

Transnational Elites: Imperial Histories, Global Power and Public Resistance Today



Monday 13th - Tuesday 14th May 2024

The Royal Society, London

In affiliation with:



Department for
Science, Innovation
& Technology

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Conference Summary

Today's increasing economic inequality goes hand in hand with an uptick in elite power worldwide, raising concerns about eroding democratic governance and diminishing social cohesion. Although this trend has inspired vital new scholarship, much of this approaches elites through a national lens, and lacks attention to the past and present imperial and (neo)colonial contexts in which they operate. Yet, public debate about the role of oligarchs and kleptocracy, widespread tax evasion and use of offshore finance, and the siphoning of wealth from the Global South through them, all demonstrate the need for greater academic analysis of the transnational - and specifically imperial and (neo)colonial - dimensions of elite formation and power today. This two-day conference will make a major contribution to this scholarly agenda by bringing together leading international and interdisciplinary scholars to explore the roles and influence of contemporary transnational elites in an increasingly unequal world.

Conference Convenors

- **Dr Sarah Kunz**, University of Essex
- **Dr Katie Higgins**, University of Oxford
- **Professor Mike Savage**, London School of Economics and Political Science

Conference Notes

Thematic sessions:

The conference will include four thematic sessions. During these sessions attendees will hear four presentations, followed by a break, followed by chair's response and Q&A/discussion.

Open discussion sessions (in-person only)

At the end of each day, there will be an open discussion session. Please note that these open discussion sessions will be for in-person attendees only. The live stream for online audiences will end at 15:30 on both days.

Conference Programme

Day One: Monday 13th May, 09:15 – 17:30 (GMT)

Registration: 09:15 - 09:45

9:45 – 10:00

Welcome and Introduction

10:00 – 12:00

Thematic Session 1:
Capitalism and Finance
(incl. 20 min coffee break)

Chair:

Professor Aaron Reeves, University of Oxford

Presentations:

Professor Miguel Serna, Universidad de la República, Uruguay
'Paradoxes of Elite Gender Inequality: Social Closure and Convulsion of Political and Economic Hierarchies'

Dr Sarah Kunz, Essex University
'Offshore citizenship: Selling a 'geographically diverse portfolio' of residences and citizenships'

Professor Mike Savage, LSE
'Reassessing the British imperial diaspora as an elite formation'

Lunch: 12:20 – 13:20

13:20 – 15:30

Thematic Session 2:
Elite Formation and Reproduction
(incl. 5-10 min break)

Chair:

Dr Pere Ayling, University of Suffolk

Presentations:

Professor Shamus Khan, Princeton University
TBC

Professor Hanna Kuusela, Tampere University
'These men have done great things!' How a handful of rich entrepreneurs have colonized our minds and our understanding of inequality'

Professor Maria Luisa Méndez, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile
'Elite Schools and Social Reproduction in Chile: Cosmopolitan Repertoires at odds with Local Distinction'

Dr Ujithra Ponniah, University of Witwatersrand & **Dr Katie Higgins**, University of Oxford
'Transnational Business Elites? The Therapeutic Turn, Elite Cohesion and Reproducing Inequalities'

Tea & Coffee Break: 15:30 – 16:00

16:00 – 17:30pm

Open Discussion

Elites in the context of imperial pasts and presents. (Moderated by the conference convenors. In-person attendees only)

18:00 onwards

Drinks Reception (open to all conference attendees)

Day Two: Tuesday 14th May, 09:30 – 17:30 (GMT)

Registration with tea and Coffee: 09:30 – 10:00

10:00 – 12:20

Thematic Session 3:
Transnational Infrastructures and Intermediaries
(incl. 20 min coffee break)

Chair:

Katie Higgins, University of Oxford

Presentations:

Professor Jorge Atria, Universidad Diego Portale
'Legitimizing Accumulation: Lawyers', Economists', and Accountants' Justifications of Wealth Defence'

Professor Leonard Seabrooke, Copenhagen Business School
'Professional Action in Imperial Fields: The Rise of Offshore Finance' (paper co-authored with Brooke Harrington)

Dr Annalena Oppel, LSE
'Meritocracy and race: Perceptions and attributions for success'

Professor Kimberly Hoang, University of Chicago
'Spiderweb Capitalism: Uncovering Secret Offshore Financial Webs'

Lunch: 12:20 – 13:20

13:20 – 15:30

Thematic Session 4:
Racialisation, Gender Relations and Intra-elite Inequalities
(incl. 5-10 min break)

Chair:

Professor Annette Lareau, University of Pennsylvania

Presentations:

Professor John Osburg, University of Rochester
'Naturalizing New Wealth: Lessons from Post-Mao China's New Rich'

Dr Denisse Sepúlveda, Centro de Estudios de Conflicto y Cohesión Social
'An intersectional exploration of access privilege positions of upwardly mobile indigenous people in Chile'

Dr Parul Bhandari, University of Cambridge
TBC

Tea & Coffee Break: 15:30 – 16:00

16:00 – 17:30

Open Discussion

Challenging elite power and inequality today
(moderated by the conference convenors. In-
person attendees only)

18:00 – 20:00

Conference Dinner

(Invited speakers and chairs only)