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**Social Inequalities and
Global Interdependencies in Latin America**
A Provisional Appraisal

Marianne Braig, Sérgio Costa, and Barbara Göbel



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Social Inequalities and Global Interdependencies in Latin America

A Provisional Appraisal

Marianne Braig, Sérgio Costa and Barbara Göbel

Abstract

The following working paper (the English translation of “Soziale Ungleichheiten und globale Interdependenzen in Lateinamerika: eine Zwischenbilanz” *desiguALdades.net Working Paper Series 4*, 2013) lays out the baseline from which the research approach of the research network *desiguALdades.net* was developed. Starting from diverse social inequality phenomena in Latin America, the network seeks to underline the multidimensionality of inequalities and their transregional interdependencies, taking a synchronic as well as a diachronic perspective into account. It thereby draws, first, on the discourse on global approaches to the study of inequalities, particularly world system approaches and transnationalism. Secondly, it is based on a critical examination of key concepts (like figuration and regime). Lastly, it seeks to link these to subjects and areas, especially the environmental dimension, that until now have received little consideration in research on inequalities.

Keywords: figuration | interdependent inequalities | regimes | transnational entanglements

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1. Introduction

The growing social gap between the rich and poor has once again become an important social problématique. Along with its prominence in recent political debates, it is attracting increased attention in social science research. Although the study of social inequalities has long been a central topic of modern sociology, the analysis faces empirical and heuristic challenges that reveal the limits of conventional social theories and stresses the necessity to overcome methodological nationalism. In the context of increasing global entanglements, it seems to be no longer adequate to use only the nation-state as the primary unit of analysis. Rather, alternative relational units of analysis must be developed that take transregional structures into account in which the nation state is embedded. Stronger cooperation with area studies can widen the perspectives of social science disciplines, and break out of the traditional straitjacket of the nation-state.

In this context, the research network *desiguALdades.net* pursues several objectives. One of its objectives is to contribute to the discussion on social inequalities in Latin America, by fostering the exchange of ideas between area studies and other social sciences organized into disciplines. A second objective is to provide methodological and theoretical input to current discussions on social inequalities in a global context. Finally, through empirical research on Latin America, the network also seeks to contribute to a more differentiated understanding of social inequalities that takes multidimensional and transregional interdependencies into account

Latin America represents an appropriate empirical starting point for various reasons. Latin America – including the Caribbean – is the world region that exhibits the greatest social inequality: 28% of its population is considered poor and more than 12% extremely poor. Its societies are characterized by extremely polarized income distribution. The Gini coefficients (after taxes and transfers) of most Latin American countries exceed 0.45, while West European countries gravitate towards 0.3 (CEPAL 2016). Even though income differences in some countries have recently fallen, the basic structure of economic and social inequalities has hardly changed. The great extent of economic inequalities and power asymmetries in Latin America is not a new development. These are historically persistent phenomena, which in their *longue durée* cannot be considered without their ties to colonial times and the historical foundation of each nation-state in the course of the 19th century. At the same time, both historical and contemporary configurations of inequalities in Latin American countries have been and continue to be shaped by their transregional interdependencies.

In addition to these empirical reasons, Latin America is also a good focus to foster a more thorough exchange between area studies and social sciences disciplines in the context of inequality studies. In Latin America, social science research on inequalities has developed over several decades to come to grasp the multidimensionality of inequalities and think in terms of dependencies. With the exception of one variant of dependency theories in the 1970s, knowledge produced in this tradition has not reached a wide audience in Germany. One of the aims of the research design of *desiguALdades.net*, therefore, is to bring the results of research in the Latin American social sciences into the debates in Germany and Europe.

2. Interdependent Inequalities: Theoretical and Methodological Challenges

Building on the standard approaches (Dubet 2001; Kreckel 2004; Tilly 1998), we define social inequality as the distance between the positions of individuals or groups in the hierarchy of possession of socially-relevant goods (income, wealth, etc.) and power resources (rights, political participation, political office, etc.). Unlike conventional research on inequalities, which examines these positions within the spaces of the nation state, we employ units of analysis that are neither fixed nor spatially pre-determined. Interdependent inequalities viewed in this way require taking into account the spatial entanglements and flows between spaces that transcend the framework of the nation-state. Accordingly, the units of analysis are defined relationally, that is, according to the web of relations relevant for each specific research question.

At the core of the research interests of *desiguALdades.net* are those inequalities which emerge from transregional entanglements and also those which are strengthened or changed through global interdependencies and power asymmetries. Therefore, *desiguALdades.net* emphasizes the following three particular aspects in the investigation of social inequalities:

(1) Transregional entanglements: Extending beyond methodological nationalism – which has shaped both German and Latin American social science research on inequalities – social inequalities are regarded in the contexts of global entanglements. This involves expanding the usual spatially defined units of investigation to also include relational units of analysis.

