

Call for Sessions - WEHC 2015 [S20027]

Proposed title of the session

An Undervalued Comparison. Growth, Inequality and Institutions in Africa and Latin America since 1492

Abstract

Comparing the 'Lost Decades' in post-independence Africa (1970-2000) and Latin America (1820-1870) Bates, Coatsworth and Williamson (2007) have pointed to several interesting analogies in both region's transition from a colonial to a post-colonial social, political and economic order. Although their study did not generate much follow-up research, there may be good reasons to give the Africa-Latin America comparison a new impulse. Both regions share a history of colonial occupation and European settlement, which has shaped a great deal of post-colonial development trajectories, including a legacy of deep-seated socio-economic and political inequality. In both regions the exploitation of natural resources has been key to long-term economic development patterns, provoking heated debates about the sustainability of growth. Africa and Latin America also share experiences with debt crises and macro-economic mismanagement, in the context of particular political-economic conditions. And finally, the legacy of African slave immigration into Latin America continues to have a serious economic, social and cultural impact.

But apart from exploring a fruitful analytical perspective, the Africa-Latin America comparison serves a wider aim: making global economic history a truly global discipline, in which 'development' is no longer pre-dominantly evaluated along the European yardstick. The vast number of sessions on African Economic History at the WEHC 2012 in Stellenbosch already indicated that economic historians are increasingly making up for lost ground. However, Africa has not yet been situated in global comparative studies of economic development in a similar way as Asia or Latin America. Asia figures prominently in larger Eurasian comparisons, whereas Latin America has been studied intensively in comparison to both European and North American development trajectories. But the literature on Africa has largely focussed on the connections with other parts of the world, particularly in the context of the Atlantic slave trades and European colonialism, but much less so in comparison to other world regions, with the exception of a few studies which have taken Europe as the mirror image.

This session invites economic historians to engage into, and further explore the potential of the Africa-Latin America comparison, especially in relation to long term trajectories of economic growth, inequality and institutional development. The scope for comparisons is enormous, ranging from specific colonial legacies, fiscal policies, trade relations, financial markets, educational developments, the resource curse, the functioning of indigenous (pre-colonial) states or comparative systems of labour coercion. It would also be very valuable to analyse the current economic boom in Africa (1995-present) in relation to the late 19th C. commodity boom in Latin America. Such comparisons would constitute a next step in developing a truly global framework for understanding long-term economic development, one that breaks with Eurocentric conceptions of global inequality and one that places more emphasis on comparisons within and across the former 'periphery'.

Session participants are also invited to attend the pre-conference "Exploring the Africa-Latin America comparison in global economic history and development" Montevideo, March 2015, organized by the Research Institute for Development, Growth and Economics (RIDGE), a joint venture between the Uruguayan Government and the International Economics Association.

I. Corresponding Session Organiser

Prof. Ewout Frankema (Wageningen University & Utrecht University [Netherlands])

II. Co-Organiser(s)

1. Corresponding Organiser.
2. Prof. Luis Bertola (Universidad de la República, Montevideo [Uruguay])

III. Expected Participant(s)

1. same as correspondent.
2. Luis Bertola (Universidad de la República, Montevideo [Uruguay])
3. Jeffrey Williamson (Harvard University [United States of America])
4. Leandro Prados de la E. (Carlos Tercero [Spain])
5. Leigh Gardner (London School of Economics [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])
6. Alejandra Irigoin (London School of Economics [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland])
7. Marlous van Waijenburg (Northwestern University [United States of America])
8. Gareth Austin (Graduate Institute Geneva [Switzerland])
9. Regina Grafe (European University Institute, Florence [Italy])