Maia Green, Department of Social Anthropology, University of Manchester,
Oxford Road, M13 9PL
Maia.green@man.ac.uk

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**Representing Poverty: Attacking Representations
Anthropological Perspectives on Poverty in Development**

Bank staff sustain their livelihoods by labelling. By calling Christmas vegetarian, the powerful turkeys survive (Chambers 2001:304).

Introduction : International Development and the Social Sciences
The development focus on poverty has not been reflected across the social sciences, with the exception of the satellite disciplines to development. These disciplines, including the various branches of development studies, exist partially to service international development institutions. Their intellectual agenda is strongly influenced, if not determined, by this relationship. The intellectual agendas of other social sciences are equally influenced by the different institutional and political contexts of their production. This is certainly the case for anthropology which, through the establishment of applied anthropology, in effect a minority sub discipline somewhat marginal to academic anthropology, has effectively maintained a distinct separation from development (Green 2003 *a*).

The institutional structure of international development and its globalisation through various policy and funding mechanisms and, more recently, an explicit drive to consolidate types of legitimate knowledge on and for development means that much of the content of social science knowledge in development is more homogenous than in other social sciences. The apparent homogeneity of development knowledge about the social is a consequence of shared paradigms in development thinking which privilege knowledge as information in terms of its instrumentality, that is its utility for purposes of policy implementation and planning. Such paradigms also set the parameters of what is recognised as authoritative knowledge within the international development sector (Goldman 2002; Mehta 2001).

As development knowledge is first and foremost instrumental knowledge which can be made to work in realising particular policy priorities topics for development research tend to be determined by particular interpretations of current policy agendas. This research is a case in point. Asked to consider the potential contribution of social anthropology to research about poverty and well being in the context of a debate about the integration of qualitative and quantitative methods, the silence of anthropology on the specific question of poverty was notable outside the rather narrow confines of development anthropology (cf Booth et al 1999).

This apparent silence does not mean that anthropology has nothing to say about poverty. Anthropological studies conducted outside development have consistently demonstrated the social constitution of categories and the importance of social relations as the bedrock of inequality. Such accounts point to the distortions inherent in viewing poverty in absolute and ahistorical terms and, in presenting poverty as a wholly subject position, of denying the poor agency. I argue that an anthropological perspective throws considerable light on the constitution of poverty , as both a category of development thinking and as a label applied to particular social categories. The application of such categories and the political implications of such classifications are explored through an analysis of social

development perspectives on poverty and a discussion of the new institutional mechanisms for monitoring poverty.

Perceiving Poverty

Poverty has been at the heart of the international development agenda for quite some time. Recent policy shifts which view poverty as something which has to be actively addressed, as opposed to something which will wither with economic growth, have lead to an increased emphasis on defining and assessing poverty so that which is known and made visible can be targeted. The World Bank has assumed a leadership role in the attack on poverty which is stated as the key focus of its activities. It has also lead the way in establishing systematic ways of representing poverty, which have become internationally significant through the introduction of country anti-poverty strategies and in shaping development perceptions of what poverty is and how and by whom it might be dealt with.

Poverty, as the focus of the international development efforts, has become not merely the stated priority of agencies such as the World Bank, but a total social fact. The facticity of poverty is attested through the numerous studies defining it and the institutions which exist to research its scale and dimensions. The various poverty departments, research centres (including this one) and systems for monitoring poverty nationally and internationally all point to the tangibility of poverty, its existence as an objective object about which facts can be determined and known. The development focus on poverty has spawned an army of anti-poverty specialists and a burgeoning literature on its constitution and definition.

The agenda for the study of poverty is determined by those agencies and agents with a vested interest in poverty. It is not determined by those people who would be categorised as poor. Nor is it determined by the findings of other studies which have happened to highlight poverty, although evidence from studies about poverty feeds into the knowledge production cycle. Poverty as a research focus is predetermined by the current policy content of international development, and the World Bank in particular, which gradually adopted poverty as its priority in the 1970's((Escobar 1995: 21-44; Finnemore 1997: 208). This focus in delineating the object of study constitutes the subject. Poverty as an entity is brought into being through the institutions established to describe, quantify and locate it.

