of culturally responsive education, Rodiz's agency and resistance ensured a space was opened for her (with support from her friends) to *transform* these spaces, rather than merely produce reactionary or self-defeating resistance (Solorzano and Delgado Bernal 2001). In each of these cases, cultural wealth was achieved primarily through individual action, but as we describe below, this was often accompanied by collective organization.

Affirming collective Indigenous identity in these predominantly white educational spaces was especially important to a number of the participants. In particular, they narrated how it provided them with alternate epistemologies, knowledges and emotional support. In Leonor's case, resistant capital meant re-socializing other university members, whilst her participation also led to new leadership skills destined toward community goals:

We called ourselves *Trafkintu*, with the idea of creating a space to spread ideas and Indigenous people's thinking within the university, because we realized that nobody knew anything about these peoples ... So we started to give talks. I was the one who presented most of the time, even though I never thought of myself as a leader or anything ... over the course of [doing this] I met other people with similar interests and that my studies could be useful, my thinking evolved so now I constantly question how I can link it to Mapuche culture. (Leonor, 23, Anthropology, project 1)

Similarly Patricio and Maria, who had attended university years earlier, spoke of the role that social (indigenous) capital had among university students, even spanning across institutional affiliations, and connecting them to Indigenous communities outside the university:

When I heard about their group [at another university] we all went there. *We kintun* looked to rescue [Mapuche culture inside the university, to organize cultural activities, to support Mapuche students in terms of helping them adapt to university, to look for other sources of financing their studies, for housing. At that time we had direct contact with Indigenous residences, so we could find spaces for them ... We had monthly meetings, led by important people from Mapuche society. One person was an expert in the Mapuche language and had a [leadership] role in a community while studying at university. (Patricio, 38, Agronomy, project 2)

We replicated other university [Mapuche] groups. We had joint activities with other universities and groups with similar interests in the Mapuche. We celebrated *We Tripantu* (Mapuche New Year) and got together to dialogue about our experiences in university, about social benefits that were available to us, where you could go to get them, and what other university groups were doing ... It was a place where common experiences and problems were discussed, it was really satisfying and fun. (Maria, 44, Social Work, project 2)

As these narratives suggest, staying in university education is a particularly arduous task for Indigenous youth given the institutional barriers that oppose minority populations. Learning to navigate these systems is made easier when common identities can be found, and experiences shared (Delgado Bernal 2001; Yosso 2005). In Ruben's case, university spaces offered similar networking opportunities and resources that were unavailable in secondary education:

I started to participate more in an organizational world, inside and outside university. *Trawun Academia* brought together students from Psychology, History, Political Science. It existed because we needed to create those networks to be seen, and to begin to study Mapuche culture. In higher education you have more tools than during

secondary education where there was nothing. For example books; in secondary nobody wanted to take up a book to read. But in university, with the library, everyone was open to reading. I had course-mates who valued Mapuche culture and said to me, 'it's great that you participate in that, keep going' so it was a context that started to create a sense within me like, this is the way to go.

Ailin suggested that seeking out Mapuche peers led to a different quality of friendship, owing to shared understandings and emotions. However, she was also adamant that these friendship groups were not solely inward-looking, but that they could be transformational in interrupting the invisibilization of the Mapuche in educational spaces. Her organization joined a student march, but chose to delineate and establish Mapuche demands as compatible but separate from general student politics:

I made friends there. I started to participate actively in the group and they helped me a lot. We talked through issues that you can't talk about with other friends, no matter how nice they are, it's different with a Mapuche student because the others can't see it from your perspective, they don't criticize the same things as you.... last year I remember we went to a march, a student march about education and we went as *Chilkatufe* [Mapuche group name] dressed as Mapuche students to put forward our demands.

Collective identities and mutual support are vital for navigating university spaces, but they serve an additional function in resisting assimilation and invisibilization on campus. Although theories of cultural capital correctly point to the disempowerment and barriers facing minority and working class populations to enter into and remain in university, LatCrit perspectives enable us to recognize alternate sources of wealth that function in similar ways, albeit from the margins (Huber 2009). The cases cited in this section indicate that Indigenous students' participation in university life is capable of transforming its colonizing tendencies, whether by re-interpreting or re-directing the skills and knowledges transmitted in curricular content, or through Indigenous student organizations.

## Conclusions

Many Indigenous young people finishing school in the early twenty-first century are the first generation to have the opportunity to attend post-secondary education, but must face a continuation of colonizing practices that extend back from primary schooling (Battiste, Bell, and Findlay 2002). Since the benefits of an intercultural university – much less an Indigenous one – are not available in Chile, we need to understand how Indigenous young people confront these realities in the present.