(2) Interdependencies between different stratification axes: Investigation focuses on intersectionalities between ethnic, gender-specific and other forms of ascription that shape social inequalities together with class-specific factors.

(3) Multidimensionality of social inequalities: Cultural and socio-ecological dimensions are also considered in addition to socioeconomic and power-political dimensions, which for long time have been the only core components of the research on inequality. Spatial and temporal effects of inequalities are taken into account as well. In addition, these dimensions are not regarded separately but are studied empirically through specific phenomena through their combined effects on the structures of inequality in Latin America.

2.1 Approaches to the Research on Inequality between National Societies and Global Entanglements

In the research on inequalities, the concept of interdependence refers to two complementing forms of entanglement:

(1) One form is the interdependencies between different axes of inequality (class, gender, ethnicity, “race”, place of residence, etc.) from which a person or a group is positioned and from which they enter into socio-economic and power-political hierarchies. Investigating inequalities from the perspective of methodological nationalism implies conceptualizing the society and the societal as a nation-state, without reflecting on the implications.

(2) Global interdependencies are understood here as entanglements between structures of inequality extending beyond local, regional, nation-state, and supranational spaces. In addition, these refer to temporal as well as spatial phenomena of inequality (e.g. inequalities between generations or between various places in different world regions). The analysis of interdependencies among different axes of inequality has a long tradition in Latin America, and it remains one of the central areas of research of the social sciences in the region (e.g. Fernandes 1965 and Stavenhagen 1969). In case of global interdependencies, since the early 1960s, social research in Latin America made important and innovative contributions to a more profound understanding of interdependent inequalities within a global context and between social spaces beyond the nation state. The social sciences, particularly those developed in the context of dependency and marginalization theories, produced studies on the striking differences in wealth both between world regions and within individual national societies in Latin America. At the same time, they emphasized the reciprocal nature of the relations between individual nation-states and between world regions. These approaches interpreted dependencies as results of asymmetrical relations within the world economy (e.g. Cardoso and Faletto 1979) and within the states of Latin America, in addition to factoring in historical dimensions.

However, the debates in the social sciences that prompted the dependency and marginalization theories were interrupted by various discontinuities and a paradigm change. In the course of the 1980s, research in Latin America turned away from approaches based on dependencies. As in other world regions, econometric approaches dominated the field of inequalities research (Deiniger and Squire 1996; Psacharopoulos et al. 1997), focusing only on national-level explanatory variables. Thus, the social sciences in Latin America lost a measure of historical depth and theoretical focus, shifting the emphasis away from the research on social inequalities towards studies on poverty and “the war on poverty”. These studies were largely impelled by international development agencies, in particular the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank), which became the most important funders of poverty research in Latin America. In particular, the World Bank provided the format and focus of research through its World Bank Reports (Shiraishi et al. 2009; World Bank 1990, 2006). The studies of both institutions promoted and encouraged a form of knowledge production that exceeded their own programs.

These had great influence on research agendas and on the project directives of international development organizations, as well as on the focus of policy consulting. Not until the late 1990s did the field of research in Latin America experience a reconfiguration; studies once again shifted the central interest back to social inequality. The purely economic focus was supplemented with a broader investigation of inequalities. Since then, various disciplines such as sociology, law, cultural and social anthropology, political science, political economy, geography, and history have contributed to the development of new theoretical and methodological perspectives and to a considerable amount of new research findings.

This is the background that prompted a broader discussion in Latin America about the dimensions, causes, and institutionalization of inequalities. The classical focus on class and strata was broadened up, placing a reinforced emphasis on factors such as gender, ethnicity or “race”, and accentuating the complementary and interdependent nature between stratification axes. In recent years, an qualitative and quantitative studies proliferated that analyze social, political, and economic inequalities from a gender-specific perspective, as well as studies that document and analyze cultural, ethnic or race-based patterns of inequality, such as those on indigenous and Afro-Latin American population groups (cf. overview in Barros et al. 2008).

More recent historical research has dedicated itself to transregional entanglements, emphasizing the analytical relevance of the concept of interdependency. By using various production and commodity chains as examples, they indicate how global (external)

and political (internal) processes are intertwined (cf. Bonanno and Cavalcanti 2011; Topik et al. 2006). At core of these studies stands the historical role of Latin America as the supplier of raw materials and agricultural products for the world economy.