Until the 1970's international development focused on economic growth and developing the infrastructures of natural resource producing countries, just as colonial regimes had focused their efforts on self sufficiency and market integration. Poverty was neither the explicit focus of development initiatives, nor of academic study. The discourse on poverty only became influential, hegemonic even, after the World Bank under Robert Mc Namara vigorously promoted it in the 1970's (Finnemore 1997: 204-7). Its evolution as the target of development must be understood within the history of international development as a new institutional mechanism for effecting new kinds of social transfers and relations between states which emerged after World War 2 . This institutional nexus which played to American power fostered the formation of international organisations and the internationalist ideology of assistance and influence. Significant amongst the new development institutions were the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (Rist 1997; Escobar 1995). The modalities for dealing with poverty have shifted since then, along with conceptualisations of the poor, from the early and biologically informed basic needs approach of the 70's to today's somewhat more sophisticated package of rights and entitlements.

The social construction of poverty as the target of international development assistance means that what constitutes poverty

changes depending on the perspective of those charged with its assessment. More fundamentally, perspectives on poverty, and its very salience as a category cannot be assumed to be universally present. Shresthra has written about the impact of the developers' categories of `poverty' and `development' on Nepalese rural communities, and the social consequences of being defined as lacking what outsiders think they should have (1995). Goldman, describing the introduction of development planning in Laos, quotes a government official poised to write their first concept paper on 'poverty' who remarked that it was not until Bank involvement that their government officials had `ever used the term 'poverty' (2001:208).

Attributes of Poverty
Definitions of poverty, and thus proposed strategies for reducing it, differ significantly between the two World Development Reports at either end of the past decade. Whereas the 1990 report viewed poverty primarily in terms of low income and absence of social safety nets, the 2001 report sees poverty as explicitly multifaceted. Poverty is not merely about income and consumption, but amounts to a state of relative powerlessness and exclusion form decision making processes, as well as low levels of education, high rates of mortality and poor health.

Although the diversity of the experience of poverty globally is reiterated, through the `voices of the poor'[1], the report, in constructing poverty as an object, serves to homogenise attributes of poverty and the situation of those categorised as poor. Marginal, excluded, vulnerable, unwell, illiterate, indigenous and female, the poor predominantly live in remote rural areas and urban shanties, with few assets and weak social networks. Their relative

powerlessness is emphasised, and by extension the power of various groups over them, not only of local and national elites and governments, but the power of development institutions to recognise and define them, and to determine when poverty matte rs.

Recent development representations of poverty claim to make use of a range of methodologies and analytical perspectives to access the multi faceted dimensions of poverty.[2] Participatory methodologies and national poverty assessments are combined with census and survey data dealing with income and consumption to produce poverty lines and indices of change in poverty over time. The livelihood strategies of poor people are demonstrated to be diversified and complicated. The destitute and vulnerable are differentiated from the mere poor, and amongst the latter specific social categories subjected to forms of exclusion are identified. Nutrition, income, consumption and entitlements feed into the current poverty framework in terms of identifying the poor. The poor have much in common in this representation and the reasons for their poverty are similar across geographical regions an national boundaries. Corruption, gender inequity, bad government and limited access to markets all contribute to causing current levels of poverty in the world, just as, it is implied, similar policy choices will light the way out of it.

If the experience of poverty appears relatively homogenous, its quantitative dimensions seem equally striking. One fifth of the world's population is represented as living on less than one dollar a day. High infant mortality and low rates of enrolment in primary education characterise poverty across diverse countries and regions. As the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai has shown in relation to the effects of the census in colonial India, technologies of representation have consequences for the kinds of truths they reveal. Similar

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[1] See the volume titled `Voices of the Poor. Can Anyone Hear Us?' (Narayan et al 2000).

[2] For example see Carvalho & White (1997).

statistics create an impression of the similarity of experience (Appadurai 1993:321; Geertz 1984)) and of the processes which contribute to poverty in diverse settings. An identity of form rather than content justifies the grouping together of countries which may be quite different, with different histories and different causes of poverty. Such technologies also permit the construction of poverty rankings, in which countries and regions within countries can appear as more poor in the sense of having more poverty than others. Quantitative methodologies for assessing poverty allow magnitude to be addressed. Poverty can be seen to be increasing or decreasing, and the scale of poverty assessed. Quantitative measures also permit the quantification of measures to address poverty, the cost benefit analyses that are the basis of economic appraisals and, in the case of income and consumption, justify the models of growth needed to raise incomes and `lift the poor' out of poverty.