Contradictions between human capital formation for a capitalist economy and Indigenous identity and ways of life are not incompatible, and are not necessarily assimilatory (Pidgeon 2008). Instead, this paper has demonstrated the ways young Mapuche negotiate their roles as university students by re-signifying the value that their studies hold in regard to impacting their communities. For most, schooling had been a racializing experience at one time or another, and all described difficulties in their adaptations to university life. However, the majority of participants also described the community resources that they had drawn on in order to get on in these unequal spaces. We analyzed the role of aspirational and resistant capital to assess the ways they were able to transform their personal experiences, relationships and formal aspects of the university. Whilst linguistic and cultural diversity are generally excluded from these spaces, the young participants have found creative and agentic ways to establish meaningful connections with Indigenous identities and political vindication.

For LatCrit scholarship it is vital to demonstrate how counter story-telling of minority populations surpass individual/family deficit theories and challenge dominant ideologies of equal opportunity or race neutrality (Huber 2009; Solorzano and Yosso 2001). Mestiza and borderland identities make participation from the margins possible, despite racial microaggressions and institutional barriers in higher education. These identities maintain a tension between adapting to mainstream Western knowledges and culture, and resistance to colonizing practices. These need not lead to estrangement or assimilation, since the agency and transcultural capacities (Huffman 2001) of Indigenous youth make alternate pathways possible. Life story interviews were used to capture a broader

understanding of these capacities, but one of the most striking results from the broader project were the motives and sense of purpose that the young people gave to university studies, discussed in this paper. Of particular interest are opportunities seized by the participants to turn mono-cultural education into spaces of diversity, and that these practices usually have wider goals in view, to benefit their Indigenous communities.

The implications from this research are relatively straightforward; affirmative action policies may be working to get more Indigenous students into higher education, but retention strategies are virtually non-existent. It is clear from the young people's narratives that they find very few institutionally-led opportunities to learn more about, or share their own Indigenous knowledges and experiences in pedagogic spaces. However, this does not mean the young people are unable to develop a coherent link or apply these skills and knowledge to their own identities. They find their own pathways through this unequal terrain, demonstrating an instrumental capacity to make the most of these opportunities for their own peoples. Many of them draw on community cultural wealth, such as aspirational capital, whilst others are instigators of it, resisting inequalities so as to collectively organize and utilize university resources for collective purposes. Before intercultural education becomes a reality in higher education, more needs to be done by existing institutional actors to facilitate these connections.

## Notes

1. Tribal Critical Studies is perhaps a more suitable framework for addressing indigenous young people's experiences of education, but crucially less research has been conducted on resistance in this literature. LatCrit is a complementary branch of the same scholarship.
2. Exceptions exist, such as a handful of privately-invested secondary schools, and some university courses with additive forms (Richardson and Blanchet-Cohen 2000) of intercultural content, but the remainder of the education system is wholly mono-cultural.
3. Mapuche are one of the most endogamous indigenous groups in Latin America so it is likely all are mixed-race, but in Chile there is a marked difference between having two Mapuche surnames and only one. For example, some students suggested that because their paternal surname was Chilean and maternal surname was Mapuche, they were less discriminated than peers who had a paternal Mapuche surname.

## Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank each participant for their valuable time and contributions, Macarena Sepulveda for all her valuable support with the fieldwork in project 1. The authors also thank the Centre for Social Conflict and Cohesion Studies (COES), Center for Intercultural and Indigenous Research (CIIR) and Millennium Nucleus for the Study of the Life Course and Vulnerability (MLIV) for their institutional support.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

## Funding

This work was supported by Center for Intercultural and Indigenous Research (CIIR) [grant number FONDAP 15110006], and by Becas Chile [grant number 72140258].

