

Socio-spatial scales as social boundaries? Or: How do migration studies profit from including 'space' in the sociology of social boundaries

ANNA
AMELINA*

Abstract

Starting from the critique of methodological nationalism the article questions the conventional limitation of migration studies on social inequalities imposed by the nation state context. First, it highlights the conceptual shortcomings of assimilation approaches which mainly analyse hierarchies of social positions within the settings of the immigration countries. Second, it reviews migration research which addresses inequality patterns at the global and the transnational scale. It analyses both bodies of literature which have in common their inability to explicitly address the interaction between particular socio-spatial scales. This is the reason for the necessity to include the scale approach in migration studies. Moreover, to adopt the scale theory into inequality research, spatial scales, such as the global and local, the national and transnational must be re-conceptualized in terms of the social boundaries approach. In sum, the article exemplifies how migration studies on social hierarchies profit from understanding 'space' as a distinct set of categorical distinctions powerful in social practice.

Keywords: methodological nationalism, scale approach, categorical distinctions, social boundaries, social inequalities.

Introduction: Immigration state as the taken-for-granted framework to analyse social inequalities in migration studies

In social sciences dominant discourses on migration mainly address the subject of migrants' social mobility within the receiving context. They particularly focus on the complex interrelation between the ethnic and class divisions that encourage the economic and political inequality in the country of destination (Alba and Nee, 2003, Portes and Rumbaut, 2006).

Intentionally caricaturising this, one could argue that 'migration studies have to analyse the formation of social inequalities exclusively within the framework of an immigration state.' Hence, this notion is implicitly included in the conceptual arguments of many migration studies that focus on the genesis of social inequalities. The conventional research interests of these scholars are conditions which influence migrants' access to education, welfare or the labour market as well as their social mobility in the country of destination.

The article presented is sceptical to this unquestioned commitment, not only because it equates the nation state with the social unit of society, but also because it overlooks the impacts of transnational and global relationships on the formation of social inequalities in the migration process (Weiß, 2005). To

* Dr Anna Amelina, Faculty of Sociology, Bielefeld University, Germany.
E-mail: anna.amelina@uni-bielefeld.de.



be more precise, recent studies on transnational inequalities point to the simultaneity and multiplicity of migrants (status) in transnational settings (Ameilina, 2011, Nieswand, 2011). Moreover, they call for new conceptual tools to better understand the processes and patterns of inequality beyond the framework of national societies.

Seeking to overcome this methodological nationalism (Beck 2007, Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2003) in migration studies on social inequalities, the article centres on the question of how to analyse the formation of social inequalities without pre-defining the immigration state as a singular research framework. To respond to this question the article links two prominent approaches: the socio-geographical scale approach (Brenner, 2004, Glick Schiller and Çağlar, 2009) and the sociology of social boundaries (Lamont and Molnar, 2002).

The social inequality analysis provides the approach to overcome the modified exclusivity of the nation state by considering the multiplicity of the socio-spatial scales such as the national, the local, the global and, to add one more, the transnational. This argument builds on the elements of scale theory (Brenner, 2004, Jonas, 2006) that defines space as socially produced and analyses the multiplicity of socio-spatial scales as being historically specific and changeable. Nevertheless, I would argue that in order to be adopted in migration studies on social inequalities this approach needs to be re-conceptualised in terms of the sociology of social boundaries. However, there is a missing link between the debate on methodological nationalism in studies on migration and cross-border relations and the debate on social boundaries in studies of social inequalities. Whilst the first position suggests analysing international migration and mobilities beyond the framework of the nation state, the second one makes it difficult to reduce social inequalities to class-related inequalities. Highlighting the meaning of symbolic and cultural distinctions it considers the relevance of 'ethnicity'/'race', 'gender', 'age' and 'body' to the formation of social hierarchies (Anthias, 2001, Bourdieu, 1984, Lamont and Molnar, 2002). No comprehensive attempts in migration studies in particular and in social sciences in general have been made to address the two debates from an integrated perspective.

The article addresses exactly this conceptual lacuna. Re-defining socio-spatial scales as social boundaries this text introduces conceptual elements to constrain methodological nationalism and to include the sociology of social boundaries in studies on migration and social inequality. This work allows consideration of socio-spatial categories such as local, national, global and transnational. Moreover, their intersection with other types of social boundaries e.g. 'class', 'race'/'ethnicity', 'gender' etc. could ultimately be taken into account.

The article begins with a critical review of migration theories which address social mobility of migrants on the national scale to highlight their main limitations. These are in particular the assimilation approaches, the theoretical

tools of which are explicitly confined by methodological nationalism (Section II). Subsequently, the article elaborates on conceptual attempts to overcome the national lens in studies on international migration and social inequalities. It hence introduces the aspect of migration research dealing with the global and transnational scales (Section III and IV). The article however points to the limitations they impose in addressing the multiplicity of socio-spatial scales. This is the reason why the pursuant section (V) re-conceptualizes spatial scales in terms of the sociology of social boundaries. Re-defining spatial scales (i.e. space) as a set of categorical distinctions this section provides elements of a conceptual tool to better understand how ways of ‘doing’ space are interrelated with ways of ‘doing’ social inequalities. The resulting conclusion (VI) sheds light on the benefits of inequality analysis in migration studies by considering the multiplicity of socio-spatial scales as well as the variety of social boundaries.

