

World Income Inequality 1820-2000

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1. Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present a new dataset of global inequality between 1820 and the present, based on the available historical evidence, and to tentatively analyse some of the results that emerge from these data. The importance of the subject hardly needs to be stressed: the enormous increase of inequality on a global scale is one of the most significant – and worrying – features of the development of the world economy in the past 200 years. For this reason, the subject has become one of the most discussed topics in the social sciences; in particular the debate on the measurement and interpretation of recent trends in global inequality – is it still increasing? and why or why not? – has attracted considerable attention (Deininger and Squire, 1996; Jones, 1997; Bourguignon and Morrison, 2002; Milanovic, 2007 for a review of the debate). Economic historians have also intensely discussed the long term trends in the world that lead to the growing income disparities between nations and changed patterns of inequality within nations, although often using other concepts (such as ‘the Great Divergence’). We argue, however, that we lack the historical data to really analyse these patterns of changing global inequality in detail. The one paper that has attempted to do this, Bourguignon and Morrison’s seminal AER 2002 article, is for the period before 1950 largely based on the assumption that income inequality within countries is unchanging. They extrapolate their estimates of income inequality in certain periods to cover much longer time periods, as a result of which, we think, changes in income inequality within countries are clearly underestimated. For large parts of the world the result is that estimates from the post 1914 or even the post 1945 period are used to infer income inequality in the 19th century, and that, in other words, inequality within countries is assumed to have remained constant. For Latin America and Africa B & M rely completely on 20th century data to estimate inequality in the 19th century; for Asia they have in total four historical estimates (in fact often very partial estimates): one for China in 1890, two for Indonesia and one for Japan. The dataset for Europe and North America is somewhat better, but also uses only part of the evidence available. For a large majority of the world’s population, and almost all people living in the ‘developing countries’, their estimates are based on almost no historical evidence, implying that we really cannot rely on their work to analyse the long term patterns of global inequality. Moreover, scholars interested in the question whether different levels of inequality may have affected the way in which countries participated in the Great Divergence, cannot use this dataset to analyse such a possible link, as it simply does not have sufficient historical observations to make such an analysis feasible.

For these reasons, we have set out to try to create a new dataset of global inequality focused on improving the estimates of inequality within countries through the use of the results of (old and) recent research on this topic, and through the application of a number of indirect ways of measuring (changes in) income inequality in the past. In reviewing their work, we saw no reasons to modify the other pillar of the Bourguignon and Morrison paper, the estimates by Maddison of inter-country inequality (although we used an updated version of his estimates, Maddison 2003); there has been some discussion about, in particular, his 19th century estimates, which have been criticised for a number of reasons, such as underestimating GDP per capita (or more in general, welfare levels) in China (and India, and Japan) at the beginning of the 19th century (Pomeranz 2001, but see Van Zanden 2002); for underestimating GDP per capita of the US during much of the 19th century (Ward and Devereux 2005); and more fundamentally, because of possible fundamental flaws in the methodology, which uses 1990 benchmark estimates of PPP-corrected GDP per capita, which are then extrapolated back in time using time series of GDP and population (Prados de la Escosura 2000). We think that for the 19th and 20th century the Maddison framework is the best on offer, and probably catches the overall changes in inter-country inequality rather well. Perhaps Chinese income per capita at the beginning of the 19th century is underestimated somewhat and the decline sketched by Maddison is perhaps even larger than he envisaged; the relative position of the US versus the UK is still a matter of considerable debate (Broadberry 2003), but it is not clear that this will affect the overall pattern of global inequality very much – as a different assessment of the Chinese growth record would clearly do.¹ We consider the within country estimates of income inequality to be the weaker part of the estimates of global inequality, where in view of ongoing research in this area, much more progress could be made, and we therefore concentrated on this part of the story.

How did we enlarge the dataset? Basically, in three ways: firstly, by incorporating new research done since the 1990s and collecting the results of older research overlooked by B & M. This, however, does not really solve the problem of the data gap between rich and poor – probably the gap even widens, as much more evidence is available and much more work has been done on Europe and the Americas than on Africa or large parts of Asia. Therefore, in order to get a more balanced set of estimates, we had to apply two alternative ways of estimating (changes in) income inequality suggested in the literature. The first one, which we particularly used for the 19th century (and for a few countries also to the interwar period), was to infer changes in income inequality from the development of the ratio between GDP per capita and wages of unskilled labourers. The idea, initially suggested by Jeffrey Williamson (1998, 2000), and recently tested by Leandro Prados de la Escosura (2008) is that if wages lag behind income per capita, inequality is probably increasing; conversely, if wages grow faster than GDP per capita, this may point to a decline in inequality. We tested this relationship for a set of countries for which we had independent estimates of inequality of income distribution, and found a small but (just) significant effect, which we used to extrapolate (or intrapolate) estimates of the Ginis of income distribution. The second ‘new’ approach that we applied is to use data on the distribution of heights of the population that can be derived from different sources to estimate the Gini of the income distribution. Again, for a subset of countries for which

¹ At some point we hope to experiment with the alternative set of estimates produced by Prados de la Escosura 2000.

we have both independent Gini coefficients of income distribution and data on the distribution of heights, we could establish the link between the two measures of socio-economic disparities; the found relationship was then used to estimate income inequality for those countries and periods for which other data were lacking. This procedure has been developed by Baten (1999) and Moradi and Baten (2005), and has now been extended to a much broader sample of countries (all details below).

Moreover, we identified a group of 30 countries – most of them relatively large, but spread more or less equally over the globe (with an inevitable over-representation of Western Europe, however) – for which we tried to get consistent estimates of income inequality for all the benchmark years, starting in 1820. These countries were: (in Europe) Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia/USSR, Spain, Sweden, Czechoslovakia, UK; (in Asia) China, India, Indonesia, Japan, Thailand, Turkey; (in the Americas) Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Mexico, Peru, USA; (in Africa) Egypt, Ghana; and Australia. Together, these countries represent 70-80% of the world's population (according to the Maddison estimates). We think this dataset is more or less representative of global trends, although it is handicapped by the underrepresentation of in particular Africa in it (and the overrepresentation of Western Europe). In a second step, we considered all countries with 500,000 and more inhabitants. To this were added all countries, even those for which we have only a few – and sometimes only one – datapoint (Botswana in 1990, or Sudan in 1910, 1929, and 1970, for example).

2. Data

2.1 Income inequality in post 1945 period

Data on income inequality is relatively scattered. However, for the twentieth century two important sources may be distinguished that contain direct information on income inequality. First, there are the direct Gini-coefficients. One major source is the WIID (2008). These cover most of the period after 1950. However, these estimates are not completely consistent. As pointed out by François and Rojas-Romagosa (2005), three broad groups can be distinguished based on gross household income, net household income and expenditure data. These are not mutually exchangeable because the trend in these data is different (François and Rojas-Romagosa 2005). The major actor causing a different trend is income/expenditure smoothing: progressive taxation, extra earnings from by-employment, and the black economy all contribute to some kind of smoothing of expenditure and net income. In addition, the wealthy are expected to save a larger share of their income, and therefore the observed expenditures are far from being a linear function of income. Finally, François and Rojas-Romagosa (2005, 17) point out that expenditure measures are subject to bias caused by borrowing or lending. These factors are especially prevalent in the post World War II period when many countries expanded their income taxation. However, as suggested by Van Leeuwen and Foldvari (2008) for Indonesia, it seems that there is only a relative short transition phase when income taxes gain ground. This means that, after (and also before) a relatively short transition period after WWII, the trends in the net hh/expenditure Ginis and the gross household income gini are again similar. We test this hypothesis for a larger sample of countries in regressions, where we regress the gross household Gini prior to 1980 (and after 1980) on the net household income Gini, a trend, a cross effect of trend and net household income Gini.

