

Towards a cultural sociology of transnational and global inequalities

International Workshop

8-9 May 2025

Otto-Friedrich-Universität Bamberg

Organizers: Daniel Drewski & Thorsten Peetz

Workshop summary

The analysis of social inequalities is a core research field of sociology. Not least due to processes of globalization and regional integration, however, scholars have raised the question of whether the nation state should continue to be the exclusive frame of reference for studying social inequalities, as people may be positioned within transnational or global relations. Yet, sociological analyses of social inequalities at transnational and global levels remain incipient and scattered across different research fields. Against this background, the aim of this workshop was to bring together international sociologists from diverse theoretical and methodological backgrounds to contribute to the development of a research agenda on studying transnational and global inequalities. In particular, we sought to advance this agenda by leveraging recent conceptual innovations from cultural sociology, which have emphasized the importance of cultural practices such as classifications, evaluations, and symbolic boundaries for social inequality.

The workshop contributions highlighted the importance of cultural practices for the (re)production of transnational and global inequalities in many ways. The workshop was divided into six panels, while the presentations can be grouped into four thematic streams described below. One of the highlights of the workshop was a keynote presentation by Michèle Lamont (*Harvard University*), who presented her latest book "Seeing others" and ongoing collaborative research on seeking recognition across the world. The keynote was organized in cooperation with the Bamberg Graduate School of Social Sciences (BAGSS) and the Institute of Sociology at the University of Bamberg.

The first thematic stream dealt with global inequalities in international migration and mobility. It highlighted the continuing importance of categorizations related to the nation state. Adrian Favell's (*University College Cork*) contribution described the changing categorizations embedded in migration and visa policy that regulate access to nation states. Emanuel Deutschmann (*University of Flensburg*) then demonstrated how nationality determines globally unequal access to visas. Yossi Harpaz (*Tel Aviv University*) analyzed the status-

generating effects of citizenship, which become particularly evident in international border controls. Finally, Helena Hof's (*University of Zürich*) presentation focused on the experiences of European migrants within restrictive migration regimes in Asia.

A second thematic stream examined the phenomenon of the emergence of global economic elites in connection with rising income and wealth inequalities worldwide. While Nora Waitkus' (*Heidelberg University*) and Christian Schneickert's (*University of Magdeburg*) presentation dealt with the question of how to define economic elites, Bruno Cousin (*Sciences Po Paris*) and Sébastien Chauvin (*University of Lausanne*) showed in their respective presentations how the "super-rich" present themselves to the outside world and distinguish themselves from others through exclusive consumption practices and lifestyles. Sören Carlson (*University of Flensburg*) focused on tech professionals and asked to what extent they constitute a transnational elite by drawing symbolic boundaries. Finally, Kristin Surak's (*London School of Economics*) presentation bridged between this and the previous thematic stream: She showed how economic elites acquire international mobility rights by purchasing citizenship, thereby detaching themselves from their country of birth.

A third thematic stream was focused on the transnational and global diffusion of valuation patterns and their effects on social inequalities. Bettina Mahlert (*University of Innsbruck*) presented the shifting valuations of poverty and development in the context of international development policy, while Till Hilmar (*University of Vienna*) highlighted the effects of meritocratic discourses on biographical dynamics after the fall of communism in Central Eastern Europe. Thorsten Peetz (*University of Bamberg*) addressed the global diffusion of intimate valuation categories via Tinder. Finally, Michèle Lamont's keynote speech, addressing global struggles for symbolic recognition in response to neoliberal scripts of the self, also falls within this thematic stream.

Finally, several presentations addressed theoretical foundations and methodological questions regarding research on transnational and global inequalities. Anja Weiß (*University of Duisburg-Essen*) emphasized the importance of socio-spatial autonomy for social actors' position within the global inequality structure and how this autonomy is restricted by borders and boundaries. Julian Hamann (*Humboldt University Berlin*) highlighted the important role of cultural processes for the socio-spatial scaling of inequalities. Roberto Dutra Torres (*State University of Northern Rio de Janeiro*) examined the relationship between functional differentiation and categorical inequalities in the (re)production of global inequalities from a systems theory perspective. Finally, Emanuel Deutschmann's and Thorsten Peetz' presentations also included methodological insights from a quantitative and qualitative perspective on the potential of using digital data.

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Workshop program

Thursday, 8th May

10:30–11:00 **Welcome and introduction**

11:00–12:30 **Citizenship, borders and unequal mobility**

Anja Weiß (Universität Duisburg-Essen)

Inequalities of access: borders, boundaries, institutionalized (dis-)connections

Yossi Harpaz (Tel Aviv University) - online

The passport as an international status symbol

12:30–14:00 **Lunch**

14:00–15:30 **Global elite mobility and transnational class-making**

Kristin Surak (London School of Economics)

Who's in the Fastlane? Elite Mobility and Immobility in the Global Market for Golden Visas and Golden Passports

Sören Carlson (Universität Flensburg)

Transnational class-making? Symbolic boundaries among Dublin's tech professionals

Helena Hof (Universität Zürich)

The transnationally mobile in restrictive Asian migration regimes: Interrogating the inequalities and classed implications of skill construction

15:30–16:00 **Coffee break**

16:00–17:00 **Categorizations and the (re-)production of global inequalities**

Adrian Favell (University College Cork)

The Orders and Borders of Global Inequality: Rethinking Migration and Mobilities in the Era of Neoliberalism and Beyond

Roberto Dutra Torres (Universidade Estadual do Norte Fluminense)

The construction of global and transnational inequality categories in organizations and functional systems: a proposal for dialogue between systems theory and the theory of durable inequalities

17:00–18:00 **Coffee break**

18:00–19:30 **Keynote lecture**

In cooperation with the Bamberg Graduate School of Social Sciences

Michèle Lamont (Harvard University)

Global dignity and "seeing others": Political, environmental and work-based recognition compared

20:30 **Dinner**

Restaurant "Kleehof", Untere Königstraße 6

Friday, 9th May

9:30–11:00 Economic elites and their cultural practices in a global perspective

Nora Waitkus (Universität Heidelberg and London School of Economics) and Christian Schneickert (Universität Magdeburg)

What are economic elites? Methodological and global perspectives

Bruno Cousin (Sciences Po Paris) – online

Ironically Wealthy: Ostentation, Reflexivity, and Self-Parody among the Rich Kids of Instagram

Sébastien Chauvin (University of Lausanne)

Coaching the Global Super-Bourgeoisie: Physical Lifestyle Intermediaries and the Management of Elite Social Capital

11:00–11:30 Coffee break

11:30–13:00 Practices of d/evaluation in global and transnational contexts

Julian Hamann (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin)

Transnational Social Inequalities – Perspectives from Field Theory and Studies of Valuation and Evaluation

Bettina Mahler (Universität Innsbruck)

Evaluation and the construction of inequalities in the development field: Some trends and possible research agendas

Till Hilmar (Universität Wien)

Economic devaluation and moral economies in Central Eastern Europe after 1989

13:00–14:00 Lunch

14:00–15:00 Methods for studying transnational and global inequalities

Emanuel Deutschmann (Universität Flensburg)

Using digital trace data and computational methods to explore global inequalities in transnational mobility and its accessibility

Thorsten Peetz (Universität Bamberg)

Global qualitative analysis: Analyzing global inequalities through self-documenting interactions

15:00–15:30 Wrap-up and outlook