## ORCID

Andrew Webb  <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-2706-7670>

## References

- Álamos, V. and A. Furnaro. 2012. "Repensando el lugar de origen: Estudiantes de hogares Mapuche en Temuco y Santiago." *Revista ISEES* 12: 59–86.
- Alvarado, V., M. Báez, A. Cárcamo, M. Cazanave, R. del Valle, E. Espinoza, A. García, et al. 2010. "Diversidad y Equidad: Programas de Acción Afirmativa en la Educación Superior Chilena." In *Diagnósticos y Diseño de Intervenciones en Equidad Universitaria*, edited by L. E. González, 193–230. Santiago, Chile: CINDA.
- Arnett, J. J. 2007. "Emerging Adulthood: What is it, and What is it Good for?" *Child Development Perspectives* 1 (2): 68–73.
- Atkinson, P. 2002. "The Life Story Interview." In *Handbook of Interview Research: Context and Method*, edited by J. Gubrium and J. Holstein, 121–140. Sage: London.
- Banks, J. 2013. "The Construction and Historical Development of Multicultural Education, 1962–2012." *Theory Into Practice* 52 (1): 73–82.
- Barajas, H. L., and A. Ronnkvist. 2007. "Racialized Space: Framing Latino and Latina Experience in Public Schools." *Teachers College Record* 109 (6): 1517–1538.
- Battiste, M., L. Bell, and L. M. Findlay. 2002. "Decolonizing Education in Canadian Universities: An Interdisciplinary, International, Indigenous Research Project." *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 26 (2): 82–95.
- Braun, V. and V. Clarke. 2006. "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3 (2): 77–101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Castagno, A., and B. M. J. Brayboy. 2008. "Culturally Responsive Schooling for Indigenous Youth: A Review of the Literature." *Review of Educational Research* 78 (4): 941–993.
- Corntassel, J. 2003. "Who is Indigenous? Peoplehood and Ethnonationalist Approaches to Rearticulating Indigenous Identity." *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 9 (1): 75–100.
- Delgado Bernal, D. 2001. "Learning and Living Pedagogies of the Home: The Mestiza Consciousness of Chicana Students." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 14 (5): 623–639.
- Dyson, S. 2003. "Life Histories: Interpreting the Subjective Reality of African Students Studying Nursing in the UK." In *Narrative, Memory and Health*, edited by C. Horrocks, N. Kelly, B. Roberts, and D. Robinson, 97–104. Huddersfield: University of Huddersfield..
- Eriksen, T. H. 2002. *Ethnicity and Nationalism*. 2nd ed. London: Pluto Press.
- Fine, M. 2001. *Framing Dropouts*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Gonzalez, M. E., and J. L. Sáiz. 2007. "Equidad en el acceso de estudiantes mapuche a la educación universitaria: Ingreso, carrera y preparación académica." *ISEES* 4 (2): 69–80.
- Hare, J., and M. Pidgeon. 2011. "The Way of the Warrior: Indigenous Youth Navigating the Challenges of Schooling." *Canadian Journal of Education / Revue canadienne de l'éducation* 34 (2): 93–111.
- Huber, L. P. 2009. "Challenging Racist Nativist Framing: Acknowledging the Community Cultural Wealth of Undocumented Chicana College Students to Reframe the Immigration Debate." *Harvard Educational Review* 79 (4): 704–730.
- Huber, L. P., and D. Solorzano. 2015. "Racial Microaggressions as a Tool for Critical Race Research." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 18 (3): 297–320.
- Huffman, T. E. 2001. "Resistance Theory and the Transculturation Hypothesis as Explanations of College Attrition and Persistence among Culturally Traditional American Indian Students." *Journal of American Indian Education* 40 (3): 1–23.
- Hutnik, N. 1991. *Ethnic Minority Identity: A Social Psychological Perspective*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Instituto Nacional de la Juventud (INJUV). 2015. *Jóvenes y juventudes indígenas: vivencias y tensiones en el Chile contemporáneo*. Santiago: Gobierno de Chile.
- Jones, L., J. Castellanos, and D. Cole. 2002. "Examining the Ethnic Minority Student Experience at Predominantly White Institutions: A Case Study." *Journal of Hispanic Higher Education* 1 (1): 19–39.
- LaFromboise, T., H. L. K. Coleman, and J. Gerton. 1993. "Psychological Impact of Biculturalism: Evidence and Theory." *Psychological Bulletin* 114: 395–412.
- Limerick, B., T. Burgess-Limerick, and M. Grace. 1996. "The Politics of Interviewing: Power Relations and Accepting the Gift." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 9 (4): 449–460. doi:10.1080/0951839960090406
- Loo, C., and G. Rolinson. 1986. "Alienation of Ethnic Minority Students at a Predominantly White University." *The Journal of Higher Education* 57 (1): 58–77.
- Marker, M. 2000. "Lummi Identity and White Racism: When Location is a Real Place." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 13 (4): 401–414.
- Marker, M. 2004. "Theories and Disciplines as Sites of Struggle: The Reproduction of Colonial Dominance Through the Controlling of Knowledge in the Academy." *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 28 (1–2): 102–110.
- Martin-Díaz, E. 2017. "Are Universities Ready for Interculturality? The Case of the Intercultural University 'Amawtay Wasí' (Ecuador)." *Journal of Latin American Cultural Studies* 26 (1): 73–90.
- McLaren, P. 2007. *Life in Schools. An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education*. 5th ed. Los Angeles: University of California.
- Ministerio de Desarrollo Social. 2013. *Encuesta CASEN 2013*. [www.ministeriodesarrollosocial.gob.cl/observatorio/casen/](http://www.ministeriodesarrollosocial.gob.cl/observatorio/casen/)

