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Thinking Through Chronic Poverty and Destitution: Theorising Social Relations and Social Ordering

This paper takes an anthropological look at the concept of chronic poverty. It asks what the concept does, both within and outside of specialised poverty and development discourses, investigates its genealogy and considers what kinds of social phenomena it captures. While economic conceptions of chronic poverty, whether based on income or consumption measures, are reliant on neo-liberal characterisations of agency and markets, alternative propositions from the human development perspective merely infer the social impacts of a range of deprivations on abstract potentialities. Neither approach has the capacity to apprehend the social constitution of poverty, that is as an effect not of deprivation of income or entitlements but of a system of social relationships. To some extent the limitations of the chronic poverty concept are explained by its origins along the depth versus duration axis, and the importance of confronting the normative assumptions about the close association between economic development and poverty reduction as conjoined temporal outcomes. Perhaps paradoxically, although chronic poverty theorists have opted for *time* as a key analytical tool, their approach has focused on duration rather than process (cf Bevan 2003). This has implications for analytical reach. Approaches to chronic poverty have tended to be descriptive, rather than dynamic, concentrating on attributes associated with poverty as a state or, where based on panel data, comparing states across time periods.

Focus on attributes rather than process creates a social category, the chronically poor, as a category of analysis. But because this category is not one through which societies and economies are organised on the ground, as it were, it cannot enhance social analysis, that is our understanding of how societies, inequalities and economies are made to work together in various places and times. Chronic poverty as a category may correspond to some local conditions, but it

is not a local category of organisation. Depending as it does on implicit arguments about economic growth and the agency of households as maximizing actors in market oriented economies, the idea of chronic poverty is derived from and intrinsic to the categorical ordering of current approaches to development.

Concepts and categories come into play as the means through which we construct orders, the building blocks of the social imaginary realized through practice. Indeed, it could even be argued that current constitutions of poverty within the social order of development are fundamental to modern social imaginaries, depending as they do on its fundamental categories of ordering- the economy, as abstracted from political order, the public sphere and the disembedding of the person from wider structures of kinship and society (Taylor 2004; Habermas 1989). Policy work, in government and development, is an explicit instance of institutional reordering, in which agents and individual are tasked with achieving diverse transformative visions. Policy makers and analysts use concepts and categories to represent the worlds which they seek to change, and resource transfers to effect the institutional transitions through which they may be realized (Green 2006).

The importance of significant categories and key words in policy discourses derives not only from their condensation of meanings and associations, but as nodes in the social orders which those policies seek to effect. Therefore although policy constructs claim grounding in empiricism or to be evidence based, they are also fundamentally theoretical. Rethorising chronic poverty matters because it can inform how social relations are envisioned. The concept of chronic poverty is too important to lose to development economics. Chronic poverty as a concept can pose challenging questions if informed by social analysis which explores the processes of differentiation. The concept of destitution offers some interesting possibilities for poverty theorists. Firstly, it corresponds more to indigenous and local understandings of extreme deprivation, which emphasise depth and duration combined. Second, like other processes of exclusion, it emphasises the social bases of destitution as a moral shift in performance of categorical entitlements within a social system. Finally, it is freed from implicit assumptions about the normativity of economic engagement as the means to escape poverty traps.

Chronic Poverty

Chronic poverty is as yet a rather unspecified concept within the emerging field of poverty studies. Defining chronic poverty as the condition of poverty persisting for more than five years and which is commonly associated with far longer, indeed intergenerational, deprivations across multiple indicators, the concept is intentionally conceived to confront development representations of poverty as a state which is temporary or transient. Research conducted into chronic poverty demonstrates that such poverty traps are not short term obstacles to economic participation or human fulfilment, but are durable and enduring.ⁱ Chronic poverty affects those individuals and their families who will remain below a certain threshold from year to year, and generation to generation (Hulme & McKay 2006; Hulme & Shepherd 2003). This finding is fundamentally important for development thinking about how the problem of poverty is to be addressed. The resilience of poverty, its immovability, provides concrete evidence that arguments about growth automatically benefiting the poor are deeply flawed. The tenacity of poverty raises fundamental questions about its durability: the extent to which social institutions perpetuate the relations of exclusion and allocation which ensure that certain individuals and their families will remain in poverty (Harriss 2006; Green & Hulme 2005). Because the concept of chronic poverty is so recent these questions are yet to be adequately addressed within the chronic poverty framework. Arguably, chronic poverty as a conceptual instrument in development studies is restricted at present to framing. Although implicit theory is embedded within the concept, namely its situation in relation to theories about the effects of growth, the main utility of chronic poverty is to capture those individuals and households with similar attributes in order to aggregate them into a development category as a potential object of policy.