Before 1980

```
. xtreg grosshhincome nethhincome nethhincomet t doecd dsocialist dafrica dasia
dlatinamerica daustralia d
> northamerica if year<1981, rob fe
```

```
Fixed-effects (within) regression      Number of obs   =      82
Group variable: countrynum~r          Number of groups =      12

R-sq:  within = 0.7298                  Obs per group:  min =      1
      between = 0.9121                    avg   =      6.8
      overall = 0.8775                    max   =      36

corr(u_i, Xb) = 0.5026                  F(3,11)         =     59.35
                                          Prob > F         =     0.0000
```

(Std. Err. Adjusted for 12 clusters in countrynumber)

| | Coef. | Robust Std. Err. | T | P> t | [95% Conf. Interval] | |
|--------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|-------|-------|----------------------|-----------|
| grosshhinc~e | | | | | | |
| nethhincome | .7876379 | .1768145 | 4.45 | 0.001 | .3984717 | 1.176804 |
| nethhincomet | .0021408 | .0002889 | 7.41 | 0.000 | .001505 | .0027766 |
| t | -.0729689 | .0141431 | -5.16 | 0.000 | -.1040975 | -.0418402 |
| _cons | 9.420317 | 6.075219 | 1.55 | 0.149 | -3.951149 | 22.79178 |
| sigma_u | 2.8443162 | | | | | |
| sigma_e | 1.0527019 | | | | | |
| rho | .87952345 | (fraction of variance due to u_i) | | | | |

After 1980

```
. xtreg grosshhincome nethhincome nethhincomet t doecd dsocialist dafrica dasia
dlatinamerica daustralia d
> northamerica if year>1980, rob fe
```

```
Fixed-effects (within) regression      Number of obs   =     114
Group variable: countrynum~r          Number of groups =      23

R-sq:  within = 0.4624                  Obs per group:  min =      1
      between = 0.8302                    avg   =      5.0
      overall = 0.7872                    max   =      17

corr(u_i, Xb) = 0.6261                  F(3,22)         =     11.34
                                          Prob > F         =     0.0001
```

(Std. Err. adjusted for 23 clusters in countrynumber)

| | Coef. | Robust Std. Err. | t | P> t | [95% Conf. Interval] | |
|--------------|-----------|-----------------------------------|-------|-------|----------------------|----------|
| grosshhinc~e | | | | | | |
| nethhincome | .3671768 | .4023948 | 0.91 | 0.371 | -.467339 | 1.201693 |
| nethhincomet | .0034468 | .0069078 | 0.50 | 0.623 | -.0108792 | .0177728 |
| t | -.0590284 | .224085 | -0.26 | 0.795 | -.5237522 | .4056954 |
| _cons | 19.61811 | 11.80289 | 1.66 | 0.111 | -4.859587 | 44.0958 |
| sigma_u | 2.771718 | | | | | |
| sigma_e | 1.6913547 | | | | | |
| rho | .728668 | (fraction of variance due to u_i) | | | | |

In the period prior to 1980, the cross-sectional effect is significant and positive, implying that (combined with the coefficient of the net household Gini), that the net household Gini grows slower the gross household Gini. If we compare the same regression from the period after 1980, where we may reasonably assume that there is a linear relationship

between the gross and net household Gini, we indeed find none of the coefficients significant.

2.2 Direct estimates for pre 1945 period

Reworking the WIID dataset is a first step. A lot of new work has been done recently on the estimation of income inequality in the past that can also be included in the dataset. This consists of two things: direct Gini coefficients can be obtained from several other, mostly scattered publications. A good overview of a lot of the historical work is supplied by Lindert, Milanovic and Williamson (2007), and on the Global Income and Prices website at UC Davis (<http://gpih.ucdavis.edu/Distribution.htm>). New work has also been done (and old work has gone unnoticed), by Bertola et al. (2009) for parts of South America, Rossi et al. (2001) for Italy, Soltow and Van Zanden (1998) for the Netherlands.

A separate category of new work is related to income share estimates, in particular the project focused on estimating the historical development of the share of the richest 1 or 5 % in total income, inspired by the work of Piketty and Atkinson. Studies are available for Australia (1921-2003) (Atkinson and Leigh 2007a), Canada (1920-2000) (Saez and Veall 2005), France (1905-1998) (Piketty 2007), Germany (1925-1998) (Dell 2007), India (1922-1999) (Bannerjee and Piketty 2003), Indonesia (1920-2004) (Leigh and Van der Eng 2007), Ireland (1922-2000) (Nolan 2007), Japan (1886-2002) (Moriguchi and Saez 2006), Netherlands (1914-1999) (Salverda and Atkinson 2007), New Zealand (1921-2002) (Atkinson and Leigh 2005), Spain (1981-2002) (Alvaredo and Saez 2006), Sweden (1903-2004) (Roine and Waldenström 2006), Switzerland (1933-1996) (Dell, Piketty, and Saez 2007), UK (1908-2000) (Atkinson 2007b) and the USA (1913-2004) (Piketty and Saez 2006b).

One problem, however, is how to convert these income shares, which are nothing more than just one point on the Lorenz curve, into Ginis. The only way this can be done is by assuming a distribution. Two distributions are normally used: a log-normal, and a Pareto distribution (see Soltow 1998). We use the log-normal distribution in this paper. Lopez and Servén (2006) shows that the Lorenz-curve, under the assumption of log-normality, can be expressed as follows:

$$L(p) = \Phi(\Phi^{-1}(p) - \sigma)$$

Where p denotes the poorest p^{th} quantile of the population, and σ is the standard deviation of the log income and $\Phi(\cdot)$ denotes the cumulative normal distribution.

The Gini coefficient (G) can be expressed as:

$$\sigma = \sqrt{2} \Phi^{-1}\left(\frac{1+G}{2}\right)$$

In the end, it turned out that on average the difference between both methods was limited. Van Leeuwen and Foldvari (2008, 16-17) claim that their level slightly differs. More interesting is the question if the movement over time of the estimated Gini is really independent of using a Pareto or lognormal distribution. As the Gini in both cases is estimated using only one point at the Lorenz curve (mostly of the upper quintiles), this is

actually the question as to whether the relative distribution of the upper quintiles versus the lower quintiles changes over time. Clearly, this is a bold assumption, but there is some evidence in its favor. First, Soltow (1998, 17) argues that at max the distribution of the top 33% richest person resembles a Pareto distribution while the log-normality assumption may work fine otherwise. Hence, the suggestion is to use the lowest possible quintile to calculate the Gini coefficient using a log-normal distribution. Second, another way of looking at this issue is by the extraction ratio (Milanovic et al. 2007). This indicates how much of the above-subsistence income is extracted by the rich. Although it therefore does not say much about the distribution sec, it can be considered as an indication of the shape of the Lorenz curve. As indicated by Milanovic et al. (2007, Table 2 and Figure 4), with the exception of some very poor countries, this changes relatively little over time in the twentieth century. Consequently, the relative position of the upper and lower quintiles also does not change much over time meaning that using either a Pareto or lognormal distribution does not bias the change of the estimated Gini coefficients over time. Indeed, as most income shares are calculated for Western countries in the twentieth century, we may accept this assumption. Finally, and most importantly, empirical results seem to confirm this finding.

In this paper we will use the log-normal distribution given the situation that the log-normal is most widely used and is applicable both on higher and lower classes in society. Since this only provides a trend of inequality, we can use benchmark Ginis to bring the Gini estimates back in time using the income share estimates.

2.3 GDP divided by unskilled wages as a proxy

Above two methods give us a reasonable complete picture of income distribution among countries in the twentieth century. Except for some direct estimates of income inequality available for a limited number of countries not much is known, however, for the earlier period. For earlier periods (and for countries with less abundant data) we therefore have to rely on proxies for income inequality. Several options exist, for example, the economic distance between the landed elite and landless labour or the ratio of average family income (y) to that of an unskilled rural labourer (w). Both methods draw heavily on the extraction rate (Lindert et al.). This ratio indicates what share of potential surplus can be taken from the poorer groups, hence increasing inequality.

The basic equation used by Milanovic et al is:

$$G_t^* = \frac{1-\varepsilon}{\mu_t} (s \mu_t)$$

where G^* is the possible maximum Gini, ε is the share of higher class people (assumed constant), μ the mean income (per capita GDP) and s the unskilled income. When taking logarithm of both sides, this becomes:

$$\ln G_t^* = \ln(1-\varepsilon) + \ln s + \ln \mu_t$$

If we assume that the expropriation of the incomes of lower classes by the elite is not complete we can have a more general form:

$$\ln G_t^* = \ln(1-\varepsilon) + \beta \ln s + \gamma \ln \mu_t$$

where $\beta=\gamma=1$ is the basic case, with the maximum income diversion. In our case, we used a LSDV regression model with GDP and wage premium as independent variables, i.e.

$$\ln G = \ln(y/wus) + \ln y + D_{i,t}$$

Where the dummies indicate year and country. The sources used for the real wage series were Williamson (1999a, 1999b, 2000), Mitchell (1998 a, b, c), Allen (2001), Mironov (2004), and Allen et al. (2005); the GDP estimates were again taken from Maddison. This results in a fit of 0.7.