Class and ethnic differences in the immigration country: The national scale in migration studies

The limitations of methodological nationalism in migration studies on social inequalities are especially visible in the assimilation approaches (Faist, 2000, Glick Schiller and Çağlar, 2009). This section focuses attention on the most prominent amongst them, the classic theory of assimilation (Gordon, 1964) and the segmented assimilation approach (Portes and Rumbaut, 2006), in particular because these conceptually link the assimilation processes to social mobility.

For example, Milton M. Gordon’s inequality analysis (1964) is strongly related to his study of migrants’ assimilation into US-American society. He defines the minorities’ cultural and structural (i.e. labour market and political participation) assimilation into the white protestant Anglo-Saxon middle class ‘core sub-society’ as the most preferable assimilation path. Gordon does however make an observation that only some minorities of European protestant background manage to become structurally included into the institutions of this ‘dominant sub-group of society’. He states that despite most migrants’ acculturation into the ‘anglo-confirm’ US-American culture the structural assimilation into the institutional fields fails.

Thus, this imperfect assimilation is rooted in the basic structure of US-American society which is internally divided into ‘ethclasses’. On the one hand, every social class is internally divided into ethnic subunits and on the other, ethnic groups are internally separated in different class layers. In point of fact, social inequality is identified as a hierarchy of ethclasses within the framework of an immigration society.

Although Gordon is interested in the intersection between ethnicity and class, he first and foremost partly conceptualizes them in a static manner, but does not thematise this intersection as a process. In particular, ethnic differ-

ences are viewed as constant variables preventing the process of assimilation and acculturation.

In contrast to Gordon, both Portes and Rumbaut (2006), as well as Portes and Zhou (2005) move away from a normative expectation of a single assimilation outcome, however they also situate their analysis within the setting of an immigration society. The central question of the segmented assimilation approach is therefore: 'Into what sector of American society does a particular group assimilate?' (Portes and Zhou, 2005:90). Using research on the 'second generation' of 'new immigrants' from Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean into the United States the authors outline three possible paths of assimilation. The ideas of class stratification and the concept of ethnicity as a cultural resource build analytical tools to analyse the assimilation outcomes.

The first assimilation path is equal to the traditionally highlighted *upward assimilation* of migrants into the middle class of the 'core society'. The upward mobility of migrants is encouraged by their assimilation into the 'culture' of a white middle class, as well as their professional mobility in the destination country (Portes and Zhou, 2005:90).

The second path sets *downward assimilation* of migrants into the domestic underclass. This path is assumed as probable, if immigrants tend to emphasize their ethnic affiliation and share the same neighbourhood areas with already subordinated domestic minorities.

Finally, the third trajectory, called *selective assimilation*, is characterized by migrants' adherence to their ethnic affiliation. Here however, ethnic resources are employed so as to enable successful class mobility. Portes and Zhou stress that '[im]migrants who join well-established and diversified ethnic groups enjoy access to a range of moral and material resources well beyond those available through official assistance programs right from the start.' (Portes and Zhou, 2005:92). To conclude, the selective assimilation into the US-American 'core society' enables a successful social mobility due to the manifest perpetuation of ethnic belonging.

Wrapping up: (1) Implicitly understanding the territorial space of a nation state in an essentialist manner as a pre-given container, both approaches conceptualize migration as a one-way process and, therefore, stress its exceptional quality. Consequently, they can neither consider the cross-border relations between migrants and their significant others in the emigration countries, nor address the relevance of global forces and connections. (2) This is why patterns of social inequality can be considered predominantly in terms of class hierarchies as situated in 'closed' social spaces of immigration societies. (3) Although both approaches address class mobility in relation to ethnic belonging, the 'class' remains a central variable for understanding the formation of hierarchies. Consequently, these approaches lack the multi-dimensional view on social inequality (Lamont and Molnar, 2002).

What available theories can deal with these shortcomings? To respond to this question the next section examines the neoclassical and world systems

theories which address the link between migration and social inequality at the global scale. Are these concepts powerful enough to weaken methodological nationalism and the corresponding essentialist prospect on space?

Universalising mechanisms of inequality formation:

The global scale in migration studies

The two prominent theories addressing social inequality and migration within the global framework are the neoclassical approach to migration (Borjas, 1989) and the world systems theory (Portes and Walton, 1981).

