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**Interactive Inequalities  
and Equality in the Social Bond**  
A Sociological Study of Equality

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# Interactive Inequalities and Equality in the Social Bond

## A Sociological Study of Equality

Kathya Araujo<sup>1</sup>

### Abstract

Based upon the results of three empirical studies conducted in Chile, this paper discusses: (1) the expansion of the perception of a specific type of inequalities in this society: interactive inequalities. These are perceived inequalities that focus on the treatment received in ordinary interactions between individuals and between these and institutions; (2) The fact that these new perceptions must be understood in the context of specific socio-historical transformations of the meanings and scope of the notion of equality. Therefore, this paper pays attention to the paths by which equality has acquired new content in Chilean society – equality in the social bond – making possible and legitimizing the perception of what we have called interactive inequalities. Finally, it argues for the importance and analytical priority of the sociological study of equality, especially when approaching inequalities.

**Keywords:** interactional inequality | social bond | perception of inequalities

### Biographical Notes

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## 1. Introduction

This paper uses empirical evidence to discuss a twofold ongoing social process in current Chilean society. On the one hand, there is now an expansion of the perception of what we would like to call interactive inequalities. These are inequalities perceived in ordinary everyday life interactions among individuals and between individuals and institutions. They focus on the ways one is treated in these interactions.

But the aim of this text is not only to describe the expansion of these perceived inequalities, but also to underscore analytically that the emergence and importance of these perceptions must be understood in light of situated socio-historical transformations in the notion of equality. In other words, the argument to be developed is that if we find an acute sensibility to inequalities in social interactions in Chile today, this has to do with the fact that the content of the notion of equality has been specified in this society in such a way that makes this perception not only possible but also legitimate. The emergence and spread among the population of the perception of these particular types of inequalities is a symptom of a major change in the meanings and scope of the notion of equality, what I call equality in the social bond. Thus, this paper pays attention to the growing trend by which a new content of equality has been established in Chilean society, enabling and legitimizing the perception of what we have called interactive inequalities. In this context, the sociological study of equality is of central importance. Thus in a theoretical perspective it will be contended at the same time the importance and analytical priority of the sociological study of equality.

To argue the former, this text relies upon the results of three empirical studies conducted in Chile:

(1) A study of the modalities in which the notions of right and equality are mobilized for the perception, evaluation, legitimization and action in ordinary interactions in social life: twenty groups consisting of between 5-8 participants were convened in Santiago de Chile and studied using the Group Conversation-Dramatization technique (GCD). This group interview technique combines elements of group discussion, drama techniques, and the methodological strategy of participatory research (see Araujo 2009c). Each session lasted between one and a half and two hours. Two members of the research team took part in each session playing the role of moderator and observer, respectively. GCDs have four distinctive moments:

(a) the narrative moment; (b) the group creation of a scene; (c) the drama-performance moment; (d) auto-reflexive work by the group about the

dramatized scene. The sample was stratified by gender (men and women), generational (young and adults) and socio-economic (lower and middle income groups) criteria.<sup>2</sup>

(2) A study on structural determination and individuation processes in Chilean society today: ninety-six semi-directed interviews were conducted with men and women between the ages of 30-55 years from middle-upper, middle and lower-income sectors. These interviews aimed to identify (a) the social challenges that individuals must face ordinarily in everyday life; (b) the way they establish a hierarchy in these challenges, and (c) the modalities of individuation to which they are driven by confronting them. This research was conducted in three different Chilean cities, Santiago, Valparaíso and Concepción.<sup>3</sup> Most of the interviews were held in Santiago. The interviews conducted in the other two cities served to avoid the risk of abusive generalizations.

(3) A study on the modalities of the exercise of authority and the reasons for obedience in family and work in the context of the ongoing democratization process in Chile. In a broader perspective, this research aims to reconstruct the principles of legitimacy and power in Chilean society. In this case, we have used exclusively the analysis of 32 semi-directed interviews with men and women between the ages of 35-55 years from middle and lower income urban groups in Santiago.<sup>4</sup>

The argument will be developed in five steps. We will start by discussing the expansion of the perception of interactive inequalities in Chile. Secondly, in the course of presenting the conceptual framework of this study, and based on previous work, we will argue that the sociological study of equality is important for an understanding of perceived inequalities. Thirdly, recent socio-historical processes in Chile and their consequences for the expansion of equality as a normative principle will be presented. Fourthly, we will discuss the effects of the encounter between this expansion and existing systemic logics operating in Chilean society for the specification of equality in social life and the perception of inequalities. Finally, some of the consequences of the analysis carried out will be highlighted.

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2 Research Project: "Noción de derechos en los sectores medios y de menores recursos" (2003-2007, supported by OXFAM).

3 Research Project: "Procesos de individuación y configuración de sujeto en la sociedad chilena actual" (2007-2010, in collaboration with Danilo Martuccelli, funded by FONDECYT, Project No. 1085006).