The global consumption of raw materials (e.g. minerals, gas and oil) as well as agricultural products (e.g. soy and oil palms) from Latin America has once again gained importance in the last few years. This is due in part to the demand of “rising countries” such as China and India, so that new transregional (inter)dependencies are formed (cf. Gudynas 2012; Orlove et al. 2011). The consequences of the new boom of the export-oriented extractivism on national and subnational levels vary widely. In the ideal case, extractivism would allow the state to receive revenues independent from its national economic basis, with which it could finance social transfers (depending on the political orientation of the government in question). On the local level, global consumption of land and natural resources unleashes social conflict and complex negotiations of the distribution of profits, costs, and risks. A recent series of studies which connect approaches from political ecology with those from conflict research in order to investigate disputes on property rights, participation, as well as the distribution of profits, costs, and risks in local, national, and international contexts. These take into account the transregional entanglements of indigenous and ecological legal regimes and policies (e.g. Bebbington 2007; Benjaminsen et al. 2012; Lund 2011) and use approaches that center on the interdependence of different levels and frames of reference. They also examine the conflict between different forms and practices of knowledge in the context of the relationship between human beings and nature. Generally, however, these investigations place a stronger emphasis on power asymmetries in access to natural resources than on questions of socio-economic inequality.

In summary, research on inequality in and on Latin America demonstrates first and foremost a persistence of inequalities. Secondly, the research has focused on socio-political inequalities, in which analyses of power relations also incorporate the importance of cultural, ethnic, “race” and gender-specific and other non-class specific dimensions of inequality. Thirdly, the research increasingly addresses the ecological dimensions of inequality by investigating the repercussions of extractivism, particularly the resulting environmental conflicts. These are not only correlated to the growing global importance of Latin America’s raw materials, but also to the increased social perception of environmental and resource problems as distribution conflicts and their relevance for the development of social inequality. In addition to the structural and power analytical approaches, socio-ecological research on inequalities takes into account knowledge and cultural-analytical dimensions, such as different notions of public goods and private property rights.

Despite the broad spectrum of theories and subjects, the Latin American scholarship on inequalities remains in general analytically limited to the nation-state (see Wehr and Burchardt 2011) except for where it is directly connected to dependency theory. In this respect it does not deviate from the general pattern observed in social science research, where units of analysis predominate that were developed from the perspective of societies bounded by nation-states. From this point of view, different social positions remain anchored in nation-state societies; the theoretical and methodological premises and implications of this positioning have not been subjected to sufficient critical questioning. This perspective is supported by the experiences of and the public discourse in the respective societies.

2.2 Recent Contributions to Research on Global Inequalities

There are a number of approaches that can be used productively for an analysis of transregional entanglements of social inequalities. Most comparative approaches adopt socio-economic perspectives based on Immanuel Wallerstein's World-System Theory to study gaps in income between groups of countries, i.e. core, semi-peripheral and peripheral countries (Bornschiefer 2008a; Korzeniewicz and Moran 2009).

Another important approach that takes interdependent inequalities beyond national borders into account is the transnationalism approach. Particularly innovative are the contributions that investigate the actors of interdependent inequalities, such as migrants (cf. Weiß 2005; Weiß and Berger 2008; Pries 2008a, 2008b), in their specific transnational and translocal frameworks. Such studies demonstrate how social inequalities can be either reproduced or mitigated via social and cultural capital, as well as ethnicity in the case of migration. Also relevant are contributions that investigate the reconfigurations of social structures, such as class (cf. Schwinn 2008) in transnational spaces.

Recent methodological advances have also produced new instruments useful for the investigation of inequalities in transnational contexts (cf. Bauböck and Faist 2010; Pries 2005, 2007). Recent publications on the transnationalization of rights have played a significant role in this. They show that "global rights" can have an effect on social inequalities which until now have not been sufficiently investigated. (e.g.: Fischer-Lescano and Möller 2012)

This has without a doubt opened new roads for the research on inequalities within the global context. Yet in most cases little attention is paid to the fact that social inequalities are a part of a contingent history of modernity which has interlocked the production of social inequalities in Europe with structures of inequality in other world regions through the colonial system and slave trade for several centuries (Randeria 2005). In addition

to consideration of the theoretical-methodological restriction of the study of global processes of inequality, the empirical scope of the phenomena under examination can also be subject to criticism. First and foremost, quite a few of the studies in the German-speaking realm have not been limited to the study of OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries. The research network *desiguALdades.net* therefore is designed to bridge empirical findings as well as theoretical approaches from Latin America back to the German-speaking discourse on inequalities.

3. The Research Concept of *desiguALdades.net*

3.1 Points of Departure

Since its founding in 2009, the research network *desiguALdades.net* has sought to bring contributions and perspectives from different epistemic communities investigating interdependent inequalities into a mutual dialog and exchange, and to expand the understanding of entanglement processes through the introduction of a transregional approach.