2.4 The distribution of heights as a proxy

A completely independent method of looking at early inequality is by looking at the relation between inequality in heights and income inequality. For example Baten (1999, 2000, 2000a), Pradhan et al. 2003, Moradi and Baten (2005), Sunder (2003), Guntupalli and Baten (2006) have argued that the coefficient of variance of the height of individuals may be a proxy for income distribution. The idea is that growth takes place especially between age 0 and 5, that there are no genetic population differences in height. As wealthier people have better food and shelter and less illnesses, they tend to be taller. Hence, the variation of height at the present may be indicative of income distribution during the decade of birth.

Heights offer a good complement to conventional inequality indicators and constitute perhaps an even better indicator in some respect. If the distribution of food and medical goods in an economy becomes more unequal, heights should also become more unequal. Yet while a correlation with income does exist, this correlation is only partial. Some important inputs are not traded on markets but are provided as public goods, such as public health measures or food supplements for schoolchildren. Public goods lead to modest deviations between purchasing power-based and height-based inequality measures. Moreover, income totally neglects transfers within households. This is a major argument in favor of height-based inequality measures: heights are an outcome indicator, whereas real income represents an input to human utility. Deaton (2001) and Pradhan et al. (2003) have argued convincingly that measures of health inequality are important in their own right, not only in relation to income. Heights do capture important biological aspects of the standard of living (Komlos, 1985; Steckel, 1995), irrespective of the fact that some problems regarding the stature variable may exist.

Anthropometric methods are even more advantageous for studying developing countries of the 20th and the generally poorer countries of the 19th century. To date, the development of inequality within LDCs could not be sufficiently explored because reliable data were lacking. The well-known Deininger and Squire data set (1996), for example, provides only eight gini coefficients of income for Sub-Saharan Africa for the period before 1980, labeled as “acceptable”. Atkinson and Brandolini (2001) convincingly pointed to serious flaws in the income inequality data collected by Deininger and Squire, arising from insufficient consistency across countries and over time. For those countries, height inequality measures can provide important additional insights. We do not claim that height is the only accurate measure of inequality, but argue

that it generates new insights on inequality while serving as a useful countercheck for other indicators, thereby leading to more meaningful results overall.

The effects of inequality on heights are best understood by comparing the likely outcomes of a hypothetical situation, in which a population is exposed to two alternative allocations of resources A and B after birth:

- (A) All individuals receive the same quantity and quality of resources (nutritional and health inputs). This case refers to a situation of perfect equality.
- (B) Available resources are allocated unequally (but independently of the genetic height potential of the individuals).

In the case of A, the height distribution should only reflect genetic factors. Despite perfect equality, we observe a biological variance of (normally distributed) heights in this case. Yet how does the height distribution respond to an increase in inequality (B)? The unequal allocation of nutritional, medical and shelter resources allows some individuals to gain and grow taller, while others lose and suffer from decreasing nutritional status. In comparison with the situation of perfect equality, the individual heights of the rich strata shift therefore to the right, the poor strata shift to the left. Thus rising inequality should lead to higher height inequality, although this effect is weakened by the fact that the genetic height variation accounts for the largest share of height variation. Even a bimodal height distribution could result if the resource endowment differed extremely between groups. In practice, since the biological variance continues to contribute a large share to the total variance, most height distributions are normally distributed or very close to normal, but with a much higher standard deviation than A (but see A'Hearn 2004, Jacobs, Katzur and Tassenaar 2008 on late teenagers).

The standard deviation is not a satisfactory measure of inequality, since anthropologists argue that the biological variance increases with average height (Schmitt and Harrison 1988). The coefficient of variation (CV) takes this effect into account and is a consistent and robust estimate of inequality. For a country i and a five-year-age birth decade t , the CV is defined as:

$$(1) \quad CV_{it} = \frac{\sigma_{it}}{\mu_{it}} \cdot 100$$

Thus, the standard deviation σ is expressed as a percentage of the mean μ . Baten (1999, 2000a) compared height differences between social groups using the CV for early 19th century Bavaria, since an ideal data set was available for this region and time period, with nearly the entire male population measured at a homogeneous age and the economic status of all parents recorded. The measures turned out to be highly correlated. Therefore, high CVs sufficiently reflect social and occupational differences without relying on classifications. The CV of a totally equal society is yet unknown and can only be empirically approximated. For decomposing world health inequality, Pradhan et al. (2003) tried to standardise height inequality by assuming that the height distributions in OECD countries reflect the genetic growth potential of individuals only. However, this would mean that no nutritional and health inequality exists in OECD countries, which seems highly implausible. In Germany during the 1990s, for example, height differences between social groups were as large as two centimeters (Baten and Boehm 2009; Komlos

and Kriwy 2003). Even in egalitarian Scandinavia, some height inequality remains between regions (Sunder 2003).

Moradi and Baten (2005) have estimated the relationship between income inequality and height CV for 14 African countries and 29 five-year periods. They controlled for the differences in income definition and population coverage by including dummy variables. In addition, country fixed-effects were included (Table 1, model 1 and 3) which implies that their analysis focused mainly on intertemporal effects.

They found that height CV was significant and positively correlated with the gini coefficients of income (Table 1). An increase in the CV by one unit corresponded with a rise in the gini coefficient by 13.2 points in the fixed-effects specification. It is noteworthy that the relationship between the CV and the gini coefficient is not sensitive to country fixed-effects in general. In another regression without country fixed effects (2), they obtained a coefficient between nutritional and income inequality of 20.9. Both coefficients were very close to Baten and Fraunholz's (2004) estimate for Latin America, which reported a significant coefficient of 15.5 based on gini coefficients whose underlying data are of the highest possible quality. Additional robustness tests including weighting for sample quality confirmed the relationship. Moradi and Baten (2005) recommended the following formula for translating height CVS into income ginis:

$$(2) \quad \text{Gini}_{it} = -33.5 + 20.5 * \text{CV}_{it}$$

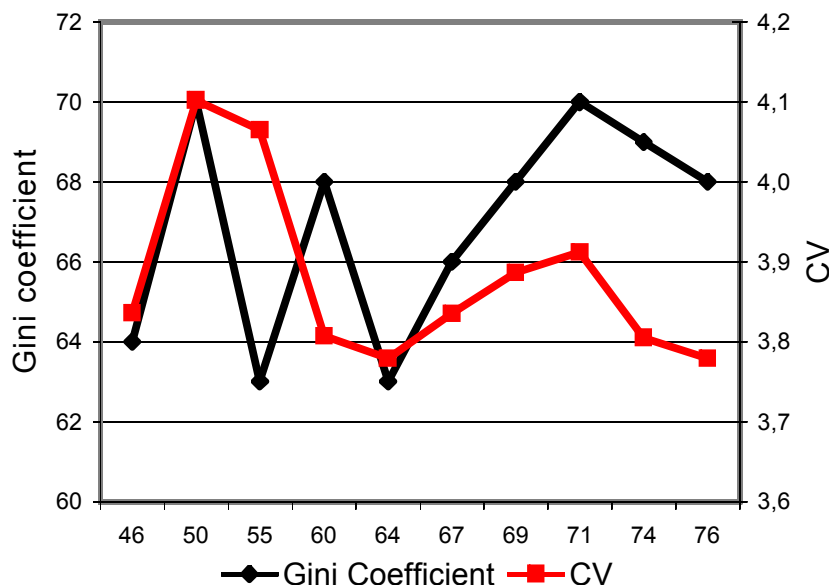
Table 1: Relationship between income (gini) and height inequality (CV)

| Gini-coefficient of income | (1) | (2) | (3) | (4) |
|---|----------------------------|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|
| Constant | -23.429 (-0.80) | -65.912 (-2.06) | 19.235 (0.23) | -33.557 (-0.70) |
| CV | 13.182 (1.72) | 20.932 (2.87) | 8.988 (0.42) | 20.547 (1.67) |
| Coverage of female population (in %) | 0.016 (0.20) | | 0.024 (0.13) | |
| Age group 20-24 (1=yes, 0=no) | -2.073 (-0.85) | | | |
| Age group 45-49 (1=yes, 0=no) | -2.343 (-0.60) | | | |
| Gabon | | 19.582 (4.22) | | 21.167 (3.01) |
| Country fixed-effects [p-value] | [0.000] | | [0.387] | |
| Fixed effects for population coverage and income definition [p-value] | [0.000] | [0.000] | [0.810] | [0.026] |
| Fixed effects for primary source [p-value] | [0.000] | [0.052] | | |
| Weighted by | share of female population | | multiple country-periods | |
| R ² -adj. | 0.812 | 0.521 | 0.324 | 0.436 |
| N | 78 | 78 | 29 | 29 |

| | | | | |
|--------------------|----|----|---|----|
| Degrees of freedom | 42 | 58 | 6 | 19 |
|--------------------|----|----|---|----|