As currently conceived chronic poverty is an adjunct to extant theories of poverty. As such it embodies rather than replaces the theories about society and economy which are embedded within poverty thinking. Chronic poverty as a concept is situated within this paradigm in which growth is assumed to inhere in the human condition as economic man (the gendering is intentional given assumptions about household headship and the ensuing problematic of female headed households) strives to achieve 'development'. Absence of growth or stasis does not

challenge current poverty paradigms but reinforces them, necessitating the creation of a sub paradigm to account for the phenomenon of households and economies which are seemingly impervious to growth. From this perspective, persistent poverty becomes a pathological condition to be isolated and exposed. Associated with the negative effects of poverty but without the escape route, chronic poverty, like some inherited disorder, is genealogically embedded. The condition of chronic poverty transcends generations. Biological metaphors are applied to the multitude affected, who become a mass, a demographic (cf Fanon 1967; Hardt & Negri 2000). Chronic poverty like disease, is intergenerationally transmitted (Moore 2001). The children of chronically poor parents are likely to be chronically poor themselves (Harper, Marcus & Moore 2003), confined within a transgenerational poverty trap which runs vertically and horizontally, across time and space.

Time and Traps

Chronic poverty as a frame which captures the individuals and households whose conditions remain unchanged for five years or longer applies duration to poverty descriptors. In selecting duration over depth of poverty, that is the extent of deprivation, chronic poverty claims not to be so concerned with differentiating between categories of the poor as to identify those most at risk of remaining poor across generations.ⁱⁱ The durable poor are in any case often severely poor (Hulme & McKay 2006). The longer individuals or households remain in poverty the less chance they have of getting out of it. The durability of poverty affects individuals whether poverty is conceptualised in terms of income / consumption axes or across human development criteria. Absence of assets, resources, capitals or entitlements impacts on income, consumption and potentialities over time.

The ultimate effects of transgenerational or long term poverty traps are empirically uncertain. If the notion of trajectories of growth lifting all boats is as much a fallacy as that of hard work being rewarded or of 'sustainable rural livelihoods', the opposite equally applies. What is clear is that while the chronically poor remain trapped in poverty, they do not necessarily slide into absolute impoverishment and destitution. If poverty here appears as a relatively static condition in both directions this perhaps tells us less about the trajectories of people so classified than about the representational effects of poverty within development studies and within economics, that is as

a state and a condition not so much of relative differentiation but of positionality in relation to an analytical boundary, the conceptual barrier separating poor from the non poor.

Poverty thinking has prioritised this boundary and the means of traversing it over the sub divisions on either side. This is because poverty discourse has consistently situated itself within normative arguments about getting out of poverty and because poverty reduction as a boundary shifted provides a visible object of public intervention (O'Connor 2001). Poverty represented as deprivation below a common level, whether of income or consumption, focuses attention on the possibility of crossing the line and hence of the range of policy prescriptions which can facilitate this movement. Where poverty is understood in income and consumption terms, the prescriptions logically focus on increasing income, not necessarily directly but through assumed relationships between increase in the overall economy and the incomes of individuals and households (Escobar 1995). Where poverty is understood in human development terms to connote a state in which social agents are deprived of their potentiality to achieve a series of moral conditions and abstract freedoms, the emphasis is on the unspecified range of social and regulative regimes which could ensure that individuals achieve their capabilities.ⁱⁱⁱ If the former conceptualisation of poverty rests on implicit assumptions about market engagement and increases in productivity as much as value as the means through which growth can be achieved, the latter depends on implicit assumptions about the latency of enabling institutions through which individual capabilities could be realized (Gore 1993). As such, although both conceptualisations of poverty claim empirical validity, what is actually accessed through such conceptual tools is simply that which can be quantified within their respective frames. Both rest on social theories about the normative possibilities, of economy on the one hand and, on the other, entitlements to self realization.