The first, the macro-oriented neoclassical research refers to the global setting more implicitly than explicitly. It conceptualizes international labour migration as a result of economic inequality between the sending and the receiving countries. From the neoclassical point of view labour migration is a result of an oversupply of labour in the low income countries and an increase of labour demand in the high income countries: 'Countries with a large endowment of labour relative to capital have a low equilibrium market wage, whilst countries with a limited endowment of labour relative to capital are characterized by a high market wage' (Massey et al., 1993:433).

Labour migration has however the effect of reducing rather than increasing economic inequalities between emigration and immigration countries due to the mechanism of 'factor price equalization' that organizes the exchange of capital and migration in opposite directions. Whilst labour migration tends to be attracted by the labour-hungry receiving countries, capital is usually invited by the capital-hungry sending countries. In sum, labour migration functions as a force that in the long run reduces the economic disparities between the countries.

In contrast to the neoclassical approach, studies based on the world systems theory question the inequality reducing effect of international migration; (Lipton, 1980, Penninx, 1982 and Zachariah et al., 2001) explore for example global economic inequality gaps by referring to the international division of labour between the core, the peripheral and the semi-peripheral regions. This position classifies international migration as a 'natural outgrowth of disruptions and dislocation that are intrinsic to the process of capitalist accumulation' (de Haas 2007: 15). To be more precise, on the one hand international migration is defined as a result of the already existing international division of labour, on the other, however, it leads to the intensification of global disparities between countries located at the core, periphery or semi-periphery.

In sum: (1) both concepts view international migration as a one-directional process – from the periphery to the centre. (2) The global arena itself is more prominently addressed in the world systems analysis (Wallerstein, 1988). The global scale is conceptualized, however, in an essentialist manner as being the surface of the earth. Although the differentiation in centres, peripheries and semi-peripheries is thought in a relational way as being a historically changea-

ble international division of labour, the geographic space is understood to be “static, fixed and timeless” (Brenner, 2004: 38, see also Pries, 2008a:7). (3) Both approaches transfer the idea of class stratification to the global framework. Social inequality appears, however, not as inequality between class strata, but between strata of nation states. This is why nation states or sets of nation states (such as core, periphery and semi-periphery regions) appear as the central units of analysis *within* the framework of global arena. (4) Consequently, inequality patterns on the global scale are described as determining social inequality (in the sense of nation states’ economic development) on the national scale. The global subordinates the national in this sense: it appears to be the most powerful category. (5) Finally, the analysis of global inequality patterns suffers from the primacy of economic arguments (see also Faist, 2010). Therefore, the need remains for a multi-dimensional view on the formation of hierarchies, which, besides considering the economy also takes ‘gender’, ‘ethnicity’, ‘race’, ‘body’, ‘age’ and other sets of unequal social relations into account. However, even if world studies address some of these sets, such as gender hierarchies (Hochschild, 2000), the primacy of economic factors remains manifest.

To conclude: although the approaches presented analyse the nexus of international migration and social inequality without being constrained by the national lens, their essentialist view on global geography as well as their ignorance of the multidimensionality of inequality relations limit their explanatory power. Are transnational approaches to migration characterized by a similar limitation? This question is the subject of the next section.

Does transnational migration produce new social inequalities?

The transnational scale in migration studies

An alternative attempt to limit the methodological nationalism of assimilation research has been made by transnational migration theories (Faist, 2000, Pries, 2008a). As in the case of the neoclassic and world system migration studies here it was also a matter of refusing to understand the nation state as a single context of inequality formation. However, in contrast to the world system research, transnational scholars reject the view of migration being a mere unidirectional resettlement of people from the sending to the receiving country. Instead, these scholars take a closer look at the social practices of the individuals and collectives organized across a multi-sited socio-spatial framework. As a consequence they pay more attention to simultaneous transformations of unequal social positions amongst migrants in both emigration and immigration countries (see Pries, 2008b).

To understand the transnational prospects on social inequalities I discuss the two relevant conceptual positions: 1) the migrants’ contradictory social mobility approach and 2) a study of transnational habitus.

(1) Rhacel S. Parreñas (2001) and Luin Goldring (1998) analyse social inequalities primarily as being class inequalities and pay attention to how the

transnational linkages of migrants *simultaneously* influence their class position in both the emigration and immigration countries. Here they shed light on the phenomenon of a *contradictory social mobility*, which is particularly experienced by skilled migrants who belong to the middle class in the emigration country. Due to various forms of institutional discrimination, such as limitations of residency and work permits, as well as limited acknowledgement of their university degrees, these migrants have only a rare chance of achieving an adequate professional position in the destination country.

Rhacel Parreñas (2001) elaborates on this in her study on Filipina domestic workers in Italy where such migrants are mainly employed in the low wage sector, i.e. the domestic or care services. This mobility is however ‘contradictory’, because Filipina migrants (who experience downward social mobility in Rome) simultaneously attain higher social and economic status in the Philippines. In other words, these migrants situate themselves simultaneously within stratification orders of both the emigration and immigration countries. The inconsistency in their social position is rooted in fact that class distinctions are assigned to reference groups in multiple countries.