Source: Moradi and Baten (2005). Notes: Gini coefficients which were not based on a national coverage were excluded; t-values in circular parentheses. Number of countries: 14. The reference category represents a gini based on gross income, which covers the total population and persons as reference units. When dummies for countries and the source of gini are included, the reference category additionally represents Kenya and Bigsten (1986). The population coverage controlled for refers to households, economically active population, income recipients and taxpayers, with the income definitions referring to expenditure, net income and income not nearer specified. In cases where two DHS-surveys offer information on the same birth cohort, we took the average weighted by the female population they cover. The gini coefficients were derived from twelve primary sources listed in Deininger and Squire (1996). Coverage/Age: Additionally, we would have expected a negative coefficient for the percentage of the female population measured, correcting for the somewhat higher CV when based on more women. Obviously, however, the impact is almost zero. Similarly, age effects have the expected negative sign but do not introduce a significant bias.

Figure 1: Development of income and nutritional inequality in Kenya



Source: Moradi and Baten (2005). Notes: The gini coefficients are from Bigsten (1985) with a national coverage but based on national accounts of income groups, although Deininger and Squire (1996) label them as being based on taxpayers. Bigsten (1985) admits that his estimation technique overestimates the gini coefficients by about 20 percentage points. Birth cohorts were averaged from Kenya II and Kenya III, weighted by the coverage of female population.

Moradi and Baten argued that an excellent case for comparing the development of both income and height-based inequality measures is Kenya, for which the estimates by Bigsten (1985) offer a consistent source with a sufficient number of data points (Figure 1). The development of both inequality measures is nearly identical, except for the sudden fall of the gini coefficient in 1955 with which the CV does not correspond. It is actually not clear which of the two inequality measures describes the development better, but at least it seems that the CV's movement is somewhat smoother and less volatile (the CV might moreover be less volatile due to some consumption smoothing, as people

reduce their savings in harder times to smooth their consumption). However, both the strong rise of inequality in Kenya during the early 1950s and the more gradual rise of the late 1960s are clearly visible in both series. Similarly, the decline in inequality thereafter is confirmed by both measures. Summing up, the development of CVs over time serves as a promising measure of inequality, even more so because in periods and countries in which other data on inequality are either non-existent or unreliable.

Taking the formula of Moradi and Baten (2005) and translating height CVs into income ginis, we compared the resulting gini coefficients with income based gini coefficients. Actually, most estimates between height CV and income gini have been performed for the period after 1950s when the budgets started to increase and a smaller part of that budget was allocated to food and shelter. This might bias the correlation between height CV and gini coefficient of income downwards because in many regions a lower portion of income was spent on food and shelter in the later period. Our main interest is the period prior to 1950, and especially the poorer countries. In that period budgets were relatively small, and the proportion spent on food and shelter high, so height CV and income ginis should be closer correlated than in the post-1950 period.

In sum, the relationship between gini coefficient of income and height CV seems quite well-established. Hence we collected all available data from hundreds of previously published articles (a list of references is available upon request), and benefited from scholars who provided us with their original height data sets. We excluded cases with very small numbers of height measurements, or if only one special group within a country was included. We took care that late teenage year / early twen samples, military truncation, gender, prison selectivity and other factors did not distort our samples. Finally, we calculated the height CV for each country and birth decade not covered by the income ginis and converted the CV with formula (2) into income gini equivalents.

3. Description of inequality: regions and countries

Table 2 gives a summary of the sources of the newly constructed dataset. The overall dataset consists of about 1000 estimates of gini coefficients of income inequality, spread over more than 130 countries. The greatest number of new estimates is produced by using the heights data, but because these often refer to relatively small countries, the total impact on the estimates of global inequality that will be presented is more limited. The other new sources of estimates – ‘new’ direct estimates of income inequality, and indirect estimates derived from the GDP/wage ratio – are used for the larger countries (on which we focused this part of the research). When more than one estimate for a country was available, we applied the following rules: a direct estimate of income inequality superseded all indirect estimates, which were in that case ignored; when we had two different indirect estimates, based on heights and on the GDP/wage ratio, we used more or less arbitrarily the unweighted average of the two, which happened in 54 cases (Col. 6 of Table 2). Changing this assumption does not have a big impact on the final results,

however. To get a systematic set of estimates for the core-group of 30 countries, we had to interpolate some of the estimates for those countries.²

Table 2: Overview of the sources of the dataset of income inequality, 1820-2000

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|-------|-----|------|----------------|-------------------|---------|---------------------|----------------|
| | All | WIID | 'New' ginis | GDP/wage ratic | Heights | Both 4&5 (50/50) | Interpolations |
| 1820 | 40 | 0 | 6 | 7 | 21 | 5 | 1 |
| 1850 | 40 | 0 | 1 | 9 | 18 | 8 | 4 |
| 1870 | 45 | 0 | 9 | 6 | 19 | 10 | 1 |
| 1890 | 47 | 0 | 7 | 6 | 21 | 11 | 2 |
| 1910 | 54 | 0 | 12 | 9 | 25 | 6 | 2 |
| 1929 | 55 | 0 | 16 | 12 | 19 | 7 | 1 |
| 1950 | 75 | 13 | 11 | 9 | 37 | 5 | 0 |
| 1960 | 89 | 53 | 3 | 2 | 30 | 1 | 0 |
| 1970 | 97 | 62 | 2 | 2 | 30 | 1 | 0 |
| 1975 | 53 | 48 | 1 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| 1980 | 84 | 73 | 0 | 0 | 11 | 0 | 0 |
| 1985 | 70 | 69 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1990 | 105 | 104 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1995 | 93 | 92 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 2000 | 50 | 50 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Total | 997 | 564 | 71 | 62 | 235 | 54 | 11 |

Which differences of within-country inequality would we expect for the various world regions? It is well known that in the post-1950 period there are more or less persistent differences in the level of within-country income inequality in different regions of the world; Latin America and Africa have, on average, relatively high levels of inequality, whereas Western Europe and Asia tend to have lower levels (Deiniger and Squire 1998). These patterns actually emerge when we look at the unweighted averages of the ginis of the different countries in the different regions and the world as a whole: Latin America and Africa almost always have a (much) higher average gini than Europe; the Middle East also is often above average, whereas Asia is always below average. The persistency of these patterns is indeed striking, but large changes can also be observed: Western Europe moves from above average in the 1870-1910 period to below average after 1945, a pattern that is even more pronounced in (communist dominated) Eastern Europe, which

² Estimates are complete for following countries: Argentina, Belgium, Brazil, China, Spain, France, UK, Indonesia, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Sweden, USA, Germany, India, Poland, Norway, Ghana and Mexico; interpolations were necessary for Thailand (1850, 1910), Turkey (1850, 1890, 1980), Australia (1820 is assumed to be identical to 1850), Russia/USSR (1850, 1890), Canada (1870), Chile (1820 is derived from Argentina), Czechoslovakia (1910), Denmark (1850), Egypt (1890, 1929, and 1820 derived from Turkey) and Peru (1910).

has by far the lowest ginis during the 1950-1990 period. The 'egalitarian revolution' of the 20th century is also apparent in North America/Australia, and can even be found in the (unweighted) global averages, which decline between 1929 and 1980 (by about 10%). In all regions we see an increase in inequality in the last decade of the 20th century; it is most striking in post communist Eastern Europe.