Drawing on Reinhard Kreckel (2004), we took the following leading question as a starting point: To what extent are possibilities for access to and distribution of desirable goods, social status and positions of power in Latin America shaped not only by local, regional, and national ties of interdependencies, but also by global and transregional ones?

In focusing on global processes that structure social inequalities and on their multidimensional character, *desiguALdades.net* aims to contribute to a re-orientation of the research on inequality. Our approach to interdependent and multidimensional inequalities draws on new findings in the field of transnationalism (transnational inequality) and of World-System Theory (global inequality). We contextualize these into the macro-sociological discussions on “entangled modernities” (Randeria 2005) in order to gain a clear understanding of entangled inequalities (cf. Costa 2011a). The transnationalism approach emphasizes the interconnection between different national structures of inequality. At the center are actors that move across borders, such as migrants in transnational networks or members of a globalized middle class, whose life styles have developed similarly in societies of different nation-states (cf. Faist 2010; Fraser 2010, Pries 2008a; Weiß 2005; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002). The contributions based on World-System Theory deal with global historical processes such as colonialism, slavery, and asymmetries in world trade, which still shape contemporary inequalities (cf. Bornschier 2008b; Korzeniewicz and Moran 2009; Korzeniewicz 2011). The World-System Theory approach and the transnationalism approach do not limit the scope of their investigations to comparison of societies contained within national

boundaries; they also develop analytical investigation units (cf. Pries 2005, 2007, 2008b) that allow for the research to focus on flows between spaces on different levels of entanglement. Social science research focused traditionally on the investigation of nation-state societies in Western Europe and North America; this focus should be expanded to encompass the entanglements between different world regions and inequalities and to look for new units of analysis.

It is important for us to stress here that the politically constituted reference units related to the nation-state will continue to have meaning. Beyond this, using analytical units that are not limited to the national or sub-national space allows us to demonstrate how social inequalities in Latin America were and still are created and shaped significantly by transnational interdependencies and global processes. Our results show at the same time that despite the acceleration of globalization, the political arenas where negotiations about resource access, political and social participation and the distribution of wealth and resources have at the same time remained primarily at the national and subnational levels. Although political arenas are nowadays more heavily influenced by global factors, such as transnational actors, the international division of labor, and international legal frameworks (which bear particular effects on economy, trade, the environment and indigenous populations, as well as the production of knowledge), they remain to a great extent oriented towards units bound to territorial borders on the national and subnational level. Hence, the global processes and transnational interdependencies that create and/or (partially) shape structures of inequality have no corresponding space in the political arenas in which the negotiations about redistributive and participatory policies take place.

desiguALdades.net was able to expand the approaches of international and interdisciplinary research of inequalities by taking the perspectives presented above as points of departure. Along with the analytical scales of societies of nation-states, world regions, the world system, and world society, reference units that considered transregional entanglements in their full historical depths were also able to be considered. It also became possible to specify more accurately how transregional figurations of inequality were reproduced and transformed during the different phases of globalization.

3.2 Studying Entangled Inequalities

The observation of interdependent inequalities in Latin America is particularly well-suited for the broadening of the perspectives presented in this paper. For example, entanglements now involve more than the former colonial powers in Europe. Today, transpacific contexts of entanglement are gaining influence on the formation of inequalities in Latin America (Rosales and Kuwayama 2012). These South-South-

Relations overlap and change the inequality figurations of transatlantic relations, including that of the “South Atlantic” and the Black Atlantic (Alencastro 2000; Gilroy 1993), as well as the transregional and translocal inequalities within the Americas, which have dominated the Latin American subcontinent for the past few centuries (Meißner et al. 2008, Boatcă 2011).

Through a closer examination of transregional figurations of inequality, we seek to develop units of analysis that are more appropriate for empirical research, in order to make visible and comprehensible the interdependent relations that constitute and change social inequalities. We base our use of the term “figurations” on Norbert Elias’ (1996: 139-140) dynamic interdependencies that result from the reciprocal interrelation of agency and structure. Transregional, in turn, means that these webs of interdependency are not spatially pre-defined –by city, country or nation-state borders – but rather emerge from and are in constant change within other webs of interdependency.

Using the concept of figuration for our purposes – in the sense of a web of entanglements – has certain advantages. The concept in this sense suspends the disciplinary and analytical separations which traditional sociology has adopted in dealing with social levels within a nation state, which has until now proceeded unfortunately without considering the implicit limitations of this approach. International problems have long been disregarded by investigations of internal social processes because they were considered to belong to the field of international relations, a sub-discipline of political science and not sociology. According to Elias, such separations are not sustainable in figuration analyses:

[J]e weiter sich die Interdependenzverflechtungen über die ganze Menschheit hin ausgebreitet haben und je enger die Verflechtung der verschiedenen Staaten der Menschheit geworden ist, umso weniger einträglich ist es, die Erforschung dieser beiden Ebenen der menschlichen Gesellschaft nach Fächern zu trennen. [...] Wo immer man hinblickt, stößt man auf die Interdependenz der innerstaatlichen und der zwischenstaatlichen Prozesse (Elias 1983: 75).