4 Research Project: "Autoridad y procesos de democratización social en Chile" (since 2011 and ongoing, funded by FONDECYT, Project No. 1110733).

## 2. The Perception of Inequalities: Inequalities in Social Interactions

Our studies show that in the case of Chile, inequality perceptions are strongly linked with a widely diffused denunciation of verticality and hierarchy and its abuses. This denunciation is based on the experiences of individuals in basic situations such as not being treated with courtesy, being treated as suspect of theft if one is poor and young and goes into a supermarket in a wealthy neighborhood or being called *huevones flojos* (good-for-nothings) by their superiors at work, for example. In words of a woman that recalls her experiences at her job:

It is a mistreatment that is with [...] it is a mistreatment that goes from an annoying way of addressing you with the tú-form (tuteo) [...] to telling you "(tú) go make photocopies"; and you realize that to the other person they say "(usted) go make photocopies" and to you "tú" (adult woman, lower-income group).

Certainly, experiences of interactive abuse are not homogeneous and are not equally distributed in every sphere of everyday life. Among the lowest-income groups, abuse threatens primarily their basic dignity, while in middle-income groups, although dignity is also an issue, what are mainly threatened are their social positions and opportunities. However, abuse is experienced directly, condemned and denounced strongly by all groups. In all cases, it is perceived as a matter of respect. At the hospital, a woman said, it seems as if they would be "wanting to humiliate you treating you as if they were saying "these little kids"" (own translation). At work, as a middle class male affirmed, as boss one is not well evaluated based on work "quality but on how nasty and tough you are" (own translation).

The central fact here is the acute awareness of abuse in social relationships. Acute awareness means the presence of a feeling of alert or even over-alertness in the relationships with others. Certainly, alertness is one basis for condemnation, but over-alertness is the basis for irritated or even abusive responses toward others (the assumption of being abused or of the other's willingness to abuse works as a premise that encourages and justifies one's own abusive act). Abuse is, therefore, an omnipresent social phantom.

The language of abuse has become a natural expression to name what is increasingly perceived as a product of morally intolerable social attitudes. As a young man says:

I feel that they take advantage of [their power]. I understand that the problem is there: that one has no way to defend oneself. They are like creepy-crawlies that can attack you and you have no decision (man, middle income group).

What underlies all these experiences is the conflict with power and verticality. In every egalitarian order, it is necessary to know how to deal with vertical relationships, as Erving Goffman (1974) has pointed out, but in Chile this has its own special features. Abuses and mistreatments are conceived there as being the result of the permanence of a hierarchical order and a notion of verticality based on the assumption of a natural superiority of those at the top of the social pyramid. This is seen as a result of a pattern of interaction historically produced and culturally reproduced. As one group participant put it:

[T]he stronger steps on the weakest, but that is not only the case between entrepreneurs and workers, it occurs in the relationship between the state and the citizen, the teacher that because has a little more power crushes the student [...]. That is an authoritarian attitude: always subduing somebody (man, middle income group).

At the same time, however, once the persistence of these patterns is perceived, they have lost legitimacy. The loss of legitimacy has two main effects. On one hand, as recent research results show, it contributes to the generalization of mistrust (Valenzuela et al. 2008), including that towards authority of any kind.<sup>5</sup> This effect means that every authority is no longer seen as a factor for the regulation of power exercise by means of legitimacy (Weber 1964) or as a plus that sanctions and pacifies submission to power (Renaut 2004). Authority is perceived as excessive; authority is authoritarian:

Chile is a very authoritarian country, very authoritarian. But [...] not to 100%, 70%, because [for the other 30%] is as if it had not much importance (woman, lower-income group).

The thirty percent referred to by the participant is not the rate of those who exercise authority in an authoritarian manner, but refers instead to those who “do not care a bit” about authority. In this way, widespread perceptions of routine authoritarianism go hand in hand with dismissal of authority.

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5 Research Project: “Autoridad y procesos de democratización social en Chile” (funded by FONDECYT, Project No. 1110733, see footnote 2).

All these complaints against abuses in daily interactions or mistreatments in face to face encounters are relevant components of inequality perceptions.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, they are interpreted as a vivid expression of inequality in society:

When you stop a microbus [public transportation], you can notice differences if you are a doctor, a professor, or a fireman [...] these are apparently strange things but they are parts of normality, get it? (Respondent)

These expanded particular narratives of inequality reveal the importance gained by what we have called interactive inequalities<sup>7</sup>: perceived inequalities that focus on the ways one is treated in ordinary everyday life interactions among individuals and between individuals and institutions.

