



Editorial introduction: REPE symposium on inequalities, social stratification, and stratification economics

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Institutional and evolutionary economists have long studied the existence of persistent inequalities. Today, many of these economists continue to emphasize the problems of social and economic inequalities, while engaging with newer nuances and developments in the social sciences. Stratification Economics (SE) is an emerging body of scholarship in heterodox economics and political economy more widely that addresses the institutionalized nature of economic inequality, based on group stratification. It is papers that apply the thinking of SE that constitute the focus of this symposium.

In the first paper in this symposium, Nitika Dhingra (2022) examines land laws and conflicts around land use in India over the last 100 years. The article pays particular attention to the 2013 Land Acquisition Act, which ultimately deepened existing class and caste stratification. Using this institutional setting, the analysis in the paper makes two contributions. First, it gives an example of historical and existing mechanisms of stratification and exclusion. Second, it articulates the ways in which an analysis of the development of land rights in India from a mainstream economic perspective founded in the concepts of efficiency and growth (would) mask brutal conflicts around land possession and use. The article demonstrates how quasi-efficiency arguments based on land dispossession for the public purpose of infrastructure improvement dismiss and override local sensibilities, leading to a systematically unjust distribution of resources.

Next, Mariano Féliz and Emilia Millón (2022) consider how the macroeconomic conditions of stagnation and crisis in Argentina between 2009 and 2020 led to a rise in structural inequality. A key contribution of this paper to the SE literature is its

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measure of inequality. The approach taken in the paper distinguishes between different aspects of stratification like educational opportunities and the incidence of unemployment, because income alone does not explain the vulnerability of particular households to changing economic conditions. In this paper, we see that structural elements of socioeconomic position interact with macroeconomic changes to create and perpetuate economic stratification.

Finally, Pedro Fandiño (2022) revisits existing explanations of persistent wage inequality in Brazil. Not only does the Brazilian experience defy the neoclassical thesis that inequality follows an inverted U-shaped curve, it also questions the worn-out radical thesis that inequality in Brazil is a reflection of the country's colonial past alone. Instead, Fandiño contends that social conventions, social norms, and social protection in explaining inequality in Brazil must be taken into account, too. Any explanation of public policies designed to address inequalities must also entail an emphasis on social conventions.

These papers give compelling examples of why it is crucially important to engage with Stratification Economics. The authors of the three papers in this symposium submitted their work in response to our call for papers for a special issue on SE. The articles in this symposium sit in between institutional economists' long-standing interest in inequality and the new subfield of SE. They are examples of *applications* of an SE approach to analyzing structural and multidimensional economic inequality. They each deal empirically with structural and institutionalized social and economic mechanisms that ascribe people to groups with different and differential economic rights and opportunities.

Stratification Economics is a field of economics concentrating on the analysis of institutionalized inter-group inequality. It considers the socially embedded mechanisms that stratify groups of people into privileged and disadvantaged positions of varying levels as to the access to and control of economic resources and opportunities (Darity 2009). These mechanisms can work via institutions as broad and variable in nature as social norms, laws, traditions, and formal establishments.

The strengths of SE are numerous. First, it questions and is critical of neoclassical economic theories and understanding of inequality. SE's critique of mainstream economics lies in the latter's inability to fully engage the institutional forces and power differentials that systematically put people into unequal groups. Established primarily by Black economists, SE has traditionally considered race and racism as key stratifying mechanisms in its analysis. However, SE perspectives on the economy also consider the intersections of socioeconomic class, gender, ethnicity, migratory background, caste, ability, and sexual orientation as lines along which economic opportunities and outcomes are systematically stratified.

Another strength of SE is its use of holistic methodologies, including more historical approaches to political economy. SE puts a sharper focus on the relationship between stratifying institutions and resulting economic inequalities over time and space. Lastly, SE engages with concrete policy proposals such as reparations (Darity and Mullen 2020; Darity et al. 2022). These have been empirically demonstrated to more directly address group-based inequalities more effectively than traditional institutional economic policies (Mason et al. 2022). After congealing fully in the USA, SE has started to attract world-wide attention. This new subfield has

been developed further in Latin America (Mitchell-Walthour 2017), Africa (Obeng-Odoom 2020), and Asia (Vijaya and Bhullar 2022). So, geographical context is also systematically nuancing the development of this new subfield.

The papers in this symposium give us cutting-edge examples of how to apply the insights of Stratification Economics to a broad range of intersectional political-economic inequalities across institutional contexts over time. We hope that this symposium will inspire future empirical work that draws on SE to provide a deeper understanding of the nature of institutionalized stratification in economic inequality and inspire transformative policy and social action.

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