Thus, the concept of figuration allows us to use a context-sensible and relational approach that surpasses essentialist and ideologically shaped spaces (such as culture and nation) by placing entanglements and intermingling at the center. In doing this not only are concepts of nation-state social containers overcome, but the very idea of clearly separated levels within (subnational levels) and outside of (national multi-levels) of these as well. The concept allows us to go beyond the focus on the “interdependence of internal and inter-state processes” (Elias 1983: 75) and look at

other spaces (beyond and within the nation-state) that are shaped by the dialectic between external and internal processes. The concept of figuration in the sense of a web of interdependencies appears helpful to us because it allows us to illustrate the relationships between different actors from varying structural contexts on the one hand, and the movement between different spaces and levels on the other. Transregional figurations of inequalities involve dynamic processes of negotiations for access to and distribution of material and immaterial resources, which may bring actors on the local level (for example indigenous villagers), transnational corporations, and national governments together with international institutions such as courts into interdependent webs.

4. Initial Findings

In the first step, we positioned the investigation of regional interdependencies within the framework of recent developments in the research of inequalities. The following table presents the distinctive characteristics of our entanglements approach in relation to World-System approaches and to studies on the transnationalization of social inequality.

Table 1: Various Research Approaches to Global Inequalities

	World System Approach	Transnationalism	Entangled Inequalities Approach
Unit of analysis	World regions, center/ semi-periphery/ periphery	Transnational, plurilocal spaces	Relational, not spatially-defined figurations of inequality
Temporal perspective	Diachronic	Synchronic	Diachronic and synchronic
Focus	Global flows (world trade, financial flows, etc.)	Transnational classes, families, networks of migrants	Transregional movements, structures, and actors

Source: summary of Costa 2011a: 16

The concept of figurations of inequality is important in order to identify an appropriate relational and abstract unit of analysis that can encompass the entanglements relevant to inequality from a transregional perspective. The concept allows us to outline the analytical-theoretical context in which we want to position our research. However, because “figurations of inequality” is an abstract concept, it often proves

to be operationally insufficient for empirical investigations. Usually it is necessary for the term to be translated into intermediate categories appropriate for each context. In empirical research, terms like “regime” and “chain” are quite helpful to this end. Nevertheless, it still remains to be considered whether the sustainability of these terms are not themselves limited by their original theoretical and empirical contexts or whether the concept of figuration proves to be useful precisely because of its abstractness.

In order to concretely describe the relevant aspects of a specific transregional figuration of inequality through intermediate categories and concepts that stem from different disciplines and theoretical traditions, such as “regime” (e.g. gender, welfare, race regimes), “commodity chains” or “care chains”, and thus capture in a more precise manner the subject of investigation, it is also necessary to question the origin and position of such intermediate terms. In the case of “regime”, the concept demonstrates how various aspects and rationalities of entanglement are addressed in various disciplinary traditions. This allows us to deal with the variety of dimensions of inequality in different analytical and empirical ways.

4.1 Concepts of Regime

In the sub-discipline of international relations, the term regime encompasses international agreements and legal regulations between different states, as well as between private and other non-governmental organizations. According to Stephen D. Krasner (1982), these represent forms of international cooperation that are governed by norms and rules which serve to handle problems and conflicts in different policy areas of international relations, and which create a specific political and institutional scope of regulations. Regimes emerge, expand, and are reinforced through negotiation processes. Violations and deviations can be punished through sanctions or through processes of “blaming and shaming”, depending on how they are formally reinforced. An example is the international human rights regime and the global climate regime, both of which allow (parts of) the international community to establish supranational regulations within a regime space that can influence national decision processes (e.g. Haggard and Simmons 1987). The concept as such is a helpful analytical unit of investigation in understanding the formal and informal entanglements of regulations in a specific area and to a certain degree. Its limitations are in its capacity to account for power asymmetries, dependence and interdependence processes, as well as to portray historical processes.