Certainly, the perception of interactive inequality does not diminish the importance of perceptions of economic or juridical inequality, but it becomes a salient barometer from which other inequalities are interpreted, especially in lower-income groups.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, analytically, this concept goes beyond previous related approaches, including the existential inequalities of Göran Therborn,<sup>9</sup> or the theorization of recognition of Axel Honneth (1997), in three different aspects. Firstly, recognition was far from being a central element in the results obtained in the case studied. It appeared as one among other elements that constitute the grammar of “good” treatment desired in social interaction. This makes a difference from those that have worked on recognition as a problem of justice with a focus on identity or status respectively (Honneth 1997; Taylor 2003; Fraser 2006).

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6 In a study on inequalities, Manuel Antonio Garretón and Guillermo Cumsille (2002) found perceptions that young men of lower-income groups read inequality primarily as social injustice and power abuse. In this same study, 87% of the interviewees declared that the biggest inequalities were those related to people with power and people without power. Based upon these results, the authors propose to speak of citizenship or civic inequalities. However, this notion is not systematically developed. In any case, the reference to citizenship ceases to be restrictive because what this data reveals cannot be adequately encompassed by a concept restricted to rights and duties. Such a focus on the political dimension is incomplete without consideration of the social dimension.

7 Such an importance is visible, for example, in the way in which “abuse” has become placed on the political agenda and entered into public discourse in the 2013 presidential campaign.

8 It is possible to suppose that these results contribute to explain the fact that when perceptions of economic inequalities are analyzed, the magnitude of this perception among lower-income groups is less acute than in other income groups (Castillo 2009; Castillo, Miranda and Carrasco 2011). Based on our results, we could develop a hypothesis that this is an outcome of the importance of interactive inequalities in the hierarchy of perceived inequalities in these groups.

9 This author, taking in account some other works like those of Axel Honneth (1997) or Avishai Margalit (1999), defines this type of inequalities as an unequal acknowledgement of human beings as persons, which has an important effect in the distribution of freedom to continue activities and in the affirmation and negation of recognition and respect. This inequality can be recognized as such when a feeling arises of humiliation or not being recognized or of not being respected (Therborn 2006).

Secondly: inequalities identified in this study were not conceived of by respondents as being constituted or articulated by the legal or institutional spheres which are the focus of many inequalities concerning recognition. The type of inequalities in our case study allows us to focus on social interaction patterns. This is to say, they relate to sociability and civility and are not limited to legal and institutional treatment. This is the decisive difference with other approaches to complex inequalities.

Thirdly: there is an important reason for insisting on the notion of interactive inequalities and not to subsume it under a broader definition such as existential inequalities. This notion sheds light on and allows drawing the consequences of the special weight that sociability has in Latin American societies. This is an importance that has been underscored in Latin America from the so called “Ensayos del carácter” (Paz 1987) through to fundamental texts of social thought (Freyre 1933 or Holanda 1936) until more contemporary interpretations (Nugent 1992; Nino 2005; Lomnitz 1971, among others). For all of these scholars, as well as others, sociability has been highlighted as an essential element for understanding social integration in the region (Lechner 1987; Morandé 1984). It has also been conceived of as a privileged venue for resolving social power struggles, as shown, for example, by the famous debate between Roberto Da Matta (2002) and Guillermo O’Donnell (1984). In Latin America, due to the centrality of sociability, the domain of social interactions becomes the privileged field in which what Jacques Rancière (2007: 36) has called the “verification of equality” takes place. The notion of interactive inequalities and the process to which it refers, as we shall see, sheds light on one of the possible outcomes of a salient tension in the region diagnosed a long time ago: the dissonance between modernizing economic and cultural processes on the one hand and the permanence of the hierarchical and vertical character of social relations on the other.

But if the importance of underscoring interactive inequalities has to be understood in the context of a long term historical feature and a durable tension, these historical and cultural features by no means explain on their own the reasons why they have become a salient instrument to evaluate society and its outcomes in Chile. On the contrary, if verticality and hierarchy have for a long time permeated sociability in the region and Chile, we still need to answer the question of how a related set of social experiences became legitimate contents of the narrative of inequalities, or, to put it in other words, what might explain them becoming relevant elements through which social demands and evaluations of society are expressed.

My argument here is that this fact is related to the expansion and transformation of the contents of the notions of equality which are acting in social life. But before going

into this argument for the case of Chile, it is worth to briefly present the conceptual framework within which this problem is approached here.

### **3. Equality and the Perception of Inequalities: A Sociological Approach**

This work departs from the premise that social perceptions of inequalities should be understood with reference to equality principles acting in a society. To support this statement, it is worth recalling the fact that it would not be possible to conceive inequalities as we do nowadays – the kind of inequalities we are able to identify or the lack of legitimacy we claim – if equality would not have been installed as the basis for expectations in the so-called modern democratic societies (Therborn 2006).<sup>10</sup> In other words, inequality conceptions would not be possible if equality had not become an essential component of the idea of justice. Although this statement might sound almost self-evident in current academic discussion, this interrelation is usually not explicitly theoretically approached or, even less frequently, empirically studied in social sciences (Reis 2006; Turner 1986). Although there is a significant amount of research on inequalities, this is not the case for equality. While inequalities conceived as complex social phenomena have received extensive attention in social studies, the study of equality as an abstract normative construction has been relinquished to the discipline of philosophy.