As imposed frames what are captured by such evaluative criteria do not necessarily correspond to local social categorisations of difference and deprivation, which generally make different kinds of distinctions and which impose boundaries in different places corresponding to the systems of social organisation in which such boundaries come to have salience and are put to work. Chronic poverty as a concept has only limited resonance with the kinds of deprivation classifications invoked by members of poor communities, who are more likely to comment on

the extreme poor where they have suffered other deprivations and where their status borders on the marginal (Hulme & Mc Kay 2006). Chronicity in itself or persistent poverty may indeed be too commonplace to be remarked upon in many communities at the periphery of world economies.

The lack of fit between chronic poverty as a category and the kinds of differentiations amongst the poor which people in poor communities consider meaningful stems from current policy orientations which aim to keep people out of poverty, and hence to focus representational energies on policing the analytical line between poor and non-poor. The result is a reliance on social analytical models which either make the boundary visible or facilitate its maintenance, hence for example vulnerability is defined in development social thought not as a state in which negative outcomes are likely, as in the common meaning of the term in English, but as a likelihood of becoming poor. Vulnerability in this line of thinking is actuarial, a form of economic risk (Ewald 1991). In this categorisation based on shared vulnerability to risk rather than shared attributes, the attributes of those so categorised are rarely differentiated (Hastrup 1993), with the paradoxical effect of equating the social and biological effects of extreme deprivation with the effects of assetlessness for the poor, who are nevertheless assumed to be situated on the margins of potential economic self-reliance. Such conceptual elisions are exemplified in the theoretical arguments of the economist Dasgupta, linking poverty to destitution, and destitution not merely to hunger but to human capacity for labour and hence to income and wealth (Dasgupta 1993; Devereux 2004). This approach not only takes economies too literally, in assuming that the natural extension of human capacity to labour equates to the production of exchange value, after Ricardo and Marx (Gudeman 2001: 101). It reduces humanity to biology, and biology to the reproduction of labour power.(cf Fanon 1967). Human beings become simply machines within production systems.

In actuality, the causes and effects of extreme deprivation, poverty and assetlessness must be differentiated. Extreme deprivation associated with destitution must be differentiated from poverty, even of the chronic or apparently long-lasting kind. The important question is not whether assetlessness leads to deprivation, but under what conditions assets become the mediating factor in accessing support entitlements. Access to support may be mediated though

exchange frameworks and markets, hence Sen's insight that the Great Bengal famine resulted not from an absence of food which was widely available in markets, but from what he termed a 'failure' in 'exchange entitlements' (1981). It may also be mediated through a range of social statuses, commonly associated with, and often prior to, asset portfolios, as for example in feudalism or caste based landholding in village India.

Unnatural Assets

Assetlessness in the formal sense of absence of personal property and formal land holding were characteristic of foraging societies of southern Africa during the twentieth century, exemplified in the example of the San of Botswana and Namibia. Absence of assets or, rather, a social system which did not construe relations between people as mediated by access to things (Strathern 1985), did not entail conditions of poverty (Good 1999; see also Woodburn 1982). As long as San could access their main economic resource, their hunting and gathering territories, and as long as they could obtain additional cash through wage labour for neighbouring cattle herders, they seem to have enjoyed relatively good standards of living. They had autonomy and the freedom to work they chose, good nutrition (Lee 1989) and plenty of leisure time. Indeed, the anthropologist Marshall Sahlins went so far in the 1970s to claim that contemporary foraging groups were the 'original affluent society' (2004). This has long ceased to be the situation. Forcibly resettled San in Namibia and Botswana find themselves excluded from their hunting grounds, unable to gather wild foods and dependant on cash to mediate access to basic foods and necessities. Leisure ceases to be the desired purpose of productive labour and instead becomes forced through a combination of lack of access to previous productive activities and high unemployment. Poverty, welfare dependency and destitution result (Good 1999). Examples such as this demonstrate that relations between poverty and assets are complicated, depending on the social systems in which relationships between assets and entitlements are determined.