Although the subjects of ‘class’ and ‘social mobility’ are central for Parreñas’ and Goldring’s analysis, ‘gender’ and ‘race’ appear relevant as well. For example, through the analysis of the Filipinas’ mobility pathways in Rome Parreñas focuses on the racialised and gendered domestic care-sector in which these migrant women work. Though she does not explicitly use the term ‘intersectional analysis’, her way of argumentation in fact already acknowledges multi-dimensionality of inequalities. This position allows ‘gender’, ‘race’ and other sets of unequal social relations to be linked to the conventional inequality studies that focus on ‘class’.

(2) The study on transnational habitus by Kelly and Lusi (2006) promotes the idea of the multi-sitedness of migrants’ social mobility even more explicitly. The authors analyse the transnational space as a relational socio-spatial context which includes localities of the emigration and immigration countries. This approach is also prominently advocated by Ludger Pries (2008a) who defines transnational settings as “border-crossing pluri-local societal spaces” (2008a:5). Kelly and Lusi understand such settings as central frameworks of inequality formation and analysis. This is why their case study reconstructs the (de-) valuations of economic, cultural and social capital (Bourdieu, 1984) of Filipina migrants who circulate between Vancouver/ Canada and the Philippines.

To take just one example, the authors analyse the institutional and embodied cultural capital of Filipino migrants, and go on to exemplify its ambivalent implications on the migrants’ positioning within the transnational social space. For instance, institutional cultural capital such as education provides the Filipino migrants with the qualifications necessary for immigrating to Canada, but these are seldom institutionally recognized on resettlement. In the end, these

degrees only enable these migrants to access the (low waged) labour markets in Canada and hence send economic capital (i.e. remittances) back home.

In a similar way, the embodied cultural capital that includes fluent communication in English and the familiarity with Northern American cultural norms allows speedy access to (low waged positions on) the labour market in Canada. At the same time, it “creates a sense of distinction from them left behind” in the Philippines (Kelly and Lusia, 2006:843). Moreover, ‘going abroad’ itself is evaluated in the Philippines as a form of cultural capital, which is expressed and celebrated during the festivities organized by migrants throughout their visits to the sending localities.

In point of fact, Kelly and Lusia (2006) indicate that the migrants’ self-positioning in the transnational setting creates a transnational habitus, which is not a sum of two different (national) habitus patterns, but an alternative cultural scheme allowing various forms of capital to be translated and converted into one another: “For most immigrants ‘being here’, ‘sending back’, and ‘sending for’ are all forms of transnational connection that circulate, enhance and convert forms of (...) capital” (Kelly and Lusia, 2006:836).

Wrapping up: (1) Contrary to migration studies that focus on the national and global scale, transnational studies presume the relational view on space. Consequently, Goldring and Parreñas as well as Kelly and Lusia consider the bi-directional quality of migration and put forward socio-spatiality as being co-produced by migration. (2) These approaches do not analyse the formation of social inequalities within the given national container but shed light at how a relational setting (including localities of emigration and immigration countries) co-produces non-national stratification orders. Only by referring to this non-essentialist position scholars can pay attention to the powerful contradictions and paradoxes in social hierarchies. (3) The approaches presented are more sensitive to the multi-dimensionality of inequality sources, and are also make it less likely that distinctions be made between the conventional class-related studies and intersectional studies (Anthias, 2001) in migration research.

Nevertheless, despite the many conceptual advantages mentioned these studies rarely consider the multiplicity of socio-spatial scales. Although they empirically deal with the intersection between the national and the transnational (and address the transnational as ‘overlapping’ or ‘spanning’ the national boxes), they still mainly aim to legitimize the relevance of the transnational scale in inequality analysis. Similar to the studies discussed in other sections, they primarily focus on one socio-spatial scale. Consequently, the shortcomings of all migration studies presented are that they tend to limit the analysis only to one particular socio-spatial scale. The subject of how scales interact in migration processes (and whether this interaction is relevant for the formation of social hierarchies) is rarely raised.

This lacuna has already been problematized by Nina Glick Schiller and Ayşe Çağlar (2009), who adopt the socio-geographic scale approach to better understand the mutual impact between spatial processes and international

migration. In their innovative city-making approach they suggest viewing urban (local) scale as a form of interaction with global neoliberal restructuring. In sum, they elaborate on how the transnational linkages of migrants affect urban localities in different manners, depending on the city's position in global hierarchy. No normative dominance of the global, the transnational or the local scale is assumed. Instead, they are viewed as mutually constitutive for each other.

The next section suggests following the argument by Glick Schiller and Çağlar to adopt the scale approach to migration studies. Why? Because, it promises an opportunity to consider the multiplicity of the spatial scales, the global and the local (urban), the national and the transnational¹, as well as interrelations between them. However, if we also require the inclusion of scale theory in the migration studies on inequalities, we must be prepared to re-conceptualize it using the terms of sociology of social boundaries.