Furthermore, when the interrelation between these two notions is evoked, most of the time this is accompanied by what might be called a “normativist” bias. The most important contributions to the equality debate come from the philosophical field, especially from the discussions about justice in their different traditions: liberal (Rawls 1999 or Dworkin 2000), communitarian (Walzer 1983) or critical theory (Honneth 1997). As a consequence, the philosophical notion of equality works as a premise for the understanding of inequalities in the social sciences. The analytical effect of the normativist bias is that in empirical social analysis, actual social experiences are contrasted with an abstract normative principle deprived of any context. This reliance on a normative construct obscures the otherwise observable role of social processes in the consolidation and specification of equality in a specific society. The paradox is that this obliteration has persevered in spite of broad historical evidence that shows that the principle of equality and its function is not only a drive for social transformations (Wagner 1997), but also is itself a product of complex historical and social processes (Rosanvallon 2011; Dumont 1983).

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<sup>10</sup> In the case of Europe, inequality as a main form of injustice had appeared only in the context of modernity in which human beings are conceived of from the idea of a common foundation and human equality (Therborn 2011).

In practice, the notion of equality has normally been discussed in association with political egalitarianism. In this perspective, it has been conceived as a modern normative principle linked to the development of the national state and the ideas of democracy and citizenship. This modern ideal of equality itself became established as a normative principle precisely in this historical context and due to social processes incarnated in political struggles (Rosanvallon 2011: 27-106). The implication is that it functions both as an orientation to establish the goals of a society as well as a measure of its performances. Equality has no need of moral justification as long as it is constituted as a normative principle of our times, although it is also worth recalling that it is one ideal among others (Wollheim and Berlin 1956). Equality serves to provide criteria for the evaluation of the paths a society takes, and ideally propels the creation of institutions that safeguard the consonance between society and the normative principle and its orientations (Turner 1986).

But even if this normative principle derives from the political sphere, equality should not be dissociated from social processes. The importance of society for equality can be found, for example, in Alexis de Tocqueville's intuitions and statements from 1835 about the future of equality in the United States which the author predicted to be much more influenced by the increasing basic orientation of individuals (and masses) affected by the "passion" for equality than from any political will (Tocqueville 1961). To recall the former underscores the existence of a certain level of autonomy (as well as distinctive logics) between the function of equality in political order and the function of equality in the regulation of relationships and interactions in social life, that is to say, in the specification of the features of the social bond in a society.<sup>11</sup>

In this last dimension, its contents as well as its effects have substantial variations depending on each context. These variations can be identified in the particular forms that individuals' perceptions and evaluations of social reality take (for example whether a situation is perceived or not perceived as unequal) or in the regime of permission and prohibition that frames institutional actions. The former allows for an understanding that in some societies, the conspicuous display of the exterior signs of wealth might be generally rejected, whereas in other societies this display might not only be well-tolerated but furthermore even stimulated. At the same time, the society which disdains displays of wealth might nevertheless have highly hierarchical integration modalities for migrant groups, where the ostensibly more wealth-oriented society might demonstrate

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<sup>11</sup> The social bond here is understood as the modalities in which links and attachments between members in a society are defined or produced. These modalities contribute to shape societies and therefore social life as well as to preserve them. Obviously, this does not necessarily imply universal inclusion or the respect for the "common good" of all subjects of a community. The social bond is at the same time a tool for maintaining social cohesion and a veil of "social antagonism" (Laclau and Mouffe 1987).

more egalitarian reception processes for migrant groups. Therefore, to address the sociological study of equality it is worth starting by recognizing the analytical distinction between political domain and social bond. But to this first distinction we should still add a second one: the difference between normative principle and social ideal.

Equality is simultaneously a normative principle and a social ideal. A social ideal is a representation offered to individuals of what is valuable and desirable in a society. In this sense, a social ideal presupposes an attributive definition of the way the social world and people in it should be. The ideal is the imaginary face of the symbolic dimension incarnated by the normative principle. Thus, equality as a social ideal fills with representational contents the signifier equality that acts as principle. These representational contents are not fixed but, on the contrary, undergo transformations. In other words, these transformations should not be understood only in a historical long term perspective. As the results of an empirical study on the notion of rights have shown (Araujo 2009c), they are also produced by social experiences in everyday life specific to a society and even to the social position occupied in it.