For these aspects, a different kind of approach is better, one that links the concept of regime with Michel Foucault’s *gouvernementalité* (Foucault 1994). Here, regime means the interplay of discourses, instruments, and practices that a disciplinary power can utilize to bring the subject and its social interactions into conformity with norms,

and in such way that its supervision and control reaches into all spheres of social life. Partha Chatterjee (2006) successfully applies this kind of a conceptualization of regime characterized by power in the context of postcolonial studies. He examines the processes involved in the interdependence between different societies, as well as the influence of the regime on different stratification axes. These axes consist of techniques and technologies of rule that make citizens into mere targets of policies rather than constituting them as autonomous political subjects; regimes supervise and regulate all aspects of life. Particularly those societies that experienced European colonial rule exhibit a connection between the fragmentation of citizenship and a resilient hierarchization and categorization of the population into subgroups. In this perpetual process of classification and regulation, categories are used that date back to colonial times and are incorporated into daily life as well as into the social behavior of individuals. Figurations of inequality such as race and gender regimes can be analyzed in this manner (Costa 2011b).

A third component of the concept of regime relevant for us has been present for a considerable amount of time. The use of the concept of regime in the research on inequality dates back to Gøsta Esping-Andersen's (1990) study of welfare regimes in Western Europe. He uses the classical concept of regime of political science (cf. Zürn 2002 for an overview) which encompasses the regulation of social life forms through an institutionalized set of formal and informal principles, norms, and procedures. However, these kinds of approaches have thus far only been applied to the shaping of policy fields such as social, tax, and family policy, as well as of gender roles in societies bounded by nation-states, and to comparisons between West European regimes. Applying the concept to Latin America (cf. Martínez Franzoni and Sánchez-Ancochea 2012; Schachar 2009; Wehr 2009) requires not only a thorough consideration of the intersections of the different axes of inequalities (besides class also ethnicity, gender, and race); transregional processes and historical developments must also be taken into account.

Transregional processes that directly affect the regulation of social life forms – in this context of welfare regimes – can include:

- (1) The informalization of labor markets, which experienced massive growth during the opening of Latin American markets in the 1990s, in part leading to a decrease of formal business relationships and to a reduction of social security contribution;
- (2) Migration and the resulting increasing importance of remittances in the development of specific (individual, local) welfare effects;

(3) The interdependence of tax and fiscal policies with revenue from raw materials such as financing social transfers from export-based revenues from raw materials).

4.2 The Concept of Value Chains

Another way of defining and grasping the concept of figuration is to focus on material and immaterial goods, their movement between different spaces, and their interdependencies. Examining the production, transportation, consumption, and the introduction of export goods into the market as value chains and their entanglements with each other extends beyond analytical scales bound to the nation-state and concentrates on interactions that involve crossing borders. Material goods such as soy, palm oil, sugar, cocaine etc. and their production and commodity chains (cf. Bonanno and Cavalcanti 2011; Topik et al. 2006) are not the sole subjects of the discussion on transnational processes of inequality; care chains, which are closely tied to transnational migration processes (in particular those undertaken by women) have also come under examination (cf. Lutz 2008, 2009).

These concepts have been successfully and productively applied in a series of empirical research projects – especially doctoral theses – conducted at *desiguALdades.net*. It should be stressed that we are not just recognizing a simplistic structural dependence on global configurations. For us the global market is not just an exogenous force. Rather, we take into account concrete extractive production and commodity chains (for example in mining or agribusiness) that connect different natural, economic, political, and cultural spaces with each other. They link social actors and power groups on supranational, subnational or local levels; as well as multilateral corporations that produce locally over transregional networks with local consumers who acquire agricultural materials from other world regions over globalized meat-dominant consumption models (for example soy producers from the Argentinian Chaco region and meat consumers in Beijing and Berlin). Through such chains, value is created in and (re)distributed to different locations, and the access to both the resources and the value produced is very unequally allocated. At the same time, the exploitation of natural resources incurs certain ecological costs and risks (e.g. the loss of environmental goods and damage to the integrity of ecosystems). Gains for some are accompanied by losses that are distributed unequally, both spatially and temporally. These losses do not manifest themselves exclusively in the present; they also have a future, unequally distributed impact as well. Furthermore, it is the local population living at the original site of the resources that bears the consequences of current and future costs and risks, more so than the other actors in the value chain who skim most of the profits. Whereas the profits from the retrieval and processing of mineral and agricultural raw materials are reaped beyond the local and often beyond the national level—and for the most part are

accumulated transnationally—the environmental costs of the exploitation of resources are externalized only locally, that is, transferred mostly to the local population.

These local populations often react by engaging in social movements that protest against the global exploitation of land and of the natural resources in their living environment. Questions of access rights, participation in decision processes, share in the profits, and of compensation for environmental damages are at the center of conflicts and negotiations (cf. Bebbington 2012; Martínez-Alver 2002; Svampa and Antonelli 2009). The resistance can also articulate itself through alliances with other local social actors and transnational NGOs. Not only the global exploitation of natural resources and the value chains involved reflect transregional entanglements, but also the social debate on the effects of value chains connect various spaces, actors, and institutions with each other.