Table 3 Unweighted averages of the gini coefficients by region and period, 1820-2000

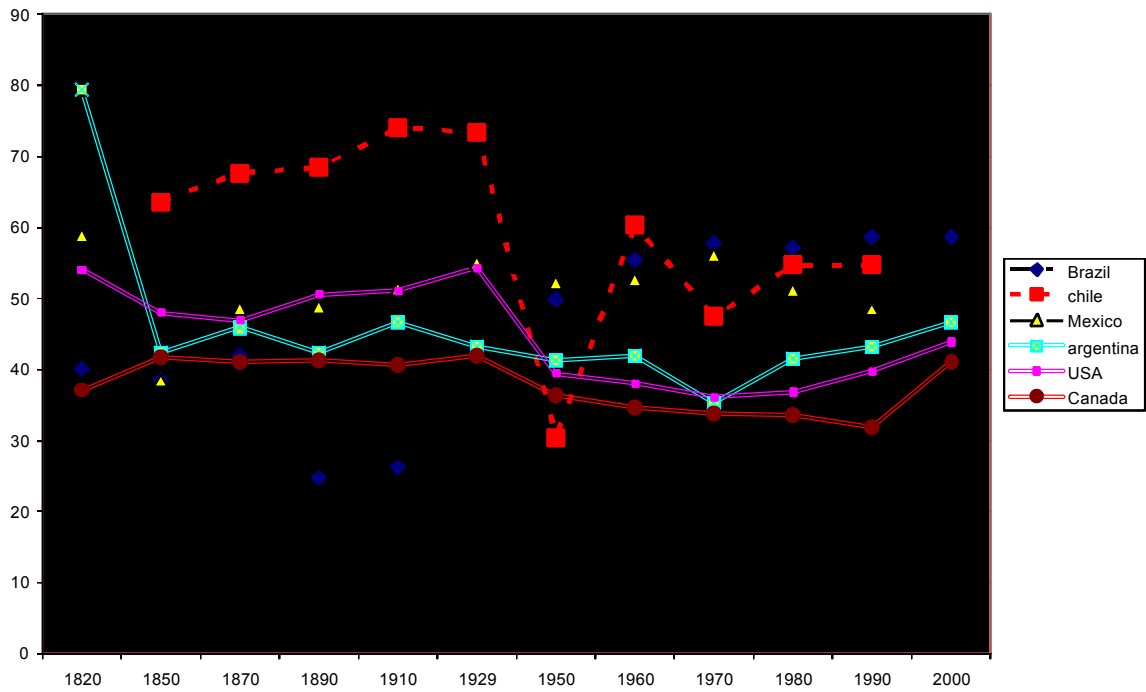
| | Western Europe | Eastern Europe | Asia | Middle East | Africa | Latin America | N.America/ Australia | World |
|--------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------|-------|----------------|--------|------------------|-------------------------|-------|
| Gini | | | | | | | | |
| 1820 | 49,73 | 43,42 | 49,08 | 57,71 | 44,60 | 66,74 | 45,92 | 49,65 |
| 1850 | 46,16 | 43,86 | 43,08 | 51,73 | 52,42 | 47,42 | 44,54 | 46,04 |
| 1870 | 49,19 | 49,86 | 39,39 | 46,93 | 53,13 | 53,80 | 42,48 | 47,56 |
| 1890 | 44,35 | 38,22 | 38,97 | 43,10 | 42,41 | 48,37 | 44,37 | 42,45 |
| 1910 | 45,80 | 38,56 | 41,23 | 37,35 | 41,97 | 47,48 | 41,75 | 42,73 |
| 1929 | 44,26 | 37,11 | 41,28 | 40,58 | 47,65 | 51,75 | 43,51 | 44,12 |
| 1950 | 40,22 | 34,25 | 41,86 | 44,25 | 48,68 | 47,65 | 34,97 | 43,99 |
| 1960 | 40,71 | 31,32 | 40,21 | 50,02 | 48,75 | 49,18 | 34,43 | 43,68 |
| 1970 | 37,59 | 27,01 | 39,12 | 48,40 | 46,73 | 49,05 | 33,38 | 42,21 |
| 1980 | 35,84 | 28,84 | 39,87 | 40,68 | 46,23 | 46,69 | 35,68 | 40,50 |
| 1990 | 34,77 | 28,82 | 38,23 | 44,22 | 45,42 | 50,27 | 38,93 | 40,11 |
| 2000 | 38,98 | 37,63 | 42,28 | 47,32 | 47,49 | 51,60 | 43,81 | 43,03 |
| Idem, as percentage of world average | | | | | | | | |
| 1820 | 100 | 87 | 99 | 116 | 90 | 134 | 92 | 100 |
| 1850 | 100 | 95 | 94 | 112 | 114 | 103 | 97 | 100 |
| 1870 | 103 | 105 | 83 | 99 | 112 | 113 | 89 | 100 |
| 1890 | 104 | 90 | 92 | 102 | 100 | 114 | 105 | 100 |
| 1910 | 107 | 90 | 96 | 87 | 98 | 111 | 98 | 100 |
| 1929 | 100 | 84 | 94 | 92 | 108 | 117 | 99 | 100 |
| 1950 | 91 | 78 | 95 | 101 | 111 | 108 | 79 | 100 |
| 1960 | 93 | 72 | 92 | 114 | 112 | 113 | 79 | 100 |
| 1970 | 89 | 64 | 93 | 115 | 111 | 116 | 79 | 100 |
| 1980 | 89 | 71 | 98 | 100 | 114 | 115 | 88 | 100 |
| 1990 | 87 | 72 | 95 | 110 | 113 | 125 | 97 | 100 |
| 2000 | 91 | 87 | 98 | 110 | 110 | 120 | 102 | 100 |
| Sample size | | | | | | | | |
| 1820 | 14 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 8 | 4 | 3 | 41 |
| 1850 | 14 | 7 | 6 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 3 | 39 |
| 1870 | 13 | 7 | 9 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 3 | 44 |

| | | | | | | | | |
|------|----|----|----|---|----|----|---|----|
| 1890 | 13 | 7 | 11 | 3 | 4 | 6 | 3 | 47 |
| 1910 | 13 | 8 | 12 | 2 | 9 | 7 | 4 | 55 |
| 1929 | 14 | 6 | 11 | 3 | 11 | 6 | 4 | 55 |
| 1950 | 12 | 4 | 14 | 3 | 24 | 10 | 4 | 71 |
| 1960 | 16 | 7 | 15 | 4 | 25 | 13 | 4 | 84 |
| 1970 | 15 | 6 | 18 | 4 | 26 | 16 | 4 | 89 |
| 1980 | 15 | 8 | 14 | 5 | 17 | 15 | 4 | 78 |
| 1990 | 16 | 13 | 19 | 6 | 16 | 16 | 4 | 90 |
| 2000 | 7 | 11 | 8 | 4 | 3 | 7 | 4 | 44 |

Continents and regions are not homogeneous, however. Latin America offers an interesting case of strongly diverging trends. Figure 2 shows the long term patterns of the largest American countries, demonstrating the stability of the Canadian pattern (which is very similar to European developments), the long term decline of American inequality (see Williamson and Lindert, 1980), and Argentinian pattern, which is more or less in between these two north American countries (except for 1820, for which estimates are weak). Brazil, on the other hand, is a story of long term increase in inequality, with a brief period of very low inequality at the end of the 19th century (which is consistent with recent work by Bertola et al. 2009). Chile seems to have a very different development path, with very high inequality in the 19th century; Mexico is a bit in-between Chile and Brazil.