Although the two faces of equality (as an ideal and normative principle) can hardly be thought one without the other, they still must not be confused. Not every social ideal is a normative principle. There are many social ideals that do not become true normative ideals and even less are those that become normative principles in a society. For example, if rights have become a true normative ideal (Habermas 1998), this is not the case for the ideals of leisure or a luxurious life. But on the contrary it is impossible to conceive of normative principles that are not supported by the function of the ideal. This, in the first place, because modern history shows, as we have already discussed, that they emerge from the political mobilization of some ideals. On the other hand, because, as Max Weber recalled in his discussion of *Herrschaft* (1964 [1922]), it is indispensable that these principles rely on the belief – the cognitive-affective adhesion – of the individuals due to the fact that this belief is the basis of its legitimacy. Normative principles require individuals' attachment in order to act as such. The ideal, as psychoanalysis has pointed out, is a vector for this non-rational affective adhesion.

It is from this conceptual perspective (the importance of socio-historical processes to define the contents of equality, the role of equality in social life as practiced, and its double-sided function as ideal and normative principle) that the relationship between perceived inequalities and the specification of equality in Chile will be approached.

## 4. The Expansion of Egalitarian Principles and Local Socio-historical Processes

In recent decades in Chile, as in many other Latin American countries, equality has undergone a new wave of expansion. This does not mean of course that equality as a principle or as an ideal had not been present before in the region. Indeed, as social movements at the beginning of the 20th century demonstrate, the expansion of these ideals is a long-standing process (Salazar and Pinto 1999). But this expansion has acquired new features in the last three to four decades in the context of the democratization processes that took place in the region (Dagnino, Olvera and Panfichi 2006; Méndez, O'Donnell and Pinheiro 2002; PNUD 2004, among others). As José Maurício Domingues (2009) has pointed out, even though in Latin America, the horizon opened by the modern idea of egalitarian liberty has been present for almost at the same amount of time as in United States and Europe, we are allowed to speak of a third phase of modernity evolving in the last period. In this phase, citizenship strengthens through political mobilization and the system of rights acquires a new place in the social imaginary as well as increases its institutionalization.

According to a recent study (Araujo and Martuccelli 2012), in the case of Chile, individuals now recognize two salient features of the historical change experienced in recent decades: on the one hand, the implementation of the neoliberal economic model; on the other hand, a renewed democratic horizon, which is not only understood in political and institutional terms, but overall linked to new demands concerning the social bond. The first change has demanded that they reformulate their condition as economic subjects and workers and has confronted them with an increasing number of social spheres becoming regulated by market logic. The second one has propelled a reconfiguration of the meanings of democracy and a particular understanding of democratization processes.

With respect to the former: Chilean society has been since 1973 a dramatic location for the unfolding of one of the most fundamental conflicts in modern societies, that is, following Karl Polanyi's characterization (1944), the conflict between the logic of the market and the logic of protection. As a result of the 1973 *coupe d'état*, Chilean society underwent an experiment that made the country first the laboratory and then the model of the so-called neoliberal order, moving from a state-based to a market-based model. This transition implied privatizations, economic liberalization, deregulation, state subsidiarity, openness to international competition and labor flexibility, among other changes. However, the implementation of the model was not linear. The model went through important corrections. After the 1984 crisis and the strong GDP descent

in 1982 (Hunneus 2000), the state regained more of a presence (Collier and Sater 1999), and entrepreneurs became relevant social actors (Montero 1997). To this first inflection point, a second was added in 1990 with the return to political democracy. As a consequence of this turn, a novel set of social policies were incorporated and, even though limited, some regulatory reform efforts. For many analysts this is the moment in which the “Chilean miracle” was consolidated.

In any case, the model provoked a new design of the frontiers between market and state. The relationships between social groups suffered a deep transformation. The national economy was re-oriented to export. It was strategically opened to international trade and later to capital markets. The labor market was regulated from a new basis of increasing flexibility, the expansion of the philosophy of competence, and the enfeeblement of collective negotiations in favor of a growing individualization of the employers-employee relationships (Ramos 2009; Soto 2008; Todaro and Yañez 2004). Social protection principles were transformed, and furthermore, citizen’s access to public services was restricted due to the expanded privatization of education, social security and health. Consumption became a structural component of society and of the definition of status (Moulian 1998). Credit also took on a fundamental role in structuring social relations and personal life. Hence, Chilean capitalism transformation entailed more than a simple “reduction” of the state. It implied the advent of a complex new matrix with tremendous social consequences. As it has been discussed, what this process produced is a new modality of social relations (Hutton 2003; Lordon 2003; Berger 2006).