Assets are not things out there in the world which have natural exchange values. What count as assets exist within social systems which determine their often changing values. Recognition as an asset holder is social recognition within a system that permits assets to become convertible. Within real economies, that is social systems, assets are what are accepted as assets, that is as having transactability and conversion value in relation to who is entitled to transact them

(Gudeman 2001). What development theorists choose to perceive as capital in the form of abstract values such as social or natural capital (e.g. Narayan & Pritchett 1997) is not utilisable as assets because it is not convertible within actual economies. Moreover, assetification, the social process of formalising the asset status of things (and, in some social systems, persons), depends on political and institutional movements in the organisation of the relations between people.^{iv} The 'mystery of capital', as De Soto acknowledges, does not inhere in capital itself, but within the institutional arrangements through which social relations can be made to bring 'capital' into being (2000). Consequently, the strategy for creating capital is premised neither on production nor technology, although it entails the production of specialised technologies for the creation of capital, which centre on legal reforms and systems, that is on ways in which social relations are organized.

Destitution and Disentitlement

The importance of relationships, the institutional ordering between people and people and people and things, is clearly evident in the example of destitution. Destitution is not an automatic consequence of poverty, an end point in an economic process of impoverishment brought about by income failure. It is rather the product of a crisis in social relations. Destitution, associated with social exclusion and marginality and with the loss of the social entitlements within society that a person may have once had, represents sanctioned harm through a recategorisation of a person away from previous entitlements. In the absence of wider systems of social support, the consequences of destitution are devastating (Harris White 2002). If destitution is so pervasive, and its consequences so devastating, why has destitution been so consistently underplayed in development thinking? The answer lies in its elision into poverty and chronic poverty, and because of the challenges a concept of destitution as a failure of social relations presents for the theoretical underpinning of the poverty paradigm, with its assumptions of individual economic agency oriented towards growth and the market as the institution capable of springing the poverty trap. Destitution, as the state in which people have lost all social entitlements, to recognition as social beings able to operate within society is patently a different kind of social position than poverty, and has different consequences. Destitution might be connected to poverty of one sort or another, the point is that once the person becomes destitute

they have entered a new social categorisation which situates them differently in relation to others (cf Harris White 2002).

Moral boundaries are redrawn around the destitute, who occupies the wrong side of the line. The person locally categorised as destitute has experienced a loss of social placement, of entitlement, within a scheme of social ordering. Their social re-categorisation situates them outside social relations of entitlement, bringing into sharp relief the centrality of moral content and values in determining who gets what, and to what extent the effects of extreme deprivation are socially tolerated. Destitution as a consequence of recategorisation of entitlements or a shift in the moral content of social relations highlights the centrality of social relations in determining how people live, that is their deprivations and entitlements (see also Kabeer 2005). These relations extend beyond the market frameworks claimed for economic models of poverty, and which fail to recognise the social constitution of value and allocations which ensure that some individuals are more likely than others to become destitute, and will not have the luxury of poverty. Destitution is not so much a failure of social relations as a categorical shift into a different realm of social relations, into the domain beyond which social obligations cease. Destitution as a categorical transition into the space where social obligation has ended is a process of reordering too, a social process through which certain individuals are socially excluded through active categorisation, This is not simply a consequence of poverty, but of a special kind of social reorganisation. Understanding the social constitution of destitution as process sheds light not only on the differences between poverty and destitution, but on the ways in which the social ordering of allocative entitlements determines social well being and social harm.

Destitution in India has been characterised by Barbara Harris White as a stage near the end point of a process of social exclusion and marginalisation. The extent of the desocialisation of the destitute is so extreme that destitution is often experienced as a condition of individuals, the fragments of atomised households. Destitution in India is not an outcome of extreme poverty, although the destitute are extremely poor. It may be a consequence of mental illness, divorce, loss of rights to dependency and stigmatization. The destitute lack social assets, although they do create their own forms of social organisation (2002) Destitution in this example is more than the failure of livelihoods and dependence on transfers, as Devereux proposes for Ethiopia

(2004). Neither is it simply a matter of exclusion from the labour market in economic terms. Destitution is a *social status*. Destitution represents the condition in which people become disengaged from the moral obligations of mutuality which constitute the matrix of the social. This disengagement encompasses kinship, households and arenas of consumption and exchange. As such it is a highly individual condition.