Including socio-spatial categories into the sociology of social boundaries

This section attempts to link two subjects: a) the idea of space as multi-faceted as well as socio-spatial scales as being mutually constitutive, advocated by the scale approach, and b) the understanding of social inequality as being multi-dimensional, elaborated in the sociology of social boundaries.

The main argument is that migration studies in general and those focusing on patterns of social inequality in particular profit from the re-definition of 'space' as a set of social boundaries based on categorical distinctions. First, migration researches would avoid the essentialist view on space and therefore weaken the methodological nationalism in migration studies. Second, scholars would be able to incorporate spatial definitions and spatial categories into their research on the formation of social hierarchies.

Theory of scale: Key elements

The scale approach (Glick Schiller and Çağlar 2009, 2010) is a powerful tool to question the naturalist ideas on space (Brenner, 2004, Jonas, 2006). First, space is viewed as being socially produced, generated by the interconnection between material artefacts, technologies and social practices. Second, space is conceptualized as being multi-faceted, differentiated into various levels, called scales, such as the global, the local (urban), the national, and, to add one more, the transnational². Third, scales are thought of as being formed in a

¹ Theorists of space (Brenner, 1998) usually refer to the urban, the regional, the national and the global scale. However, Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2009) suggest including the transnational scale – as organized by cross-border linkages between multiple localities- too. They identify the urban as the local scale, and pay less attention to the regional scale. Besides, the distinction in global, local, national, transnational seems to be the most common denominator in studies on globalization and transnationalization (Amelina et al., 2012, Beck and Sznaider, 2006, Pries, 2008a).

² Please, see the Footnote 1.

relational manner. According to Lefebvre (1991:351) the relation between scales should not be understood in an additive way as “cumulative ‘blocks’ of space defined in terms of absolute territorial size, but [as] mutually constitutive and intrinsically related levels” (Brenner, 1998:466). In this work the national is only one of many socio-spatial scales. Fourth, scales are not fixed entities. They shape yet they are also shaped by social reality: “Spatial scale (...) [has] to be constructed like ‘structures’ in the work of Bourdieu (1977) and Giddens (1984) – as their historical presupposition, medium and outcome, continually produced, reconfigured and transformed” (Brenner 1998: 260).

Although the scale theory provides a helpful tool to address the changing spatial hierarchies of capitalism, such as the re-configuration between the global and national spatial patterns after 1970s, for example, it mainly addresses the spatial transformations ‘from above’, adopting the position of the objective outside observer. To put it more bluntly, theorists of scale do not focus on the categorical distinctions of social actors, organizations and institutions used to ‘fill’ the spatial categories with meaning. However, exactly this focus would be a consequent step forward to challenge the essentialist notions on space and to include these in the sociology of social boundaries. What are its main elements?

Social inequalities as social boundaries

The core argument of the sociology of social boundaries is that “conceptual distinctions made by social actors to categorize objects, people, practices, and even time and space... separate people into groups (...) [and] are an essential medium through which people acquire status and monopolize resources (Lamont and Molnar, 2002:168). To put it differently, *categorical distinctions*, for example, male vs. female, educated vs. non-educated, ‘we’ vs. ‘others’ result in social boundaries between ‘groups’ created by these distinctions. Consequently, social boundaries are defined as *sets of unequal social relations*.

One of the prominent examples for the sociology of social boundaries is the capital approach by Pierre Bourdieu (1984) that analyses the meaning of symbolic distinctions resulting in class stratification and, therefore, in unequal access for social actors to the power of nomination. The prominent publication by Lamont and Fournier (1992) was another turning point for the sociology of social boundaries, because it provides clear evidence as to how the social positions of the actors result from symbolic struggles around such categories as class, ethnicity and race.

At the same time the intersectional approach to social inequality (Anthias, 2001, Walby and Armstrong, 2012) went even further, addressing both the formation of social boundaries and the multi-dimensionality of inequality formation. Whilst the volume by Lamont and Fournier (1992) predominantly addresses mutual interconnection of class, ethnicity/race, the studies on intersectionality identified not only these and but also gender, age and body as additional markers of inequality formation. Building on the more radical notions

of ethnomethodological studies (West and Zimmerman, 2002) and poststructuralism (Butler, 1990), the proponents of the intersectionality focus on the power of social categorization which forms and reproduces multiple discriminations of some 'groups' and privileges others. The advocates of intersectionality understand the emergence of social boundaries (between 'groups') as resulting from the authority of categories.