The study on an increasingly globalized nature, of the use of local natural resources and agricultural products which is being more and more configured globally, and its involvement in global value chains as well as its effect on social inequalities makes concrete another aspect which later will be discussed in further detail: the role of international, national, and subnational entanglements, of overlapping, and of the incommensurability of different legal frameworks (legal regimes), law practices, and sectoral policies (economy, trade, research, environment, human rights, rights of indigenous groups, etc.) in the characteristics of social inequalities, and the negotiations of them on local and subnational levels.

In conclusion, by regarding the environment as a prism of interdependent inequalities, we are able thoroughly analyze global value chains in their full complexity.

5. Examples of Interdependent Inequalities

To demonstrate how the concept of figuration can be used to further define the concept of regime, we present here two examples from ongoing research projects at *desiguALdades.net*.

5.1 Regimes of Inter-ethnic Coexistence

Our first example stems from an investigation of the social inequalities in the Afro-Latin American population. Estimated at around 160 million, the Afro-Latin American population makes up a third of the total population of Latin America and the Caribbean. From the socio-economic, cultural, and political standpoints, Afro-Latin Americans today are as heterogeneous as the entire population of the subcontinent (Costa 2011a). Hence, this investigative transregional figuration of inequality is not constituted

by a homogeneous demographic group that is diffused across different national contexts, but rather by interdependencies that link these populations together. From a historical perspective, the slave trade and slavery represent a transregional web of interdependence. The current (and very active) exchange between transnational anti-racist organizations and the diffusion of anti-racist policies across the countries of North and South America constitutes the most important entanglement that can lead to a reduction of inequalities between Afro-Latin American and other population groups living in the region.

In order to research these entanglements, several researchers in *desiguALdades.net* apply the concept of “regimes of inter-ethnic coexistence”. A regime involves a stratification principle, political discourses, political practices, corresponding legal frameworks, and day-to-day interactions.

A few preliminary results of our investigation are presented in the following table:

Table 2: Inter-ethnic Coexistence Regimes: Afro-Latin Americans

Regime Characteristics (Time Period)	Stratification/ Distribution Principle	Transregional Entanglements
Slavery (until 19th century)	Caste	Slave trade, Atlantic triangular trade
Racist Nationalism (end of slavery until ca. 1930)	Race-based ascription	Scientific exchange Europe/Americas (scientific racism)
Metizo-Nationalism (1930-1990)	Class, race-based ascription	Circulation of culturalist concepts (Americas)
Compensational Welfare (since 1990)	Class, race-based ascription, target populations	Transnational anti-racist alliances (Black Atlantic), legal entanglements, multilateral organizations

Source: adapted from Costa 2011a

The specification of these four regimes of coexistence presents a transregional figuration of inequality in its present form without overlooking its historicity (see Góngora-Mera 2012). Furthermore, this approach facilitates the description and analysis of transregional entanglements, but also of national characteristics (the different characteristics of mestizaje, varying compensation policies, etc.).

5.2 Interdependent Welfare Regimes

A further example of research in *desiguALdades.net* consists of interdependent welfare regimes that emphasize institutions, political actors, and its instruments, in addition to historical path dependencies (cf. Skocpol and Rueschemeyer 1996). The constitution and configuration of welfare regimes is investigated by interlinking various axes of inequalities (“race,” ethnicity, gender, class). Similarly, confronting Esping-Andersen’s (1990) categories of welfare regimes with the social differentiation according to gender through feminist social theory has led to critical and fruitful results (cf. Betzelt 2007; Füller 2004; Lessenich et al. 1998). Investigations outside of the United States and of Western Europe have usually been limited to comparisons of specific aspects, and have been based on a wide range of individual cases. One these cases is that of Latin America; on the one hand as a laboratory for market-oriented social policy (such as the privatization of education and health services, or the conversion of pension insurance from a redistributive system to a capital-accumulating social insurance system); and on the other as an example of the continuing fragmentation of the welfare regime caused by the focus on target groups in the war on poverty that began in the 1980s (cf. Braig 1997, 2004; Martínez Franzoni and Voorend 2009).

Beyond this, our interests lie in the effects of transregional entanglements on the welfare regimes. We have observed, in the first place, radical changes in the labor market. The opening of the Latin American labor markets led not only to massive migration across borders, but also to an informalization of the modes of occupation, connected to the growth in informal trade activities (e.g. street trading) and personal services (such as housework and taxi transportation). This affected national social systems directly, both the receiving end (e.g. reduction of contributors and therefore of the income of social security systems) as well as the giving end (e.g. undercutting the rights of contributors, budgetary deficits, divisions among different kinds of social security beneficiaries, loss of social rights, and fragmentation of target groups). The slight decrease in income disparity observed in recent years (Lopez-Calva and Lustig 2010) and the emergence of a so-called “new middle class” (Ferreira et al. 2013) exhibited in some Latin American countries can for the most part be attributed to the economic growth induced externally (primarily because of the increased global demand of raw materials and agricultural products) and the transformation of the labor markets connected with this kind of economic activity.