Representing Poverty

Quantitative methodologies and poverty lines help to create poverty as a tangible entity, a thing in itself, the scale of which can be captured through measurement. The language of the report reinforces this notion. Poverty is ascribed agency to impact on the lives of people who `fall into' it. Poverty is not described as a consequence of social relations, but represented as an evolving entity which must be attacked. Size matters. The growth in poverty , its sheer scale , prompts a response. Poverty in these development writings is represented as inherently problematic, not only for or the poor themselves whose suffering is graphically documented, but for the wider society which is threatened by it in myriad ways. The potential threat inherent in poverty and thus the poor extends to non poor communities. The moral obligation to reduce poverty is explicitly about reducing the threat that the poor pose.

At first sight such representations of poverty seem relatively straightforward, even obvious. Their acceptance comes partly from the fact that they are so familiar and partly because they have become a necessary and expected preamble to virtually any kind of development project documentation. In practice, such accounts are a far from being unproblematic statements about the incidence of poverty in particular places, and are not intended to be. [3]The kind of poverty perceived in such accounts is both highly subjective, depending on the perspective of the perceiver, and highly political, that is related to the wider context in which such rankings and accounts come to have salience (Apthorpe 1997: 24; Pansters & de Ruijter 2000:5). Representing poverty in such documentation and policy discourse is justificatory in relation to the scale of spending or a proposed intervention.

Such descriptions are not a response to the characteristic attributes of poverty as it developed in the twentieth century but are part of a long established intellectual tradition of perceiving poverty in ways which, in making poverty the focus of analysis, obscure the social processes that make people poor and, in abstracting poverty from people, obliterate the agency of social actors in creating and transcending the limitations on their resources and entitlements. The rich or processes of wealth creation are rarely the focus of such studies. [4] This is not because wealth and poverty are unconnected, far from it, but because such approaches are essentially concerned

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[3] James Ferguson remarks of such statements apparently based on empirical research which find their way into development documentation and which are contradicted by more academic studies, which are not cited, that `It must be recognized that which is being done here is not some sort of strangely bad scholarship, but something else entirely..' (1990:27).

[4] Hence Chambers' rhetorical suggestion that the World Development report 2010 be titled `Challenging Wealth and Power' (2001: 306).

with the a normalising vision of society that is premised on the elimination of the pathological (cf Rabinow 1989: 171).

Visions of society as functional an holistic characterised social thinking for much of the twentieth century. Such assumptions were not confined to the theories associated with the founding fathers of sociology such as Emile Durkheim. They had significant practical implications in a period when social knowledge was starting to be used as the basis of a scientific understanding of society, with implications of prediction and control. Michel Foucault has delineated the intellectual genealogy of such perspectives in the context of the history of social policy[5] in France in the nineteenth century. An evidence base concerning the spread of cholera associated the disease with the poor. Surveillance and social control were the imposed solutions, not only to epidemics, but to the potential social disruption the poor presented. Poor victims of disease were to be treated in public hospitals not only for humanitarian reasons, but in order to generate the knowledge about the disease that was necessary to develop treatments for those with sufficient wealth to pay for it. `What is benevolence towards the poor is transformed into knowledge that is applicable to the rich' (1976:84).

Although the contemporary emergence of knowledge about poverty is not directly comparable to the situation of medical knowledge in nineteenth century France, there are obvious parallels. As with the medical profession's capacity to define sickness and, backed by the state, to cordon infectivity, so what constitutes knowledge about poverty and the demarcation of the poor is a consequence of the power of international development organisations and of the national governments with whom they work. With poverty as a subject the poor, who by definition lack the resources and

entitlements to reframe the terms of this engagement, become objects of study.

As poverty reduction becomes the stated purpose of development transfers poverty becomes a proxy for under development. But poverty is difficult to identify systematically and harder still to assess. Other proxies, based on health outcomes and access to services, then come to stand for poverty. Poverty thus appears possible to address. As participatory styles of poverty assessment become the norm in aid recipient countries new proxies for poverty are revealed through the selection of indicators of poverty status and with them areas of responsibility for poverty reduction delineated. The constitution of poverty , its characteristics and causes, is thus highly political, while recourse to poverty as an analytical device in development is, often, intentionally depoliticising. Poverty as both cause and effect of un-development is accorded the kind of agency and contribution to causality that in reality belongs to a range of human actors enmeshed in the complex chains of relationships that make up history.

To assert the social construction of poverty as a category within international development is not to deny that the phenomena grouped today in its classificatory frame exist or have always existed in some shape or form. What I want to emphasise is that the current content of the category of poverty is not at all self evident. Indeed if it were it would surely have come to the attention of other empirical social sciences outside development, notably anthropology. Further, current methodologies for assessing poverty within development perpetuate a focus on poverty and the poor as both problems and solutions for development.

