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“Kinship and Consumption: The Effect of Descent on Household Standard of Living”

Tuesday, February 12th, 2013
From 04.30pm to 06.00pm

At Seminar Room R42.2.110 (ground floor)
of the Solvay Brussels School of Economics and Management
Université libre de Bruxelles - ULB

Abstract:
This paper exploits the exogenous variation in descent systems in Malawi to estimate the impact of spouses' rights to land on household standard of living. In rural Malawi, individuals trace their descent through their mother or father. Where descent is traced through the mother (matrilineal descent), women inherit land and keep this land on divorce. This gives them a stronger "outside option" than their husbands'. The opposite is true of patrilineal descent. The estimates show that matrilineal households consume 7% more than patrilineal households, once geography, prices, economic characteristics of the village, crop types, urban connectivity and demography are controlled for. The higher consumption is attributed to higher income, which is a result of matrilineal husbands allocating more labour to the wage sector and less to agriculture. This is due to the incentives generated by land inheritance rules.

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