Noteworthy is the concept of ethnic boundary making which was revived by Andreas Wimmer (2008). Building on Fredrik Barth's (1969) approach to ethnicity Wimmer identifies boundary-work, boundary-crossing and boundary shifting as mechanisms that produce ethnic 'groups'. Putting it another way, social interaction and the attribution of social categories result in 'group' formation (see also Brubaker, 2002).³

Obviously these concepts have differing rationales. They are organized around divergent sets of questions. However, they share several commonalities. First, inequalities in social positions result from the symbolic and cultural (i.e. categorical) distinctions (Bourdieu, 1984) or, to use the poststructuralist language, from the power of social categorisations (Anthias, 2001). Second, besides class, a multitude of sets of social relations, such as ethnicity/race, gender, age, body etc. are accepted as being relevant for the formation of social divisions. Third, categorical distinctions are thought of in a non-essentialist manner, as cultural systems of classification which define belonging to social positions in a relational manner. Finally, the particular focus on boundaries actually being produced through categorization processes allows scholars to identify the processes of 'making' (and 'unmaking') social inequality including constructivist (Wimmer, 2008), neo-structuralist (Butler, 1990) and ethnomethodological (West and Zimmermann, 2002) notions. In sum, the sociology of social boundaries and, in particular, the intersectional approaches mentioned (Walby and Armstrong, 2012) tend to avoid a dichotomy between the conventional class-focussed inequality studies and studies on ethnicity/race, gender and other inequality projects, since they understand different sets of unequal relations as mutually reinforcing and stabilising each other.

However, as exemplified by this overview, neither theories of space nor the understanding of space as a set of social boundaries are included in this array of concepts. This is why I suggest reconceptualising socio-spatial scales as social boundaries to include 'space' in the inequality analysis.

Space as a set of categorical distinctions: Re-thinking socio-spatial scales as social boundaries

The interpretation of socio-spatial scales as a set of categorical distinctions results from a link between the spatial turn in social sciences (Löv, 2008, Pries, 2008a, Scheibelhofer, 2011) and the cultural turn in spatial theories

³ Wimmer is not however interested in paying attention to the interconnection of ethnic categories with class, gender or other sets of unequal social relations.

(Soja, 1996). My intention is to combine both 'turns'. This is why I suggest understanding space as a set of categorical distinctions or as a cultural system of classification, which is powerful in social practice.

Adopting this position the article suggests understanding the dialectical contradiction between *mobility* and *fixity* as a social narrative around which the spatial distinctions are organized. This proposal derives from arguments of leading theorists of space (Lefebvre, 1991, Harvey, 2006) who insist on considering a variety of spatial scales as a result of the contradiction between the *spatial fixity* and *mobility* in the circulation of capital. To put it in different words: spatial theorists argued that the 'production of space' occurs in two ways: as the production of spatially fixed entities, such as urban environments, national territories, global city-regions, as well as the process of mobility, carried by transportation and communication technologies and by various kinds of social networks.

Drawing from the idea of space as a set of categorical distinctions I suggest two hypotheses:

According to the *first hypothesis* social actors (including individuals, organisations and institutions) relate to the fixed and essentialist notions to address the *global, national and local* scales.

According to the *second hypothesis* social actors create the *transnational* scale discursively referring to the networks and mobility. Actors thereby imply the relational understanding of space which identifies space as formed by relations between geographically dispersed locations, social networks, geographic mobility, and technologies.

Migration scholars too often re-inscribe these meaning patterns into their conceptual narratives, naturalising localities and national territories by presuming them to be closed spatial settings, as shown above. Only few of them (Glick Schiller and Çağlar, 2009 and 2010) analyse spatial scales as produced by social action, but even they pay less attention to how *meaning* is attributed to (interlinked) spatial arrangements.

Only the redefinition of space as a set of categorical distinctions makes it possible to understand it as relevant for the genesis of social boundaries. We could think of spatial distinctions as boundaries between the global and the local, the national and the transnational and vice a versa. This approach does not only allow the analysis of the spatial categorisations in migration processes. It also allows the issue of how socio-spatial classifications shape other types of social boundaries such as 'class', 'ethnicity'/'race', 'gender' etc. to be addressed.

Building on this approach presented researchers would then not analyse social inequalities at the fixed socio-spatial levels of the global, the local, the national or the transnational, but would instead focus on how actors (governments, organizations, diasporas, families or NGO's) ascribe meaning to them and interconnect them along with other social boundaries. Such an approach would allow light to be shed for example on how the UNO, could

create a 'global' (in contrast to the 'local') dimension of 'gender' inequality. Alternatively one could analyse how members of a diaspora compare their class-status in their country of emigration and immigration, creating the 'transnational' (in a relational contrast to the 'national') scale. To conclude, this approach would allow the analysis of interaction between the (socially produced) spatial boundaries and the other types of social boundaries.

Towards the studies on migration and social inequalities beyond the national container

The overview of migration studies provides evidence on how theories conceptually design the mutual constitution between international migration, social inequality and space. To be more precise, the way migration scholars conceptualise social hierarchies depends on the way they address the subject of space. For example, studies that focus on the national and the global socio-spatial scales implicitly refer to the absolutist and fixed view on space and therefore address social inequality as static hierarchies of social positions within such settings. Contrary to this, the transnational approach and the city-making approach to locality design the space in a relational way. This is why they consider the multiplicity and inconsistency of actors' social positions in cross-border arenas.