- Navarrete, S., R. Candia, and R. Puchi. 2013. "Factores asociados a la deserción/retención de los estudiantes mapuche de la Universidad de la Frontera e incidencia de los programas de apoyo académico." *Calidad en la educación* 39: 43–80. doi:10.4067/S0718-45652013000200003
- Ogbu, J. U. 1992. "Understanding Cultural Diversity and Learning." *Educational Researcher* 21 (8): 5–14.
- Okagaki, L., M. K. Helling, and G. E. Bingham. 2009. "American Indian College Students' Ethnic Identity and Beliefs About Education." *Journal of College Student Development* 50 (2): 157–176.
- Page, J. M. 2014. "Childcare Choices and Voices: Using Interpreted Narratives and Thematic Meaning-Making to Analyse Mothers' Life Histories." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 27 (7): 850–876. doi:10.1080/09518398.2013.805850
- Pidgeon, M. 2008. "Pushing Against the Margins: Indigenous Theorizing of "Success" and Retention in Higher Education." *Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice* 10 (3): 339–360.
- Pillow, W. 2003. "Confession, Catharsis, or Cure? Rethinking the Uses of Reflexivity as Methodological Power in Qualitative Research." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 16 (2): 175–196. doi:10.1080/0951839032000060635
- Rapley, T. J. 2001. "The Art(fulness) of Open-Ended Interviewing: Some Considerations on Analysing Interviews." *Qualitative Research* 1 (3): 303–323.
- Richardson, C., and N. Blanchet-Cohen. 2000. "Postsecondary Education Programs for Aboriginal Peoples: Achievements and Issues." *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 24 (2): 169–184.
- Rosenthal, G. 1993. "Reconstruction of Life Stories: Principles of Selection in Generating Stories for Narrative Biographical Interviews." *The Narrative Study of Lives* 1 (1): 59–91.
- Roulston, K. 2001. "Data Analysis and 'Theorizing as Ideology'." *Qualitative Research* 1 (3): 279–302.
- Schmelkes, S. 2009. "Intercultural Universities in Mexico: Progress and Difficulties." *Intercultural Education* 20 (1): 5–17.
- Sleeter, C., and D. Delgado Bernal. 2004. "Critical Pedagogy, Critical Race Theory, and Antiracist Education: Implications for Multicultural Education." In *Handbook of Multicultural Education Research*, edited by James Banks, 240–257. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons.
- Smith, L. T. 1999. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. London: Zed Books Ltd.
- Solorzano, D., and D. Delgado Bernal. 2001. "Examining Transformational Resistance Through a Critical Race and Latcrit Theory Framework: Chicana and Chicano Students in an Urban Context." *Urban Education* 36 (3): 308–342.
- Solorzano, D., and T. Yosso. 2001. "Critical Race and LatCrit Theory and Method: Counter-Storytelling." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 14 (4): 471–495.
- Tomlinson, S. 1998. "New Inequalities? Educational Markets and Ethnic Minorities." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 1 (2): 207–223. doi:10.1080/1361332980010205.
- Weaver, H. 2001. "Indigenous Identity: What Is It, and Who Really Has It?" *The American Indian Quarterly* 25 (2): 240–255.
- Webb, A. 2015. "Indigenous Schooling Grants in Chile: The Impacts of an Integrationist Affirmative Action Policy among Mapuche Pupils." *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, 18 (3): 419–441.
- Webb, A. *Forthcoming*. "Getting There and Staying in: First-generation Indigenous Students' Educational Pathways Into Chilean Higher Education." *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. doi:10.1080/09518398.2018.1488009
- Wexler, L. 2009. "The Importance of Identity, History and Culture in the Wellbeing of Indigenous Youth." *The Journal of the History of Childhood and Youth* 2 (2): 267–276.
- Wyn, J., and R. White. 1997. *Rethinking Youth*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Yosso, T. 2005. "Whose Culture has Capital? A Critical Race Theory Discussion of Community Cultural Wealth." *Race Ethnicity and Education* 8 (1): 69–91.