Anthropological Approaches to Poverty
The scale of the poverty problem as represented in the development literature has not captured the attention of other social sciences to

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[5] Or the social history of policy.

the same extent. This is partly because of the Euro American focus of conventional sociology and the colonization by development studies of expertise in so called poor countries. More fundamentally, it is because a social science perspective from anthropology or sociology would start from a position of interrogating the assumed categories of analysis , such as `poverty', and rather than assume attributes in advance, would base an account on empirical observation and analysis.

Accounts of 'poverty' from this perspective would not seek to refine globally applicable definitions, nor assume that its experiential dimensions were similar. Indeed, referring to the `world of measurement' within which the intensity of famines are conventionally assessed by outsiders dealing with aid, the anthropologist Kirsten Hastrup makes the point that for the person suffering from food shortage, it is not the amount of food which they are missing that is significant, as much as the qualitative dimensions of the experience. This is filtered through cultural expectations and perspectives, as well as those shaped by age, class, individual experience and gender. She remarks, `when hunger has become famine, quantity has long since been transformed into quality' (1993:730).

Although anthropology as a fieldwork based discipline dependent on ongoing social relationships with informants built up over an extended timeframe, usually involving more than one year in the field, could provide a potential vantage point for accessing the qualitative dimensions of poverty, and the specificities of these experiences in different historical and social contexts, the discipline has not paid much attention to poverty as such, nor to varieties of human suffering. This may be because anthropologists have largely subscribed to the social science tendency to opt for what was perceived as the functionally social. This tendency has probably , Hastrup maintains, led to a theoretical view of suffering as

abnormal, as a disjuncture in social order, when in fact such phenomena occur in all societies at all times (1993: 730).

Contemporary anthropology is changing. As the anthropological perspective refocuses in response to post colonial landscapes, anthropology has looked inwards and upwards at its objects of study. Current anthropology concerns itself not with local societies as self reproducing social universes (e.g. Evans Pritchard 1940) , nor with the articulation of these into metropolitan or capitalist relations of production as in the Marxist derived visions of the unequal economic integration of third world local communities and first world industrial centres the 1970's (e.g. Meillassoux 1981) , but with the entire span of social relations that comprise the contemporary world. No longer focusing solely on small scale rural communities, anthropologists today conduct research into diverse social worlds in all social contexts and across all continents.

Recent works by anthropologists explore the social relations around new fertility practices in the United Kingdom (Franklin 1997), how ordinary North Americans think about mathematics in their daily numerical practices (Lave 1988) and kinship amongst the post industrial communities of northern England (Edwards 2000). Anthropologists are also exploring the institutions through which contemporary international society is constituted. Examples include Wilson's study of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2001), Nader's work on the social processes through which special kinds of knowledge come to have status as `science', with all the claims to truth that this category implies (Nader et al 1996), and Harper's ethnography of the IMF (1997).

As well as globalisation and the changing nature of contemporary life in all societies, anthropology has also become more concerned with larger issues of human suffering and how these are brought

about by the conjuncture of specific social and political relations. Pertinent examples include Malkki's account of the relation between refugee status and the emergence of a politicised ethnicity amongst Hutu exiles in Tanzanian refugee camps during the 1980's (1995), Harrell Bond's classic ethnography of life for the recipients of humanitarian assistance in a refugee camp in Sudan (1986), and Paul Richard's empathetic analysis of the meaning and motivation behind an atrocity filled guerrilla war in Sierra Leone (1996).

Away from the aftermath of war, anthropologists have acknowledged ill-being in the unavoidable `violence of everyday life' brought about by appalling social conditions in some very poor communities . Nancy Scheper Hughes' (1992) description of the normalisation of infant mortality in a chronically poor *favela* in Brazil shows how because poor mothers expect that weaker children will die as a matter of course, they do little to save them. Dying infants and those perceived as having minimal chances of survival are treated as little `angels 'who are merely visiting the living and thus are not expected to be anything other than the most transient of visitors. Scheper Hughes has since turned her attention to the transnational social relations of inequality that promote and sustain the trade in human flesh- not slavery or prostitution, but the buying and selling of body parts, blood, kidneys and corneas (2002).