Given that destitution is a kind of social status it is not surprising that it is most elaborated in highly unequal and formally differentiated societies, for example India. As a shift in social categorisations into a realm beyond support it is of course more visible in countries which do not have widespread systems of emergency assistance and social welfare. Even in social welfare regimes, however, destitution exists and marks a transition point where assetless individuals become so socially disembodied as to be external not only to kinship and social networks but to the established state systems of social welfare (Pasarro 1996). Destitution as a social status is also evident in the highly unequal but less formally hierarchical societies in Africa where, as in India, as a status destitution is associated with social and household fragmentation, marginalisation, exclusion and extreme deprivation. Perceiving destitution as a social status rather than an economic condition provides an interesting vantage point for understanding the processes of destitution which again must be apprehended in social terms. Destitution as the termination of entitlements through loss of dependant status is an outcome of the ways in which dependency is constituted in certain contexts for certain social categories. It is not the loss of support in itself which fosters destitution, although this becomes a precipitating cause, so much as the social order which deems certain social categories dependent on others and incapable of subsisting without new relations of dependency being established. What is stripped away from the destitute is the latent right to ongoing relations of dependency. They thus have to rely on the unpredictability and humiliation of charity and alms, and on the very transient relationship between giver and recipient which such transactions convey.

Vulnerability to destitution is not distributed equitably but is an attribute inherent in the unequal ways in which societies are organised. Certain social categories are at greater risk than others of losing social and economic assets. This is clearly evident in the Indian example, where tribal and scheduled caste groups are at increased risk of destitution, along with other pariah categories:

widows, sex workers, the disabled. Exclusion and marginalisation are not in fact indicators of social breakdown, but of social ordering which sanctions social harm for some individuals while it ensures the protection of others. Social benefits like social costs accrue along existing lines of social division. The rich get richer, the marginal get excluded. These allocations central to social ordering are likely to be justified ideologically in moral and religious terms, hence for example the cultural elaboration of pollution and stigma in Hinduism (Torry 1986; Douglas 1991).

Reordering Entitlement

The micro processes of social differentiation as a practice of social ordering can be clearly observed at household level, within the local social relations of family, not only with re-orderings based on the possibilities presented within existing categorisations, for example the gendered category of wife to widow, but from insider to outsider, innocent victim to 'witch other' (Ciekawy 1998: 120). Recent accounts of the social effects of witchcraft in contemporary Africa provide insights into how this process happens and what drives it when families seek to reorder kinship relations, and hence relations of obligation, through witchcraft allegations. This is not to suggest that families accusing others of witchcraft are doing so only in order to alter the relations between them. They are doing so because they perceive these others to have altered, to have come to embody the attributes of witches, and hence the relations between people are already altered. The witch as pre-existing outsider such as the in-married wife within the wider family is giving way to the witch insider as notions of significant family contract. In Zambia, the anthropologist Elizabeth Colson found that fathers were now liable to be accused of witchcraft by their adult sons and daughters, something previously unimaginable when she had first undertaken research during the 1960s (2000). In Malawi and Southern Africa witchcraft disputes are becoming explicitly utilised as a means of converting the moral content of relationships, kin into strangers and those close and between whom mutual obligations existed into mortal enemies (Peters 2002; Niehaus 2005). What seems to be happening in witchcraft in many countries is an increasing emphasis on the potential for witchcraft within closer groups of kin (Ashforth 2004; Douglas 1999).

Allegations of witchcraft have different social consequences for accused witches depending on what is done to them. These range from expulsion, execution, the imposition of sanctions and, in

parts of Southern and Eastern Africa, cleansing rituals which reintegrate alleged witches into social networks (Niehaus 1993: 506; Green 1997; Green & Mesaki 2005). Irrespective of what happens to alleged witches, all face recategorisation as essentially other. Witches harbour immoral attributes and desires. Their opposition to the social good is such that witches physically embody the inverse of normal human attributes, walking upside down, adopting nocturnal habits and eating human flesh (Green 1997; 2005). The social and institutional processes which create the possibilities for categorisation are oriented towards the production of 'witch-others' (Ciekawy 1998: 120). It is the othering possibilities of witchcraft which situate it as a strategy within family conflicts and which make witchcraft useful in situations where social order is at stake. In converting kin to stranger, neighbour to demon, allocations and entitlements are profoundly redrafted.