With the exception of Glick Schiller and Çağlar (2010) these studies however rarely consider the multiplicity of spatial scales and none of them understand scales as social boundaries that result from the social interaction. The proposal of viewing scales as social boundaries as elaborated in the previous section, attempts to constrain exactly these shortcomings.

First, this approach suggests carrying out further research on spatial distinctions, such as the global, local, national and transnational, as embedded in the process of othering. They are not natural, but powerful categorical distinctions to which actors relate in order to define their social positions. In this sense, the definition of spatial categories as a particular set of social boundaries is an important contribution to the multi-dimensional understanding of inequality formation.

Second, researchers profit from addressing spatial distinctions in a relational manner. The relationality between the global and local, national and transnational is rooted in a discursive distinction between *spatial fixity* and *geographic mobility*. Adopting this perspective, scholars do not treat spatial scales as static frameworks of action, but as (sometimes silent) distinctions co-producing the multi-dimensional hierarchies.

Third, including spatial categories in the sociology of social boundaries draws scholars' attention to the processes of mutual shaping of different sets of boundaries. The intersectional approaches provide a useful debate here: while some intersectional studies suggest understanding distinct boundaries of class, ethnicity/race, gender and others (in a normative manner) as being equally important for the genesis of social hierarchies (Hancock, 2007), oth-

ers, in contrast, assume a multiplicity of patterns through which various boundaries may interrelate with each other (Walby and Armstrong, 2012). The latter strategy is a more promising one since it is more open to a variety of mutual shaping between particular sets of social relations.

Nevertheless, it is a task for future research to provide empirical illustrations of the conceptual elements presented. The fields such as migration and care, family migration, geographic mobility of the highly qualified, elite mobility, city-making as well as the politics of migration and assimilation could be relevant areas of research. Adopting the definition of 'space' as a distinct set of social boundaries (based in categorical distinctions), migration scholars could reconstruct the social relevance of distinctions between the global and local, the national and transnational. At the same time, these studies would have a chance to restrict the overgeneralization of single spatial scales in the study of social hierarchies.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the reviewers of Migration Letters for their incisive criticisms.

References

- Alba, R. and Nee, V. (2003). *Remaking the American Mainstream. Assimilation and Contemporary Immigration*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press.
- Anthias, F. (2001). The Concept of 'Social Division' and Theorising Social Stratification: Looking at Ethnicity and Class. *Sociology* 35 (4): 835-854.
- Amelina, A. (2011). An Intersectional Approach to the Complexity of Social Support within German-Ukrainian Transnational Space. In: Chow, E., Texler Segal, M. and T. Lin: Analyzing Gender, Intersectionality, and Multiple Inequalities – Global, Transnational and Local Contexts, *Advances in Gender Research*, Special Issue, 15 (2).
- Amelina, A., Nergiz, D., Faist, T. and Glick Schiller, N. (2012). *Beyond Methodological Nationalism: Research Methodologies for Cross-Border Studies*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Barth, F. (1969). *Ethnic groups and boundaries. The social organization of culture difference*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- Beck, U. (2007). Beyond Class and Nation: Reframing Social Inequalities in a Globalizing World. *British Journal of Sociology* 58(4): 679-705.
- Beck, U. und Sznaider, N. (2006). Unpacking cosmopolitanism for the social sciences: a research agenda. *The British Journal of Sociology* 57(1): 1-23.
- Borjas, G. (1989). Economic Theory and International Migration. *International Migration Review* 23: 457-85.
- Bourdieu, P. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Cambridge, UK and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. (1979). *La Distinction. Critique Social du Jugement*; trans. Nice, R. (1984) *Distinction. A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd.