Figure 3

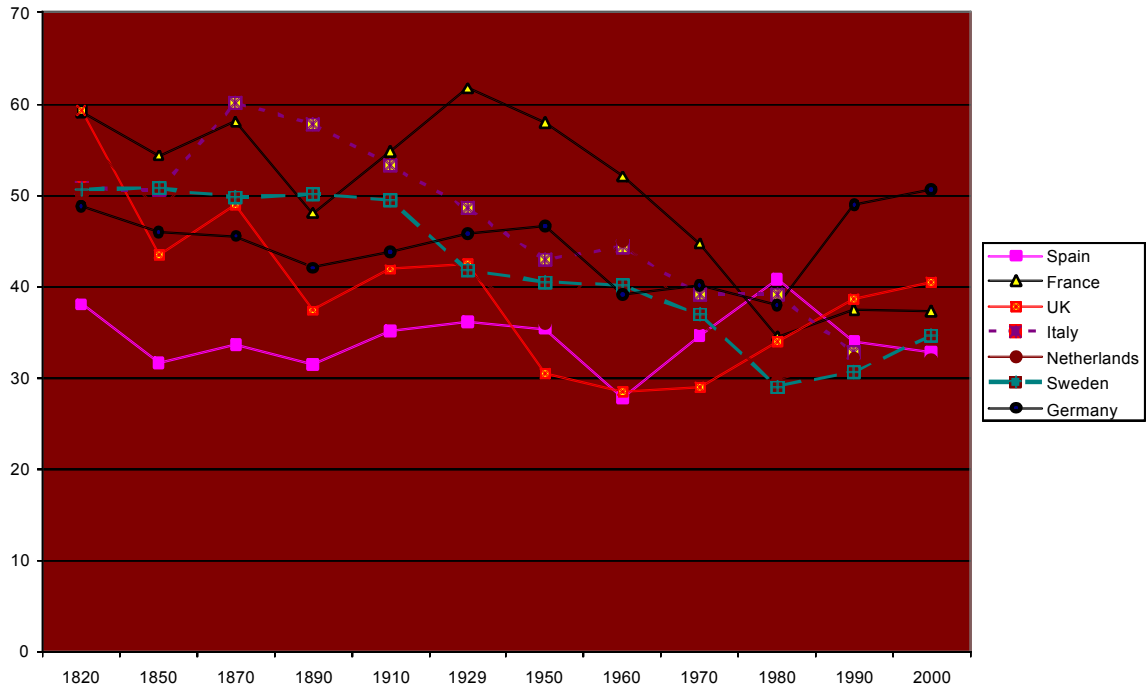
Gini's of income inequality for Americas, 1820-2000



A much more uniform picture emerges from looking at Western Europe, where all countries (with the possible exception of Spain, which has a relatively low level of inequality in the 19th century) share the same long term decline of the gini index (please note the different scale). We do not find much evidence for a Kuznets curve here, in the case of the UK perhaps because the first data point is in 1820, when the industrialization process is well underway. This does not explain the absence of Kuznets-like patterns in the rest of the region, however, because industrialization there started after 1820.

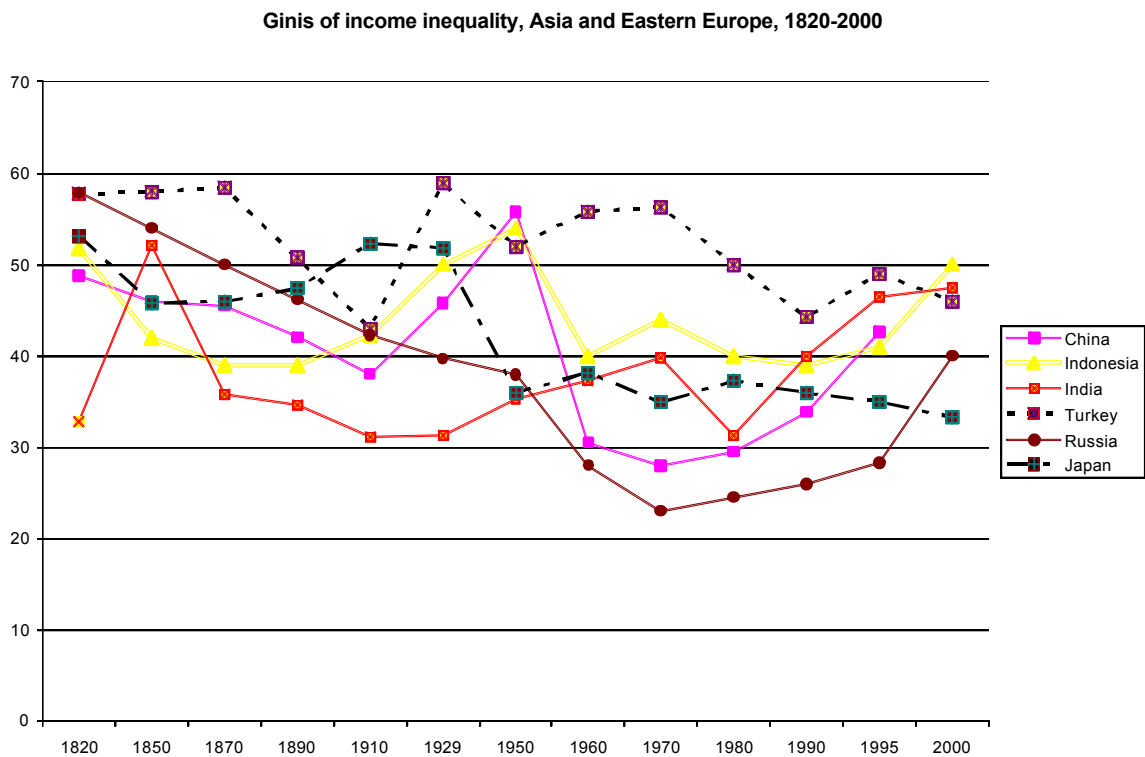
Figure 4

Ginis of income inequality in Western Europe, 1820-2000



Finally, we look at the estimates for a few big countries in Asia and Eastern Europe (Figure 5). We observe an absence of Kuznets curve also in the Japanese case, in spite of a modest increase in inequality in 1890-1910 period; a very strong decline in Russia, starting in 19th century, and continuing in the post 1917 period; similarly, a strong decline in China after 1950, and in Indonesia after Independence; Indian inequality development was characterised by long term stability, albeit some increase after Independence, and again after 1980.

Figure 5



4. Estimates of Global Inequality

The unit of analysis and comparison so far has been the Gini coefficient of the individual countries. To move from them to global inequality, we again had to assume that the underlying distributions were log-normal, which allows us to translate the Gini-coefficient into an estimate of the whole distribution of income in country X at time Y, which can be linked to the Maddison estimates of the average GDP per capita to get estimates of the distribution of income in 1990 international dollars. These estimates can then be added together, to get a global income distribution in 1990 international dollars.

What are the results of our estimates for the development of global inequality? Table 4 gives the most important results: the development of the gini of the global income distribution. It increases from .47 in 1820 to .62 in 1929 and .65 in 1950, after which it more or less stabilises at that (extremely high) level during the second half of the 20th century. The table also demonstrates that we cover between 85 and 94 percent of global population, which is (we think) quite high; this percentage tends to increase somewhat during the period under study. On the basis of the Maddison dataset we estimate that the average income of this 85 to 94 share is only slightly higher than that of the world as a whole – but the average income of the uncovered rest is clearly lower than of the countries covered by this experiment (for example, in 1820, the average income of ‘the rest’ can be estimated to be about 500 dollars). We therefore more or less consistently underestimate inequality, but the bias does not change much over time. A comparison with Bourguignon and Morrison (2002) appears to point in the same direction: their Gini estimate of global inequality is during the 19th century consistently higher than ours, by an unchanging 3 points on the Gini scale (their estimates of global inequality increase from .50 in 1820 to .61 in 1910). The difference disappears however in 1929 (B&M: .62), and both sets of estimates are almost identical for the post 1945 period. The disappearance of the gap between these two sets of estimates is somewhat puzzling as B&M are supposedly always based on a total coverage of the global population, whereas we also after 1910 or 1945 still miss 5-15 percent of the global population, who are on average poorer than the average global citizen (that both sets of estimates for the rest are quite similar is not unexpected, of course, given the fact that we both use Maddison’s estimates of GDP per capita and the Worldbank’s estimates of income inequality). This bias in our results may also affect our estimates of the development of absolute poverty levels, which is probably also somewhat lower than in ‘reality’. Still they point to a rapid decline of absolute poverty during these two centuries, a process that however seems to come to a halt during the most recent period. The total number of poor people (below 1 dollar) was more or less stable between 1820 and 1929 (when economic growth was apparently strong enough to compensate for the growth of the total population), increased very rapidly between 1929 and 1950 (from 381 to 624 millions), fell rather rapidly after 1950 to its lowest point, 221 million, in 1980, but began to increase again after 1980 – in the fifteen years between 1980 and 1995 the total increase was almost 50%. This result is really different from that published by B&M, who estimated that the number of people living in extreme poverty remained more or less the same between 1960 and 1992.

