

## **Class, Income and Wealth**

Explanation of the patterns and causes of social inequality lies at the heart of sociological enquiry. But what difference does a global perspective make to understandings of inequality? The focus of Chapter 7 is on global inequality and the discussion here brings earlier nation-focussed studies of inequality up to date. In simple and clear language we are led through the main patterns of inequality in income and wealth and how these are distributed across the world. Foremost among these patterns is a worsening of global inequality over recent decades, both within countries and between them.

It is useful to have generalisations of this kind, but there is also a danger that complexities and cross-currents may be lost sight of within one brief chapter. This stimulating chapter highlights issues and trends that readers might want to examine further. For example, one area of complexity emerges if contemporary China, the world's most populous country, is brought into the aggregate picture. While the authors rightly point to growing inequalities within China, they say little about the lessening of inequality between China and the rest of the world. This process, which may possibly be replicated by India, suggests that non-Western parts of the global economy are not necessarily trapped in unchanging or worsening levels of poverty arising from foreign domination.

Another area of complexity arises if we consider changes in patterns of global inequality over time. Here it seems there may be something of a break in trend around the 1990's. For the century before that between-country inequality was far more important as a cause of global inequality than within-country inequality, which in many areas decreased. Analysts are more puzzled about the trends since then, with some seeing a growth of within-country inequality and a possible revival of national class-based politics. Analytical uncertainties about such matters are well covered in Milanovic's book (2011).

Chapter 7 makes linkages between patterns of inequality and broader trends in social structure. A key question here is the extent to which national class structures are in transition to a more global class structure. This possibility draws on recent research on two particular phenomena- the emergence of a transnational capitalist class, and a global proletariat. What is less clear how far these structural changes have produced globally oriented class consciousness?

Taken overall, then the chapter succeeds in introducing readers to recent sociological work on class and global inequality in a clear, well-informed and jargon-free manner.

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