In the second place, the external processes that shaped social policy in Latin America bear considering. These are the external financial inflows that are either redistributed over state institutions (revenue from export products, development transfers, borrowing on international bond markets) or through remittances, which are connected with massive migration and directly modify the income distribution between households.

What these financial sources have in common is that they point local or national social policies towards a web of interdependence in value chains that exist beyond the national economy. Latin American states also attempt to intervene in this web of interdependence. The external revenues acquired during the raw material boom of the past recent years have made possible for Latin American states to increase their expenditures and transfer payments (for example in the areas of education and health) without changing the national income distribution through taxation of property or income (cf. Jiménez and Lopez Azcúnaga 2012). However, such combination of failure to increase income taxation and expansion of transfer expenditure has had a regressive effect, resulting in little improvement in bridging the difference between the primary and secondary income distribution (after taxes and transfers) in Latin America, especially in comparison to the majority of European countries (cf. Therborn 2011). Historical experience shows that a strong dependence on global processes (such as the export of raw materials) for growth is marked by high instability and periodic distortions (cf. Bértola and Ocampo 2012), limiting at the same time the scope of options for state reactions in the face of global structuring of inequalities.

In order to critically consider the concept of regime as used by Esping-Andersen (1990) in the Latin American context and to illustrate the processes of inequality in their historical interdependencies, we must place the present entanglements in their full historical context. Table 3 on the following page represents an initial consideration of types of interdependent welfare regimes:

Table 3: Interdependent Welfare Regimes

Regime Characteristics (time period)	Stratification/ Distribution Principle	Transregional entanglements
Limited liberal societies under oligarchical rule (19th to beginning of 20th century)	Social fragmentation through imposing universal rights on a corporative society; racist isolation of poor and working population, “women”, “blacks”, “indios”	Colonially and postcolonially formed international labor division; selective, resource-dependent incorporation into open world trade; partial internationalization of the elite and their lifestyles
Part of organized modernity; national-populist authoritarian regimes (1930-1970s/80s)	Urbanization, modern employment structures, classes Establishment of newer institutions between state, unions, and businesses (tripartido); at the same time marginalization of specific parts of the population	Dependence on raw material exports and of import of investment goods, and on related tariffs and duties; State regulation of global entanglements: protectionist industrial and social policy; controlled finance markets; International regimes of law in the labor market, social policy (ILO), and exchange of practices within Latin America (tripartido)
Liberal, transitional regimes (1980s and 1990s)	Informalization of the labor market; social policy oriented towards target groups; new group-specific rights	Dependence on exports; at the same time reduction of state revenues; mass migration and remittances; financial transfers with constraints; international regimes of rights

Source: Own elaboration.

6. Conclusion

desigualdades.net works with research approaches that consider the multi-dimensionality of inequalities and their transregional interdependencies, both under synchronic and diachronic perspectives, based on phenomena of social inequality observed in Latin America (see the various contributions in the desigualdades.net Working Paper Series). Using relational units of investigation that were developed for specific problems (e.g. gender and race regimes, value chains, and welfare regimes) has proven to be particularly fruitful to this end.

However, applying these relational units of investigation in an international and interdisciplinary research network also requires critical consideration of the portability of these concepts. We strive to achieve this by systematically discussing key concepts, clearly establishing the specifics of disciplinary and theoretical perspectives, and by creating a common language with common terms. These include the concepts of figuration and of regimes discussed in this paper, and the concepts of citizenship and ciudadanía among others.

The critical discussion of different approaches in the investigation of inequalities on global and transnational levels (in particular world system theories and transnationalism approaches) sharpens the focus of the analytical perspectives presented by *desigualdades.net*, in both the German and the international research on inequalities. These approaches help to further develop the spatial and temporal depths of the network's own contributions to the entanglements approach.

Our initial empirical results, which have been useful for the process of developing new units of analysis, revealed clearly the discrepancies between the global structuring of social inequalities and the negotiation of redistribution issues which are mainly located in national and subnational political arenas. These initial findings have allowed us to specify further the research question posed at the beginning of our investigation: How do global processes structure inequalities, currently and historically? We can now pose more specific questions on the discrepancy between global processes of stratification and national and subnational political negotiations. The central questions we pose for the further development of our analysis are: In which specific political arenas do negotiations over social inequalities take place – in both maintaining social distance and promoting progressive redistribution? Which discrepancies emerge from structures of inequality which are globally created and (in part) shaped, and the largely national and subnational political arenas of negotiation?

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