The dynamics of witchcraft then provide explicit commentaries on core social values, not only about what sociality is and hence its antithesis, the witch, but by extension concerning the moral content of social relations. It is not then surprising that where witchcraft is utilised against non kin co residents within small scale communities that it retains an explicit concern with moral sociality. Isaak Niehaus describes the social context of a spate of accusations of witchcraft against neighbours in a rural community in South Africa during the 1990s. Apart from the escalating violence with which alleged witches were confronted, and the very real threat of severe penalties, including homicide, they faced, the targeting of accusations was notable. Victims of accusation were not only elderly and income poor, they had few dependents. Most lived alone (200-201). Niehaus, in an inverted reference to Jane Guyer's classic account of the importance of dependants in relations of social status and power in West Africa (1993), calls this 'poverty in people' (2005: 201). Yet these elderly people were not yet destitute. On the contrary, they seemingly made ends meet and managed to maintain themselves and their social existence without recourse to support from kin and neighbours. It was the apparent self reliance of these poor individuals which aroused suspicions of witchcraft. How could they maintain themselves alone, without someone to help them? With no grandchildren to fetch and carry? With no helping hands in the fields or in the house? Surely such people must be in control of zombies, the mindless bodies of other people, to undertake this work in secret. Witchcraft here is also being utilised to create a moral boundary between witch and victim, moral villager and amoral

demon, but it is also being used to make clear statements about how people should live. Aloneness is negatively valued in general. Combined with self reliance it becomes an affront. The refusal of these older people to become enmeshed in relations of reciprocity and dependency by for example taking in children to help them and so on challenged the normativity of mutual asking for assistance which was highly threatening to other poor people in the community. Witchcraft discourse in these examples and in the strategies of older persons to do without dependants was negatively viewed as not merely anti-social, but as creating atomised households, without social ties - the very kinds of households which are the basis of economic theories of the modern social imaginary. The parallel between witchcraft, individualism and the market values of consumption is acknowledged in popular representations of witches throughout Africa (e.g. Englund 1996; Sanders 2001).

Poverty and Social Ordering

Witchcraft discourses, in Africa and elsewhere, are commentaries on sociality and in turn on the ways in which society as a network of relationships is organised. Like development theories of society, with which they contrast, they represent normative orderings which are morally weighted. This ordering emphasises the fundamental relations of interdependency between people, indeed dependency and responsibility for others as core values. Wealth in people, patronage and clientelism and the values of kinship are part of this discourse, which is articulated symbolically through the cultural emphasis on food and feeding, inclusive kinship and extended visiting. In this visioning of social order, households are not perceived as isolated units engaging with other households through market institutions. Neither is there a categorical separation between spheres of production, reproduction and exchange. These separations are in fact in the processes of being created through global incorporation and the international development policies which require modern social ordering, that is the division between conceptual spheres of economy, public sphere and the private, to be operationalised (Mitchell 2002; Taylor 2004). It these orderings, with their categorical delineation of households and restricted vision of the social, which both require poverty and create it as a problem to be solved through economic transformation.

A consequence of extant economic transitions and the development policies which promote them is to make the market the institutional cornerstone of social organisation and, in the process, to render extensive non market system of social allocation unsustainable. A result is the increasing tension between social values of inclusion and mutual obligation, and the burden of support for individuals and families who depend on cash for their livelihoods. In situations where there is no alternative but to shrink the family, and hence the pool of obligations, individuated households are being created, through such strategies as witchcraft differentiation, contributing to the creation of the kinds of households as economic agents which conform to the social imaginary of modern capitalism. Similar processes of household creation and shrinkage were set in train by the aggressive social policies of industrialising France and England in the nineteenth century, which sought to establish the productive individual enmeshed within the capitalist economy and to ensure the institutional separation between the organisational spheres of production, reproduction and exchange (Williams 1981; Polanyi 2001; Donzelot 1979; . Blok & Somers 2003). These processes of social reorganisation required by the separation of economy were for the first time explicitly managed by the state. Social policy was born out of the need to create a national economy as an object of policy and management economy, an economy which depended on the isolation of households as units of engagement and through which populations could be reproduced as labour power. Gender as an organising principle came into play here, with the ideal of the male household head as provider for a family and household reinforced through regulation which restricted women's access to labour markets and their entitlements to independent social support.