An anthropological approach starts with people rather than theory, and with a basic methodological premise that the anthropologist must first observe what people do and use their categories to understand it. From this perspective, the anthropologist cannot be so much concerned with her own idea of poverty as with what concepts of poverty do or do not exists in particular places and at particular times. Where do such ideas come from? Who is included in such categories? What does it mean to be labelled as such? How do these categories relate to other social categories? Moreover, anthropology, in starting with real people, as opposed to ideal types

read off survey data, perceives poverty as first and foremost a relation between them.

For anthropology, as perhaps for our informants, poverty is a social relation, not an absolute condition (Sahlins 1972: 37). Consequently, the more traditional ethnographic studies of communities and the social relations through which they are structured have yielded numerous insights into poverty and inequality. These range from studies of rural society to those on caste, social exclusions and the structural transformations brought about by rapid economic growth (Gudeman 1978 ; Nash 1979). Displacement, dispossession, the social construction of property relations and how people have rights over people are long standing anthropological themes with relevance for understanding poverty and inequality.

Anthropology as a people focused discipline by necessity encompasses a sense of history. Contemporary anthropology continues to rely on extended fieldwork within the community whose representations and shared meanings are under investigation as its primary method, but makes use of a range of additional methods to ensure that other aspects are covered. Anthropologists today supplement fieldwork with archival study, historical interviews and comparative research on the wider contexts in which their fields are situated. Fieldwork is no longer confined to a single location. Where chains of transnational relationships are the object of investigation, multi- sited ethnography is used to explore the constitution of multi-local communities of meaning as, for example, in Leslie Groves' recent ethnography of the totality of an ILO intervention which takes in, ethnographically, the Geneva HQ, the implementing Country Office and the project site (2002).

If poverty as a state and status is the manifestation of social relations it is also a category of representation through which social agents classify and act upon the world. An anthropological approach

explores the content of this category and its genealogy in relation to the specific historical and social contexts in which it has salience for different categories of persons. Such approaches reveal the continuity between current notions of poverty in development and social policy, and the assumptions which inform them. As we have seen, these centre on normative ideas of social order and a perception of poverty as an inherent threat to this order. Poverty is not represented as the outcome of historical and social relations but as a presence in societies which must be eliminated to maintain those societies.

Where social relations are described as contributing to poverty these are represented as flawed in terms of quality, rather than content, as in the current discourse about social capital where the low quality of local social relations is deemed to contribute to poverty, rather than the terms of a community's embedding within wider regional, national and international economies. The ahistoricism of such visions is also echoed in contemporary development representations of poverty in which poverty is presented as a state in the present with causal relations similarly present focused, rather than as the outcome of longer historical processes.

Marginality as a Social Process
Historically informed perspectives on poverty reveal not only the social construction of the category within a historical and institutional setting, and the key role of powerful institutions in globalising the poverty agenda, but the fact that the constitution of the kind of poverty that development aspires to reduce is itself a product of the socio economic relations of modernity . If poverty is measured in terms of access to services and levels of income consumption, those excluded from market participation and services require integration into state and market systems for poverty to be addressed.

Such integration, or rather the terms on which the certain social groups are integrated, is frequently the point of transition from sustainable community to social exclusion, from locally enfranchised to disenfranchised and destitute. The San of Botswana provide a case in point. An ethnic and cultural group associated with a semi peripatetic lifestyle and mode of subsistence based on the gathering of wild foods, hunting and casual labour on cattle ranches, land reforms in Botswana have restricted their rights of access to game and wild resources, forcing an increased reliance on low wages in the ranching sector. Those without paid employment have been made dependant on meagre state handouts, which do not compensate for the loss of the hunting resources claimed by the national elite. Although the San had previously been poor, occupying a kind of vassal position in relation to herding landlords, they had been able to mitigate this with access to game and the possibility of foraging (Wilmsen 1989). Their current situation of destitution is a direct consequence of the terms of their integration into the contemporary state (Good 1999).