Table 4. Global Ginis, and data on the coverage of our samples, 1820-1995

| | World GINIs | Population covered Millions | Share of global population | Average income covered population* | Average income World* | Ratic coverage/all |
|------|----------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1820 | 0,47 | 921 | 0,88 | 689 | 667 | 1,03 |
| 1850 | 0,50 | 1034 | 0,88 | 804 | 791 | 1,02 |
| 1870 | 0,53 | 1086 | 0,85 | 921 | 873 | 1,05 |
| 1890 | 0,55 | 1266 | 0,86 | 1149 | 1133 | 1,01 |
| 1910 | 0,58 | 1518 | 0,87 | 1535 | 1465 | 1,05 |
| 1929 | 0,62 | 1791 | 0,87 | 1899 | 1784 | 1,06 |
| 1950 | 0,65 | 2298 | 0,91 | 2258 | 2113 | 1,07 |
| 1960 | 0,64 | 2789 | 0,92 | 2898 | 2775 | 1,04 |
| 1970 | 0,65 | 3474 | 0,94 | 3855 | 3736 | 1,03 |
| 1980 | 0,65 | 4023 | 0,91 | 4767 | 4521 | 1,05 |
| 1985 | 0,64 | 4081 | 0,85 | 5258 | 4763 | 1,10 |
| 1990 | 0,64 | 4946 | 0,94 | 5467 | 5162 | 1,06 |
| 1995 | 0,65 | 5087 | 0,90 | 5647 | 5452 | 1,04 |

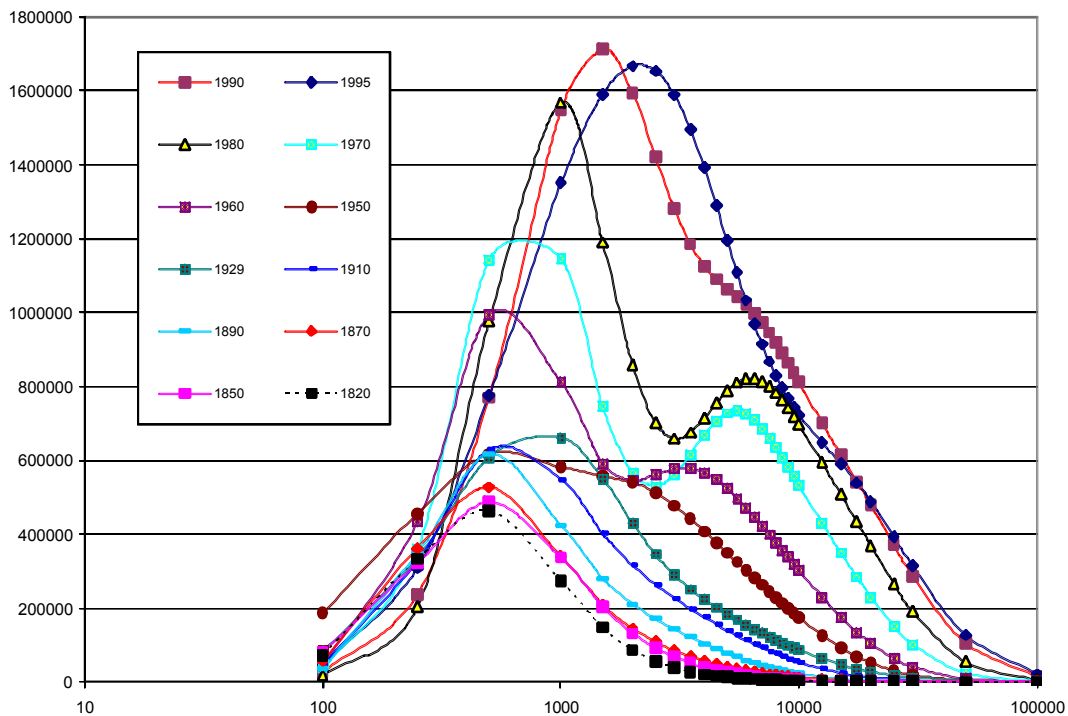
- in 1990 international dollars

Table 5. Estimates of 'real' poverty: number of people earning less than 1 or 2 USD dollars per day (in 1990 international dollars, and in millions)

| | 1 USD day | | 2 USD day | |
|------|---------------|--------------------------------|---------------|--------------------------------|
| | no persons | share of population covered | no persons | share of population covered |
| 1820 | 363 | 0,39 | 669 | 0,73 |
| 1850 | 369 | 0,36 | 695 | 0,67 |
| 1870 | 367 | 0,34 | 717 | 0,66 |
| 1890 | 338 | 0,27 | 749 | 0,59 |
| 1910 | 334 | 0,22 | 763 | 0,50 |
| 1929 | 381 | 0,21 | 805 | 0,45 |
| 1950 | 624 | 0,27 | 1047 | 0,46 |
| 1960 | 437 | 0,16 | 1110 | 0,40 |
| 1970 | 375 | 0,11 | 1173 | 0,34 |
| 1975 | 319 | 0,10 | 1077 | 0,33 |
| 1980 | 221 | 0,05 | 953 | 0,22 |
| 1985 | 229 | 0,05 | 758 | 0,17 |
| 1990 | 246 | 0,05 | 831 | 0,16 |
| 1995 | 325 | 0,06 | 899 | 0,17 |

Another way to present these estimates is to chart the different global income distributions in one picture, shown below, which indicates both the increase in income levels, the growth of the population and the changes in its distribution (all in 1990 dollars). What is in particular striking, is the change in the structure of the income pyramid through time (see for similar analyses of the more recent period, see Milanovic 2002). Between 1820 and 1929 world income distribution is unimodal, but in the next few decades a different distribution emerges with two clearly separate ‘modes’ or peaks – this begins to show a bit in 1950, is more clearly in 1960, and becomes very significant in 1970 and 1980, when indeed a big gap between rich and poor appears. However, in the 1980s the two modes begin to merge, and in 1995 the distribution has become consistently unimodal again.

Figure 6 Global income distributions: number of people with certain level of income (in dollars of 1990), 1820-1995



Another way of analysing these estimates is to make the distinction between within country and between countries inequality. Table 6 below presents the different ginis of within country and between country inequality. Unsurprisingly, the between country inequality is relatively low at the beginning of the period, and increases strongly with the growth of income disparities between countries. The within country inequality does not increase in the very long run (comparing 1995 with 1820), although in the 1950-1980 period there is a fall, followed by an increase in the final decades of the 20th century. It follows that the total increase in global inequality is the result of the increase in between country inequality.

Table 6 also shows the overlap factor; because of the statistical features of the Gini coefficient, the sum of the within country gini and the between country gini is larger than the global gini. The difference between them is the overlap factor, which is in essence nothing more than that share of the within group inequality of country A that overlaps with within group inequality of country B. This has led Milanovic (2002, 70) to claim that "the more important the overlapping component..... the less one's income depends on where she lives" . Between 1820 and 1970 the overlap factor does not increase at all, but it suddenly declines between 1970 and 1985 (a sign of growing polarization of the income pyramid we already noticed), followed by an even stronger increase between 1985 and 1995, indicating that the dual structure of the incomes pyramid has disappeared again.

Table 6. Within country and between countries inequality, 1820-1995³

| | Within country inequality | Between country inequality | Sum | Actual world gini | Overlap factor |
|------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|------|-------------------------|-------------------|
| 1820 | 0,43 | 0,24 | 0,67 | 0,47 | -0,19 |
| 1850 | 0,43 | 0,26 | 0,70 | 0,50 | -0,19 |
| 1870 | 0,41 | 0,33 | 0,74 | 0,53 | -0,21 |
| 1890 | 0,39 | 0,34 | 0,73 | 0,55 | -0,19 |
| 1910 | 0,41 | 0,38 | 0,78 | 0,58 | -0,20 |
| 1929 | 0,47 | 0,41 | 0,88 | 0,62 | -0,26 |
| 1950 | 0,45 | 0,49 | 0,93 | 0,65 | -0,28 |
| 1960 | 0,38 | 0,46 | 0,84 | 0,64 | -0,20 |
| 1970 | 0,37 | 0,48 | 0,85 | 0,65 | -0,20 |
| 1975 | 0,37 | 0,49 | 0,86 | 0,68 | -0,18 |
| 1980 | 0,35 | 0,45 | 0,80 | 0,65 | -0,16 |
| 1985 | 0,37 | 0,39 | 0,76 | 0,64 | -0,12 |

³ Estimated in the following way: column 2 results from assuming that incomes levels of all countries are the same (and identical to the world average); column 3 is the result of assuming that the Ginis in all countries are the same at 0.01 (for mathematical reasons we cannot assume that the Gini is 0)

| | | | | | |
|------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1990 | 0,39 | 0,47 | 0,86 | 0,64 | -0,22 |
| 1995 | 0,43 | 0,52 | 0,95 | 0,65 | -0,30 |