Such organisation makes capitalist integration into global markets possible, creating economic opportunities for poor people in poor countries to become part of global value chains in which their product or labour can provide them with some kind of income. It does not necessarily address the problem of chronic poverty because the social determination of value means that agents at the bottom of the global economy cannot determine their worth within it. The implicit theory of social relations in which poverty discourse is embedded rests on the categorical divisions of modernity, economy, public and private. In this construction, the problem of poverty is a problem first and foremost of households as economic units in which relations of interdependency and mutual responsibility are privatised. Dependency becomes imagined as

hierarchical relationship between unproductive persons, who are thus not economic agents, and household heads, breadwinners, market agents. Because dependency is imagined as one way and as the drain of the unproductive on the productive and hence as a cost, it is represented as illegitimate. Indeed, the only valorised activity within this social model is productive, in the sense of producing goods which have market values for exchange. Legitimate dependency becomes morally loaded and confined to the categories of acceptable dependants, children, the elderly and people whose disabilities prevent them from achieving the economic ideal of self reliance (Fraser & Gordon 1994; Adair 2002). Livelihoods discourses in development documentation and research are based on this kind of representations (eg Scoones 1998). As individuals strive to earn a living in a liberalised economic order, those deemed unproductive risk destitution. Policies which foster individuation and investment in individual human capital, such as the promotion of secondary education, may promote the betterment of some individuals but in diverting investment away from supporting other social categories of dependents actually drive the socially differentiating processes of impoverishment and destitution.^v

Conclusion: Durable Poverty and Destitution

I have argued that chronic poverty as a concept is useful in highlighting the intractability of poverty, and hence confronting theories about growth. As currently conceived it is however limited to framing. Further, in prioritising duration rather than depth it does not adequately differentiate between different dimensions or extreme poverty and their diverse contextually determined causes. The concept of destitution provides a useful comparison. Unlike chronic poverty, which may or may not correspond to local categorisations, some variant destitution is acknowledged as a state of extreme poverty and social marginalisation in many communities, often associated with stigma and with certain social categories. Destitution is different from extreme poverty. It is not a simple consequence of shortfalls in income, but of the moral constitution of entitlements. Entitlements do not exist in the abstract or within ideal institutional forms, despite capability theorising, but in the constitution of social orders as networks of moral relationships. The content of relationships determines what different categories of person can expect and the kind of values which are allocated to them. A shift in this categorisation, as demonstrated in the examples of witchcraft, shifts allocations and entitlements. The process of entitlement shifting is not confined to the use of witchcraft in contemporary Africa, but is central both to poverty theory and to the

kinds of policies which are intended to eliminate it. Because allocative entitlements cannot be inclusively achieved through market institutions entitlement shifting and the reorganisation of dependency inevitably contributes to extreme poverty and destitution. Exploring destitution as a social status and as the outcome of a social process highlights the centrality of institutions in making differentiation endure. Intractable poverty is arguably also the result of social relations and ordering, not only in which certain people are stigmatized and excluded from opportunity because they are poor, but in the ways in which values are allocated in the global economy. Theorising *durable*, rather than chronic, poverty might convey the materiality of the institutional factors which keep people poor, and highlight the importance of social relations.

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ⁱ For an account of the social processes of making unequal social relations permanent across a range of contexts see Tilly (1998).

ⁱⁱ See Devereux on chronic poverty and destitution for an account of why depth matters.

ⁱⁱⁱ On entitlements approaches to poverty and well-being see for example Nussbaum (2003), Saith (2001) and Sen (1999).

^{iv} See Marcia Wright's book on the lives of East African slaves and other owned dependants for a sense of how this was organised in the nineteenth century (1993).

^v Beck makes a similar argument for the kinds of social policies and processes which foster individuation, and which therefore render old social models, about gender relations for example, impractical in the sense that they no longer work in practice (1992).