

Globalization and Inequality

Location: ZZF Potsdam, Am Neuen Markt 1, 14467 Potsdam

Thursday, May 11 – Friday, May 12, 2023

Convened by Sebastian Conrad and Michael Goebel

Our meeting addresses the historical relationship between globalization and inequality. It thus engages a present-day public discussion as well as a growing body of scholarship, which however has for the most part been dominated by social scientists from disciplines other than history. Ever since the publication of Thomas Piketty's landmark *Capital* (2013), sharp disagreements have arisen over whether globalization has exacerbated existing inequalities or instead flattened them, with Piketty recently offering what many viewed as a surprisingly optimistic account (Piketty 2021). The focus has often been on the relationship of within-country and between-countries inequality, while the very term "inequality" has frequently tended to circumscribe discussion to quantifiable monetary matters, with a strong concentration on Western Europe and North America in the twentieth century. By contrast, our meeting intends to add greater historical depth to this discussion, include examples from world regions beyond Western Europe and the U.S., and extend our purview beyond the strictly economic dimension, so as to include, for instance, ethnicity, race, and gender. In order to structure our meeting, we propose a division into three main pillars/panels, of which each retains a focus on globalization.

Producing Inequalities

This panel deals with how, but also whether, various aspects of the world's increasing connectedness fed the making of inequalities. It thus asks about the production or rearrangement of social hierarchies as outgrowths of trade, migration, the globalization and simultaneous concentration of financial governance, or the spatial bundling of capitalist expansion.

Competing Inequalities

This panel concerns the interrelationship between various kinds of inequalities, as well as the discourses about them. The most obvious example is the interplay, or lack thereof, between within-country and between-countries inequality. But questions of intersectionality will matter too: for instance, how do widening gender hierarchies intersect with income inequality, or with the socioeconomic role of what used to be called middleman minorities in colonial and semicolonial settings?

Contesting Inequalities

Growing inequality has been accompanied, and challenged, by various forms of protest and resistance. In this panel, we are particularly interested in forms of activism that have moved beyond traditional protest movements, and beyond national borders. Some activists have specifically addressed global causes of inequality, and have formed transnational coalitions in their efforts to curb disparity in income and life chances. In addition, discussion about global justice and redress of past inequities (related to colonialism, genocide, forced labor, forced prostitution etc.) have gained traction.

Program

Thursday, May 11, 2023

2 pm

Sebastian Conrad and Michael Goebel (FU Berlin): Introduction

Nina Verheyen (Freie Universität Berlin): “Modern Merit: Globalization, Inequality, and the Glorification of Personal Achievement in Nineteenth-Century Europe”

Bronwen Everill (University of Cambridge): “Sovereignty and Self-Sufficiency: Challenging Global Inequality in Revolutionary West Africa, 1760–1848”

Jens Beckert (Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies, Cologne): “From Promissory Legitimacy to Social Anomie: Neoliberalism and Social Inequality”

4:30 pm Coffee break

5 pm Keynote Lecture

Catherine Lu (McGill University, Montreal): “Inequality, Justice, and Reconciliation in World Politics”

7:00 Conference dinner

Friday, May 12, 2023

9 am

Teresa Koloma Beck (Helmut Schmidt-University, Hamburg) and Klaus Schlichte (University of Bremen): “The Global Social Question: On the Heuristic Value of a Historical Analogy”

Manuela Boatcă (University of Freiburg): “Global Inequalities: Theoretical Filiations and Radical Critique”

10:45 am Coffee break

11:15 am

Text Discussion: Thomas Piketty, *A Brief History of Equality*, Cambridge, MA (Harvard University Press) 2022.

1 pm Lunch Break

2 pm

Pim de Zwart (Wageningen University): “Unfair Trade? Globalization, Institutions, and Inequality in Colonial Southeast Asia”

Michael Goebel (Freie Universität Berlin): “The Missing Heirs: Race and Real Estate in Nineteenth-Century Buenos Aires”

Alexander Nützenadel (Humboldt Universität Berlin): “Leveling up! The Marshall Plan and the Debate on International Economic Inequality”

4:30 pm: End of Conference

4:30 -5:30 pm: Internal Meeting