

Comparing inequalities:

Poverty, inequality, violence and the Covid-pandemics in Africa and Latin America

Livio Sansone (UFBA)

There are very few studies comparing the histories of poverty across the South. At a time when the social sciences seem to have lost their critical edge, it is crucially important to compare key aspects of poverty, as these might offer fresh perspectives on the condition of the contemporary world. Key aspects of poverty demanding urgent comparison include in particular the inequalities that have generated it, the forms it has taken over time, the survival strategies of those affected by it, the narratives of inequality among haves and have-nots, and, last but not least, how poverty is linked to various degrees and forms of violence. While poverty can be viewed as a subjective and relative concept, the icons and status symbols that define both poverty and wealth have often been very similar across different regions and periods. Globalization may be rendering them even more similar because of expectations bearing on citizenship, consumption and individual achievement. Against such a background, a comparative approach must take into account local specificities. For example, in various contexts poverty may be connected to violent crime and social or 'ethnic' violence in very different ways.

The course 'Comparing Inequalities' aims at establishing an interface between two debates that have taken place in relative isolation from each other up until now: the discussion on the staying power of extreme inequalities in most human societies and the debate about modern poverty or, rather, the modernization of poverty in the South. The inequalities that have historically given rise to poverty have been manifold racial, ethnic, religious, gendered. The workshop should focus on forms of violence and accommodation related to poverty. Which forms of violence and accommodation (physical, economic, symbolic) make poverty possible overtime? And which forms of violence and accommodation have been used to overcome poverty? How have poor people in the South coped with poverty, individually or in organizations?

In our discussion, we shall give equal attention to continuities and changes over time. These are crucial given current suggestions that we can now speak of a 'global' poor condition, in which surprisingly similar survival strategies and discourses on poverty are being deployed in very different socio-cultural contexts. The suggestion that these similarities are new needs to be examined. Are certain accommodations (e.g. dropping birth rates, transnational migration and networking among the poor, youth cultures and drug abuse) being globalized? Does the same hold true for certain forms of violence connected with poverty? And how do economic policies that have been introduced in the South in the late 20th century (such as 'structural adjustment' in Africa or, more recently, "inclusion" or affirmative action in Latin America) impinge on poverty and violence today? To what extent can they be conceptualized as forms of violence with an impact on the form and content of poverty?

Any international or transnational South-South comparison of the relationship between poverty and violence needs from its very start to shed light on two facts: a. Africa and Latin America are the parts of the world with the highest GINI index and rates of physical violence. b. Nowadays, on the eve of massive and rapid globalization, international comparison bears an earnest methodological question – what is to be compared in a world where also the icons of success and failure tend to be increasingly global.

The course will use texts on a variety of countries from the two regions and my empirical research on inequalities, consumption, globalization and identity formation in Brazil, Cape

Verde, Senegal and Guinea Bissau.

Participation in class (reading the session texts and speaking) is essential and counts for 30% of the final note, there is also an oral presentation or research document (30%), and a final dissertation (40%).

Students are supposed to read at least but no more than 1 text in English/Portuguese or Spanish per week.

The course, which aims at being exploratory and experimental rather than exhaustive, will be taught in French and is organized into five topics:

Classes:

1-2. The origins of extreme and durable inequalities in Africa and Latin America: slavery, colonialism and the religion of the “race”: paving the way for the naturalization of violence.

Reading: Appiah Anthony. Race, Culture and Identity, pp. 53-98

Film: Black Venus

3. The consolidation of poverty and subaltern status in the XX century, and the transition from poverty to inequality: assessing 50 years postcoloniality in Africa and the transition from authoritarian rule to mature democracy in Latin America.

Readings: Lynn Stephen. 2008. “RECONCEPTUALIZING LATIN AMERICA” in Debora Poole ed. *A Companion to Latin American Anthropology*, London: Blackwell, 426-446

Appiah, Anthony “The invention of Africa”, in *In My Father’s House*, pp; 3-28

Samir Amin 1972. “Underdevelopment and Dependence in Black Africa: Historical Origin”, Journal of Peace Research, 9, 2: 105-120

Frederick Cooper 2002. Africa Since 1940. The Past of the Present. New York: Cambridge University Press pp: 1-19.

Films:

Trilogy on Belgian Congo
La Battaglia di Algeri

4-5. Modern forms of inequalities: consumption, communication technologies, youth cultures and globalization at play. The cell phone & internet revolution. The making of new “needs” and forms of relative deprivation.

Readings:

Francis Nyamnjoh 2004. "Globalisation, Boundaries and Livelihoods: Perspectives on Africa", Identity, Culture and Politics, Vol 5, Nos. 1 & 2, 2004, pp. 37-59

Francis B. Nyamnjoh 2005. "Fishing in troubled waters. Disquettes and thiofs in Dakar", Africa 75(3): 295-324

Wim van Binsbergen, Rijk van Dijk & Jan-Bart Gewald 2004. Situating globality: African agency in the appropriation of global culture. An introduction, pp. 1-52.

Livio Sansone 2015. "Inequalities and identity narratives in Cape Verde: nowhere to hide on small islands with no woods".

Films on technology and globalization

6-7 New perceptions of inequalities and new "solutions": violence and a violent lifestyle, new alternative lifestyles, making neo-communities, new religious fundamentalisms, new regimes of memory, a new culture around poverty and inequalities.

Chabal Patrick 2009. The Politics of Suffering and Smiling. Pp 150-171

Jean and John Comaroff 2009. "Commodifying Descent, American-Style", Ethnicity Inc. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, pp. 60-85

Livio Sansone "A Bahian Counterpoint of Sugar and Oil: Global Commodities, Global Identities?". In: Jan Nederveen Pieterse and Adalberto Cardoso eds. Brazil: Emerging, London: Routledge, 171-191.

Films: Children of God and Bronx-Abidjan

8-9 The politics of the virus in Africa and Latin America: Coronavirus, modern pandemics, geopolitics, extreme populism and necropolitics

Readings to be given.

10-11 Comparing contemporary Africa with Latin America: state withdrawal versus new statism. Populist styles. Continuities and ruptures. The politics of comparison and the meaning and logic of the South-South perspective: durable and extreme inequalities and the geopolitics of knowledge.

12 In conclusion there will be a wrapping-up seminar, in which each student will present a brief report.

The course will be taught in French.