As a consequence of these transformations, new imaginaries and values were installed: the image of a competitive and thoroughly mobile society, the valorization of personal ambition, the confidence in individual effort, the importance of the drive to succeed, a society characterized by the promise of integration through consumption and credit as the structural basis of this promise. As our results show,<sup>12</sup> through changes propelled by the economic model, individuals are required to incarnate “hyper-actors”. But, at the same time, a *sui generis* new egalitarian promise expands by means of the philosophy of competence, meritocratic promises, and the active introduction to consume and borrow. The market in Chile, of course under different conditions as those discussed for the European 17<sup>th</sup>-18<sup>th</sup> centuries, becomes an outstanding factor in the contemporary expansion of the notion of equality anchored on the individual, an equality that must be more precisely characterized as equality of opportunity in its two versions: probabilistic (due to the action of chance) and possibilistic (due to the action of merit) (Rosanvallon

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12 See Kathya Araujo and Danilo Martuccelli (2012 [Vol. 2 ]: 244-249).

2011: 315). The rapid emergence of this new egalitarian promise had unavoidable (if unintentional) consequences for the new configuration of the social bond.

Let us turn now to the democratization factor. The collapse of democracy at the beginning of the 1970s and the installation of a new socio-political matrix, as well as the return to democracy in the 1990s, actively contributed to the reconfiguration of the democratic horizon. “Democracy” gradually became the goal and hope of a significant part of the population that was clearly expressed in the struggles for the return to democratic political regimes (Vicuña et al. 2001). The concept of democracy was loaded with legitimacy and urgency. With the return to democracy with the government of the coalition *Concertación por la Democracia*, “democracy” becomes a task that turned out to be, however, only partly finished, as has been discussed. The first limit was that this goal was principally understood in institutional terms (Tolosa and Lahera 1998): modernization, political system transformation, and reconfiguration of the relationships between state and citizens. The second fact that has been underscored is that even by these objectives the scope of achievements has been limited, especially in the case of the last one. In this case, as different authors have discussed, no sustainable and effective participation processes were implemented (De la Maza 2002), on the contrary, strategies to narrow public space were generated, and political dialogue became increasingly limited to closed groups of elite members (Garretón 2000; Garretón and Garretón 2010; Jocelyn-Holt 1999). Nevertheless, due to the international context and national political and historical factors, a discourse promoting the values of citizenship and the offer of equality of rights (privileging the notion of equity and equality of opportunity)<sup>13</sup> was strongly mobilized by the state.

Hence, equality was normatively presented as a prior value for society and was politically mobilized by the state (although barely integrated in the reformulation of the relationship between state and society, as we have already pointed out) and by the institutional political system (gradually also by conservative sectors, specifically in its version of equality of opportunity). All this evolved in a context of high receptivity to the pre-packaged agendas of international organizations, especially that of the United Nations (UN) system, but also of others such as the World Bank and Inter-American Development Bank. International organizations were conceived as “guarantors” of democratization, sources both of international legitimization and of material resources which were available conditional on the implementation of their agendas (Araujo 2009b; Guzmán 2002).

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13 For an early discussion of the tension between equality and equity and the use of the latter by the state, see Manuel Antonio Garretón (1999).

But if in Chile, as with many other countries in the region, equality was strongly connected with democracy (CEPAL 2010), the institutional political dimension alone is not adequate to understand this process. The modalities that equality acquires in this democratization context must also be explained, especially outside the political system.

Furthermore, the expansion of equality as a social ideal requires an approach that departs from social and cultural factors by themselves.<sup>14</sup> We will mention here only two of these factors. In the first place, equality has been propelled in Chile by social movements. These are defined by the outstanding role they played in the struggle against the dictatorship and the return of democracy and the transnational character of their agendas and arguments (Garretón 2000). They are an important factor because they have, on the one hand, contributed to increase the number of spheres to which equality as normative measure should be applied. In this sense, they have overcome the restrictive association between equality and the socio-economic dimension and integrated other domains like, for example, recognition. On the other hand, its importance relies on their contribution to renew the struggle for citizenship, which, as is well known, has been the struggle for equality since the beginning of modernity. The second factor we would like to mention is the increase in educational attainment. This is of equal importance. Indeed, education, as has been discussed, has been and still is a fundamental component of the promises of equality in Chile, which can be well observed in the expanded aspiration to obtain a post-secondary education (Espinoza 2012).

In summary, transformations in the economy, politics and socio-cultural spheres have combined to build a new basis for the expansion of equality as a social ideal.

## **5. The Specification of Equality in Present-day Chile**

Our studies identified the effects of the expansion of egalitarian principles and ideals. One study on the modalities in which the notion of rights was mobilized by individuals to understand their world, orient their acts and legitimize their actions in everyday life showed that equality in Chile is a social ideal inscribed in individual egoistic ideals. For individuals, this notion is a relevant tool for the evaluation of justice in society (Araujo 2009a). It is worth underscoring that what these results highlight is that nowadays equality in Chile is not only a normative principle available for some collective actors or an “enlightened avant-garde”. It is a constant and active reference for the evaluations

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<sup>14</sup> The study of the mechanisms and process of socio-cultural expansion of equality as an ideal and normative principle is an issue that still requires more empirical studies in the case of Chile.

and judgments ordinary individuals make about the everyday life experiences they have in their society.