- Brenner, N. (1998). Between Fixity and Motion: Accumulation, Territorial Organization and the Historical Geography of Spatial Scales. *Environment and Planning: Society and Space* 16(4): 459-81.
- Brenner, N. (2004). *New State Spaces. Urban Governance and Rescaling of Statehood*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Brubaker, R. (2002). Ethnicity without groups. *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* XLIII (2): 163-189.
- Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble. Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. London and New York: Routledge.
- De Haas, H. (2007). *Migration and Development. A Theoretical Perspective*. COMCAD Working Paper 29. COMCAD – Centre on Migration, Citizenship and Development. Bielefeld.
- Faist, T. (2000). *The Volume and Dynamics of International Migration and Transnational Social Spaces*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Faist, T. (2010). Towards Transnational Studies: World Theories, Transnationalization and Changing Institutions, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36 (10): 1665-1687.
- Giddens, A. (1984). *The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Cambridge: Polity press.
- Glick Schiller, N. and Çağlar, A. (2009). Towards a Comparative Theory of Locality in Migration Studies: Migrant Incorporation and City Scale. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 35(2): 177-202.
- Glick Schiller, N. and Çağlar, A. (2010). *Locating Migration. Rescaling Cities and Migrants*. New York: Cornell University Press.
- Goldring, L. (1998). The Power of Status in Transnational Social Fields. In: Smith M and Guarnizo, L. (eds.) *Transnationalism from Below*. New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 165-95.
- Gordon, M. (1964). *Assimilation in American Life. The Role of Race, Religion and National Origin*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hancock, A. (2007). When Multiplication Doesn't Equal Quick Addition: Examining Intersectionality as a Research Paradigm. *Perspectives on Politics* 5(1): 63-79.
- Harvey, D. (2006). *Spaces of Global Capitalism: Towards a Theory of Uneven Geographical Development*. London: Verso.
- Hochschild, A.R. (2000). Global Care Chains and Emotional Surplus Values, in: Giddens, A. and W. Hutton (eds.): *On the Edge: Living in Global Capitalism*, London: Jonathan Cape: 130-146
- Jonas, A. (2006). Pro Scale: Further Reflections of the 'Scale Debate' in Human Geography. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 31(3): 399-406.
- Kelly, P. and Lusic, T. (2006). Migration and the Transnational Habitus: Evidence from Canada and the Philippines. *Environment and Planning* 38: 831-847.
- Lamont, M. and Fournier, M. (eds.) (1992). *Cultivating Differences. Symbolic Boundaries and the Making of Inequalities*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Lamont, M. and Molnar, V. (2002). The Study of Boundaries in the Social Sciences. *Annual Review of Sociology* 28: 167-195.
- Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Lipton, M. (1980). Migration from Rural Areas of Poor Countries: the Impact on Rural Productivity and Income Distribution. *World Development* 8(1): 1-24.
- Löw, M. (2008). The Constitution of Space. The Structuration of Spaces through the Simultaneity of Effect and Perception. *European Journal of Social Theory* 11 (1): 25-49.

- Massey, D., Arango, J., Hugo, G., Kouaouci, A., Pellegrino, A. and Taylor, J. (1993). Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal. *Population and Development Review* 19: 431-66.
- Nieswand, B. (2011). *Theorising Transnational Migration. The Status Paradox of Migration*. New York: Routledge.
- Parreñas, R. (2001). *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration and Domestic Work*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Penninx, R. (1982). Migration and Development. A Critical Review of Theory and Practice: The Case of Turkey. *International Migration Review* 16(4): 781-818.
- Portes, A. and Rumbaut, R. (2006). *Immigrant America. A Portrait*. Third Edition. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Portes, A. and Walton, J. (1981). *Labour, Class, and International System*. New York: Academic Press.
- Portes, A. and Zhou M (2005). Segmented Assimilation and its Variants. In: Suárez-Orozco, M., Suárez-Orozco, C. and Quin D. (eds.) *The New Immigration. An Interdisciplinary Reader*. New York: Routledge, 85-105.
- Pries, L. (2008a). Transnational Societal Spaces: which Units of Analysis, Reference, and Measurement? In: Pries, L. (ed.) *Rethinking Transnationalism. The Meso-link of Organisations*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Pries, L. (2008b). Transnationalisierung und soziale Ungleichheit. Konzeptionelle Überlegungen und empirische Befunde aus der Migrationsforschung. In: Berger, P.A. and Weiß, A. (eds.) *Transnationalisierung sozialer Ungleichheit*. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 41-64.
- Scheibelhofer, E. (2011). Raumsensible Migrationsforschung. Methodologische Überlegungen und ihre empirische Relevanz für Migrationssoziologie. Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften.
- Soja, E.W. (1996). *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.
- Walby, S. and Armstrong, J. (2012). Intersectionality: Multiple Inequalities in Social Theory. *Sociology* 46, 224: 1-17
- Wallerstein I (1988). *The Modern World System III: The Second Era of Great Expansion of the Capitalist World-Economy, 1730-1840's*. San Diego: Academic Press.
- Weiß, A. (2005). Transnationalization of Social Inequality. Conceptualizing Social Positions on a World Scale. *Current Sociology* 53(4): 707-728.
- West, C. and Zimmerman, D.H. (2002). Doing Gender. In: Fenstermaker S and West C (eds) *Doing Gender, Doing Difference. Inequality, Power, and Institutional Change*. London and New York: Routledge, 3-24.
- Wimmer, A. (2008). The Making and Unmaking of Ethnic Boundaries: A Multilevel Process Theory. *American Journal of Sociology* 113(4): 970-1022.
- Wimmer, A. and Glick Schiller, N. (2003). Methodological nationalism. The social sciences and the study of migration. An essay in historical epistemology. *International Migration Review* 37: 576-610.
- Zachariah, K.C., Mathew, E.T., and Rajan, S.I. (2001). Impact of migration on Kerala's economy and society. *International Migration* 39(1): 63-88.