5 Inequality and economic growth: explaining the Great Divergence?

Does the level of income inequality during the 19th and early 20th century help to explain economic performance during the process of industrialization? Because we especially broaden the dataset available for studying 19th and early 20th century inequality, we focus on this question here. There is a large literature about inequality and growth, which already started with the works of Gerschenkron who argued that inequality did have positive effects during this period. He imagined positive effects of physical capital formation which might have been larger if the richer income groups were able to save more (assuming that the poorer strata saved close to nothing). On the other hand, the growth miracles of relatively egalitarian East Asian economies during the later 20th century encouraged a more recent literature which found that inequality did have negative effects on growth (among many, Benabou 1996; Persson and Tabellini, 1994), or insignificant effects at least if country fixed effects are controlled for (again, in a large literature, Barro 2000; Forbes 2000)

Our dependent variable is annual growth of GDP per capita for the 1820-50, 1850-1870, 1870-1890, 1890-1910, 1910-1950 periods. The periods are of different length, but by annualizing the growth rate, we obtain comparable units. We include all explanatory variables as levels at the beginning of periods, in order to measure “growth capabilities”. The gini coefficient is coded between 0 and 1, and is available for all 97 panel units, for which we could obtain growth data of the countries included, which are reported under Table 8. In contrast, the institutional variable “polity2” is only available for 78 cases. This variable is based on the coding of participation possibilities in many countries of the world, which has been classified in a systematic way by the POLITY IV project. We included this variable, as there is a big debate whether institutional quality matters for growth, and in particular, whether “princes” or other autocratic rulers can appropriate physical and financial capital from private owners (Glaeser et al. 2004, DeLong and Shleifer 1993, Baten and van Zanden 2008 on the early modern period).

Initial GDP per capita could be an important factor, as it might proxy initial physical capital endowment (Barro 2000). Moreover, there might be convergence events, if the initially poor can adopt more advanced technologies from the richer technology leaders. Finally, we included a variable for initial population size, as it proxies jointly with GDP per capita the size of economies. Moreover, to a certain extent, it allows to control for Kremer-Boserup effects of large populations encouraging more inventions (as the pool of inventions might be larger, although the “pool” might of course not be defined by nation states).

Average growth of the countries studied was 1.14 % per year, with a minimum of -0.65, a maximum of 3.07 percent annual growth, and a standard deviation of 0.757 (Table 7). Our compilation of gini coefficients varied between 0.247 and 0.741, with a standard deviation of 0.107.

Table 7: Descriptives of our growth regression variables

| Variable | Obs | Mean | Std. Dev. | Min | Max |
|----------|-----|----------|-----------|-----------|----------|
| ygrpct | 97 | 1.144796 | .7570685 | -.6507819 | 3.068836 |
| gini1 | 97 | .4655103 | .1065775 | .247 | .741 |
| polity2 | 78 | -.474359 | 6.076834 | -10 | 10 |
| lny | 97 | 7.345828 | .633732 | 6.272877 | 8.578534 |
| lnpop | 97 | 9.46843 | 1.465968 | 6.405229 | 12.92878 |

Table 8. Fixed effect regressions of GDP per capita growth 1820-50, 1850-1870, 1870-1890, 1890-1910, 1910-1950 (p-values reported in parentheses)

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---------------------|-----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| gini1 | -2.68* (0.075) | -3.87*** (0.0095) | -3.20** (0.015) |
| polity2 | 0.08*** (0.0041) | 0.06** (0.028) | |
| Lny | -1.80*** (0.00070) | -0.83*** (0.0049) | |
| Lnpop | 0.99** (0.024) | | |
| Constant | 6.77*** (0.0077) | 9.29*** (0.00015) | 2.63*** (0.000040) |
| Observations | 78 | 78 | 97 |
| Number of countries | 22 | 22 | 25 |
| R-squared | 0.31 | 0.24 | 0.08 |

Countries included are ar, au, be, br, ca, cl, cn, co, de, dk, eg, es, fr, hr, id, ie, in, it, jp, ke, mx, nl, no, nz, ph, pl, ru, se, th, tr, uk, us

Table 9. Fixed effect regressions of GDP per capita growth 1820-50, 1850-1870, 1870-1890, 1890-1910, 1910-1950 (p-values reported in parentheses)

| | (1) | (2) | (3) |
|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| extraction ratio | -1.63* (0.062) | -2.05*** (0.001) | -3.20 (0.185) |
| polity2 | 0.08*** (0.002) | 0.06* (0.064) | |
| Lny | -2.19*** (0.001) | -1.25*** (0.008) | |
| Lnpop | 1.03*** (0.005) | | |
| Constant | 9.20** (0.016) | 12.05*** (0.001) | 1.54*** (0.000) |
| Observations | 76 | 76 | 94 |
| Number of countries | 22 | 22 | 25 |
| R-squared | 0.33 | 0.25 | 0.02 |

Countries included are ar, au, be, br, ca, cl, cn, co, de, dk, eg, es, fr, hr, id, ie, in, it, jp, ke, mx, nl, no, nz, ph, pl, ru, se, th, tr, uk, us

Note: the extraction ratio is calculated under the assumption of 1% elite share

As a result, inequality mattered for 19th century growth – and the effect was negative and statistically significant across various specifications (Table 8). We get very similar results when we use the extraction ratio as defined by Lindert et al (2007) instead of the Gini-coefficient; again, inequality seems to be bad for long term growth (Table 9).

Gerschenkron was wrong – inequality did not have positive effects via physical capital formation during this period. Was this effect also economically significant? Multiplying the coefficient of Model 2 with a standard deviation of inequality (.1065775*3.87) informs us that annual growth was reduced by -0.412 percent. Is this large or small? The standard deviation of GDP growth in the period was only 0.757. Hence yes, inequality had an economically important effect on the differing growth experiences of the countries studied here.

Other results are that democracy and the institutions which came with it were good for growth. The negative coefficient of initial GDP per capita suggests that we observe here conditional convergence (note, however, that fixed effects growth regressions are sometimes biased towards convergence). Although China, India, Indonesia and all those large, slowly growing countries are included, also the coefficient for log population size is positive.

The effect of inequality is also relatively robust, if we move from the more inclusive model (1) to the less and least inclusive models. The R-square drops to 0.08 when inequality is the only explanatory variable, although it still has explanatory power. It is also robust, if extraction ratios are included instead of gini coefficients (Table 9).

As caveats, we need to mention some of the variables which we could not measure for the 19th century for a sufficient number of countries and early periods yet. Among them are human capital, innovativeness, entrepreneurial spirit, openness and similar variables which might have a good potential to explain growth differences. Some of those might have been partially captured by the fixed effect, but it is definitely on the agenda to include them as explanatory variables.

In spite of those caveats, it seems fair to conclude that inequality mattered strongly and negatively for the 19th and early 20th century growth history.

6. Conclusion

We have reconstructed a new dataset of estimates of the inequality of the income distribution for a large set of countries for benchmark years starting in 1820 and ending in 1995. This was, in comparison with the estimates produced by Bourguignon and Morrison (2002), based on the use of new (and old) historical studies of income inequality in different countries, on estimates based on the development of the ratio between wage and income, and on estimates based on heights inequality (or a combination of the latter two approaches). Moreover, these estimates have been used to reconstruct the evolution of global inequality between 1820 and 1995. The long term evolution of global inequality that emerges from this is not very dissimilar from the

results presented by B & M. Within country inequality did not change a lot in the very long run, although in many countries inequality tended to decline during the 20th century ‘egalitarian revolution’, but this was often followed by a rise of inequality after 1980. Between country inequality increased a lot and was the main cause behind the very strong increase in global inequality in these two centuries – but this process appears to have come to an end during the second half of the 20th century. Perhaps even more interesting were the changes in the structure of global inequality; it was an almost uniformly uni-modal distribution in the 19th century, because increasingly bi-modal during the 1950-1980 period, and ‘suddenly’ changed into a bi-modal distribution again between 1980 and 1995. We intend to analyse the underlying dynamics of these changes in more detail in the future.

The main contribution of the paper is perhaps the enlargement of the database of 19th and early 20th century estimates of income inequality. We therefore also tried to establish – very tentatively – if there was a link between income inequality and economic performance during the ‘long’ 19th century. It appears that, after controlling for the influence of amongst other institutions, inequality had a negative impact on economic growth during this period, which, when it can shown to be robust, will be an important new result.

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