But the study in question showed at the same time that the effect of the ideal can only be captured in its articulation with social experiences. Ideals are intertwined with what individuals “know” (not necessarily a conscious knowledge) about the logics acting in a society. Ideals and this knowledge about social life, distilled from an individual’s social experiences, constantly exert a reciprocal action. This means, ultimately, that social experiences influence the scope of action of ideals. This is to say, they affect the magnitude of the effects of ideals on social actions or judgments. But it also means that social experiences contribute in turn to define the specific contents of ideals. In this regard, our results showed that in Chile, social experiences permanently call into question the scope of action of equality. Certainly, this tension between principle of equality and inequalities is not specific to Chile. It is a constitutive element of modern capitalist societies (Turner 1986), and, furthermore, it might convincingly be argued that of every society. Nevertheless, this tension does not have the same features in every society nor the same consequences as other studies on equality would suggest.

If, as Pierre Rosanvallon has noted (2011), the fundamental fact concerning this tension in European societies – like in French society today – is the gap between a strong rejection of economic and social inequalities and a tacit acceptance of the mechanisms that produce it, and therefore a limited willingness to any corrective action, this is not the most salient feature of this tension in a Latin-American society such as that of Chile. The tension between the equality principle and inequalities in Chile sheds light, as we shall see, on the contradiction between a society that presents itself as modern and egalitarian, and even proposes and sustains institutional mechanisms oriented to equality, but in which, at the same time, remains preserved the experience of a deeply vertical and hierarchical social bond. Furthermore, it is important to underscore that it is precisely at the latter level (the social bond) that individuals imbued with the promises of equality seek, generally without success, confirmation of these promises in practice.

Individuals in Chile identify the action of four systemic logics that regulate social relations as the basis of these experiences of denial of equality.

(1) The logic of “naturalized hierarchies” (Bengoa 2006; ICSO 2010), which supposes the preserved importance of ascriptive traits and of a strongly vertical relational architecture.

- (2) The logic of privileges, which is particularly related to class factors. This logic is identified in experiences that deny meritocracy (Navia and Engel 2006), in the constant necessity to level opportunities by means of resources as the *pituto* (informal mobilization of influences) (Barozet 2006) or in the fact that family names and family networks are central to define opportunities (Núñez and Gutiérrez 2004).
- (3) The logic of confrontation of powers, due to which social space is perceived as a contentious field in which abuse is a constant experience due to the deregulation of social relationships. This logic is expressed by a constant albeit cautious display of signs of power, by expanded and spontaneous appraisal games and by strategies of social calculating and avoidance that rule relationships (Araujo 2009a).
- (4) The logic of authoritarianism and the dismissal of authority. Authoritarianism is another, extended key to interpretation and also of action. Authority may be conflated with authoritarianism – in this context, norms are perceived as an imposition to be passively obeyed, not actively consented to.

Privilege legitimizes differences based on hierarchies which are considered to be natural, but which, from a sociological and historical perspective, are opposed to equality (Dumont 1983). The deregulated use of power interferes in the development of mutual trust which is essential to social coordination. It also propels ways of exercising power that hinder hierarchies (authority) and blocks the establishment a common space between individuals beyond their particularities. In the words of one of our interviewees:

This society is still too segmented. Although it is a more open society than before, it is still very hierarchical, quite impermeable, in general, there is little social mobility, that is to say, people identify you by your face, by the color of your hair, identify you by the clothes you wear, so it is very likely to typify, to pigeonhole [...] too much prejudice (man, middle-income group).

It is worth underscoring that all these systemic logics are prevalent in social experiences in everyday life, experiences in public transportation, in the conduct of politics, and in interactions in public health services or public schools. Taken together, all these experiences call into question the principle of equality in a continuous and embodied manner.

What is the outcome of this encounter between the expansion of equality (and its increasing inscription in individuals) and systemic logics that embody the full force of

a hierarchical and vertical structure of society (Bengoa 2006; Larraín 2001; Salazar and Pinto 1999)? As a recent study shows (Araujo and Martuccelli 2012), the outcome of this encounter is a particular translation of egalitarian principles in social life: the emergence of pressing expectations of horizontality which, as we shall see, on their turn, impact directly upon the forms of perception of inequalities.

It is evident that the expansion of equality principles is a long term process. Indeed, the first version of equality which became embodied in our societies is a persistent force with a long history. This first embodiment occurred by means of its translation to guiding juridical or political principles associated to demands for political inclusion which informed the horizon of social movements.<sup>15</sup> But our results show that there is now a second way in which equality appears in a novel form in Chile. Equality appears today as a generalized demand for horizontality in the social bond. By this is not meant, of course, that persons have the expectation of living in a completely horizontal world. It means that individuals demand horizontal treatment in asymmetrical as well as in symmetrical relationships. Horizontality in face to face exchanges becomes a central exigency. Horizontality is an interactive yearning. It is expressed in the search for a more horizontal sociability. This implies not only the demand for handling asymmetries from a horizontal fundament, but also for the disappearance of the tendency in all parts of society towards “vertical unsymmetrization” (Güell 2012: 223, own translation) of relationships by means of privileges or the use of power resources. This is a demand people have for institutions as well as for other individuals.

