



Workshop

Vigilant Aspirations: Practicing Social Mobility in Spaces of Uncertainty

Convenors: Eveline Dürr, Ingo Rohrer, Tim Burger

14 November 2024, LMU Munich

This workshop explores how people aspire to and practice upward social mobility in uncertain contexts. Highlighting spaces in which complexities of belonging, economic opportunity and regimes of oppression are pronounced, we suggest that individual watchfulness is a crucial condition for ‘moving up’. Whether situated in dynamic yet policed borderlands or in ‘remote’ and deprived backwaters, aspiring actors make constant choices about how to present themselves, whom to seek intimacy with, and how to navigate the conditions of their socio-economic settings. This vigilant self-formation occurs between desired upward mobility and the operations of macro-structural processes (state policies, projects of extraction, political change etc.) and demonstrates how watchfulness is a key social practice in highly ambivalent social situations.

This workshop is situated in the Collaborative Research Center ‘Cultures of Vigilance’ (SFB 1369) which seeks to explore vigilance in its historical and cultural variations. Vigilance, here, is not so much understood through state-sponsored surveillance regimes but denotes constellations of watchfulness in which personal vigilance is related to more-than-individual goals. This lens is productive to understand aspirational strivings for ‘better lives’: we suggest that becoming vigilant about certain issues carries the potential for self-formation and upward mobility in various spaces of uncertainty. The workshop puts its ethnographic focus on questions such as: What role does vigilance play in the making of social mobility? How are individual aspirations informed by watchfulness against institutions, perceived competitors and communities? In how far are ideas about the self and ideas about community interlinked by a shared, if temporary, alertness to feasible upward mobility or structural barriers? What insights may be drawn from the interplay between hopeful aspirations, its everyday frustrations and patterns of alert social action aimed at ‘moving up’? In which specific impediments to social mobility (e.g., gendered injustice, border regimes, ecological change, state policies) is the analytic of vigilance particularly salient?

Program:

Keynote: 10:15 – 11:45

LMU, Main Building, Geschwister-Scholl-Platz 1, B 206

Professor Ruben Andersson, University of Oxford

12:00 – 13:30 Lunch

Workshop: 13:30-18:00

Multifunktionsraum, Philologicum, Ludwigstraße 25

Session 01: 13:30 – 15:00

Moderation: Ingo Rohrer

Discussant: Julia Pauli (University of Hamburg)

Eveline Dürr, LMU Munich

„Negotiating Difference and Belonging: (Un)told Stories of Migrants Returning from the USA to Mexico“

Ingo Rohrer, LMU Munich

„Surrounding Yourself with the Right People: Vigilance and Upward Social Mobility of Latinx in San Diego “

Discussion

15:00 – 15:30 Coffee Break

Session 02: 15:30 – 17:00

Moderation: Ingo Rohrer

Discussant: Yaatsil Guevara González (University of Heidelberg)

Tim Burger, LMU Munich

„Vigilant Emigrants: Transatlantic Mobility and Class Formation between California and the Azores“

Lydia Letsch, Scuola Normale Superiore

“Living on the Edge: Navigating Security, Mobility and Identity in North African Borderlands”

Discussion

17:00– 17:15 Coffee Break

17:15– 18:00 Conclusions & Outlook

19:00 Dinner

Contact: I.Rohrer@lmu.de, +49 157 39242371