Horizontality in face to face interactions becomes a central issue. Equality operating in social life is traduced as an expectation for horizontality in many different social relations. Equality is, therefore, linked to new and less vertical forms of sociability. Equality, traduced as expectations of horizontality, has achieved a normative horizon at the social bond level, more precisely in the interactive domain of the social bond. This contributes towards an explanation of why interactive experiences constitute a privileged source of signs of injustice in society. This is a revolution of expectations that concern the common social world because it entails the transformation of the social bond. But it also touches on the most intimate aspects of an individual because it concerns the definition of personal dignity and is at the moment a privileged sign of respect. From here derives the exigency of a generalized modification of statutory treatment of all individuals. The accomplishment of these expectations intervenes in a decisive manner in informing judgments about institutions or persons.

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<sup>15</sup> For the case of Chile, see Mario Garcés (2004).

It is in this regard that horizontality in action in Chilean society is expressed through the outbreak of a new sensibility which is to be related with the accurate perceptions of inequalities displayed in social interactions as we have described above.

## **6. Conclusion: The Social Bond, and the Sociology of Inequality**

Inequalities in social interactions are a major element of perceived inequalities in Chile. This might be understood, at least partially, as the outcome of a new wave of expansion of equality as normative principle and the contents which the equality ideal acquires due to the simultaneous action of structural economic, cultural and political changes, the permanence of old vertical and hierarchical logics in social relations, and the relevance of sociability as a key domain in social life. As result of this process a new horizon of expectations is formed.

As we have seen, in Chile equality appears as a very relevant element for thinking about and evaluating society and one's place in it. But, furthermore, equality is applied to a new domain. The functioning of equality in a society can be measured by calculating the degree to which the normative principle has permeated the distribution of resources (Ottone and Vergara 2007) or how individuals are conceived of before the law in comparison to others (Méndez, O'Donnell and Pinheiro 2002). Chile is no exception. But, as our studies have shown, the functioning of equality is nowadays also measured by the magnitude to which it has accomplished permeating the pattern of social interactions.

However, our results not only reveal that equality is associated with a new social domain. They also show that there is a new way of defining the measures of its accomplishment in society. We are all equal as long as we receive the same treatment in everyday life interactions regardless of social position, signs of distinction or access to sources of social power: the treatment I receive from others, the quality of the exercise of authority, the requirements for recognition, the degree of kindness or disregard. Thus, the particular index for the measurement of equality in the social bond is horizontality in social relationships.

Finally, two major consequences of this work are worth underscoring.

Firstly, in a theoretical-methodological perspective: the study of inequalities is inseparable from the study of the notion of how equality acts in a society. As we have intended to argue, equality is not an immutable notion as its normative character has tended to be understood. The notions of how equality acts in social life are ideals

and therefore have specific contents in each historical moment, certainly, but also in each society. Although equality as a normative principle has managed to migrate and simultaneously be present in different societies, its contents and scope are not precisely the same in each case. This means that understanding inequalities (but also the possibility of overcoming them) requires us to take into account the sociological study of equality.

Secondly, there are political consequences. What derives from the processes analyzed is that sociability and civility become salient barometers of injustice.<sup>16</sup> Equality in the social bond, and the expectations of horizontality that are consubstantial to it, constitute a new domain of citizen's demands. Demands for equality in this sense are not so much evocated with respect to abstract juridical and political norms; such demands are also not exclusively measured in economic terms. Demands for equality in the context used here are fundamentally embedded in concrete experiences of social interactions. This is to say, we face a notion of equality that, although certainly related to juridical/political and economic equality, transcends both. This notion of equality goes beyond what has been produced by political and institutional discourses. We have to deal with a kind of "equality" that cannot be separated from the interactive dimension of the social bond. As a consequence, interpersonal social demands as well as political demands gain a new character, and a new rhetoric enters the public space. Equality in the social bond is, at present, a burning issue for democracy in Chile, and as recent phenomena let us believe, in the region as well. This novelty entails, with no doubt, a whole set of renewed challenges to society as well as to institutional politics, but, seizing them is also an ineludible and urgent task for sociology and social sciences today.

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16 An additional argument is given by the observation of actual political phenomena in Chile, for example: the rhetoric of new social demands; the modalities of construction of social leaderships, or the effort of the institutional political system to make use of a language sensible to interactive inequalities in their electoral strategies.

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