Marginality is not always perceived as wholly negative by those communities wishing to limit such engagement. Indeed, some groups strive to maintain their autonomy through marginal relations to mainstream society and the state, relations characterised by Roma and traveller communities in Eastern and Western Europe and by some contemporary hunting and gathering communities in Africa and Asia. Such groups strive to evade entrapment into the economic relations that characterise the society they wish not to be subject to. This is achieved through such strategies as nomadism, involvement in activities that yield immediate returns (such a foraging) (Woodburn 1981), and an emphasis on the redistribution of resources through gambling and sharing, rather than accumulation and saving. Such strategies are an important aspect of identity and self definition for these communities, but the ideological emphasis on freedom is limited in practice by the very real powerlessness they

face in relation to other social groups and the state. Subject to discrimination, excluded from education and inclusion on anything other than the terms set by the majority, such groups become encapsulated within highly restricted economic and cultural niches (Day, Papataxiarchis & Stewart 1999)

Marginality in relation to place is equally an artefact of social and historical processes, namely historical decisions to situate the centre elsewhere, rather than an inherent attribute of people or places. Anna Tsing's account of a remote forest community in Indonesia reveals how they see themselves as fortunate to be relatively far from the parasitical state, and just happen to live in an 'out of the way' place (1993). Tsing's detailed ethnography goes on to demonstrate how `out of the wayness', and marginaility, are socially, historically and *intentionally* constructed (1993 :41-71), by those defined as marginal as well as by those with the power to enforce it. [6]

Marginality and social exclusion, once established, are often reinforcing. Governments and elites may actually seek to perpetuate the exclusion of some communities and social categories from access to full citizenship. Such deliberate processes of discrimination are rarely admitted, but are clearly evident in the kinds of mutually reinforcing policies applied to such communities which serve to ensure that the odds against their integration into mainstream society are often insurmountable. Extreme examples of this kind of strategy are the policies pursued by the Australian government against Aboriginal communities, the Botswana state's policies on the San and the systemic institutionalisation of discrimination against black communities in the United States of America. Mortality rates for black citizens of some US cities are higher than those in some of the world's poorest countries and a significant proportion of young black American men are in prison.

US welfare regimes based on an assumption that the majority of the poor are undeserving and thus need to be closely monitored are oriented towards making public assistance hard to obtain and unpleasant to survive on. The US approach to welfare is informed by an ideology of individual economic responsibility in which failure to achieve, and hence poverty, is viewed as a failure and thus as the individuals responsibility. Various schemes aimed at getting people to work, often for very low wages, aim to make the poor more deserving of assistance through labour, hence the concept of `workfare'. The perception of poverty as a moral failure justifies punitive welfare interventions (Adair 2002: 460-2). Claimants must permit state scrutiny of their homes and private lives over their consumption and spending . Such attitudes are not confined to the United States. They were the basis of discourses about poverty and social responsibility for the destitute in England until the mid twentieth century, hence the intentionally punitive welfare regimes in workhouses where the destitute could go to seek food and shelter in return for hard labour in conditions that were designed to replicate the prison . [7]

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[6] Similarly, the economic stagnation of much of southern Tanzania, and its ensuing 'poverty', owes much to game protection policies of successive colonial and post colonial governments which have created and maintained one of the largest game reserves in Africa right in the middle of what was until the early twentieth century the economic heartland of the region (Green 2003 *b*; Seppala 1998).

[7] For a contemporary account of the conditions inside workhouses at the start of the twentieth century, and for insights into Victorian attitudes towards poverty, see the novelist Jack London's `The People of the Abyss' , originally published in 1903 (1998).

Punishing the Poor, Blaming the Victim

Related attitudes live on in popular perceptions of poverty across many non poor communities and within the international development community. There is no doubt that the idea giving cash as opposed to food aid in famine situations is still widely resisted because of a belief that this would benefit the undeserving poor , despite evidence to suggest that this would be cheaper and more effective in supporting local grain markets and empowering local people, than the current system of transporting heavy food many hundreds of miles and allocating it (de Waal 1989).

Donor preoccupations with accounting for even trivial amounts of cash when spent in villages reflect similar concerns whereas central spending of hundreds or thousands attracts little audit attention within country and head quarters offices where the emphasis is on millions. I think that food for work programmes also promote, perhaps intentionally, this way of thinking, the idea that the work should be so menial and unpleasant and lowly paid that a person would have to be virtually starving to want to do it, rather than simply allocate funds to those in need of support.[8] The labour intensive work schemes for minimal pay to provide relief for the very poor are similar. Such schemes, whether they are called relief or alleviation, may provide some people with some income but they will never alter the unequal structure of social relations which keeps people in poverty.

The notion that certain individuals and social groups are undeserving of assistance because they somehow cause their own poverty is pervasive in the Unites States, where it informs racist discourse about non -white low income groups (Adair 2002:464). The anthropologists Felipe Bourgois has written about the problems

faced by young male Puerto Ricans in a run down district of New York City who find their access to even low income jobs restricted through a combination of institutional racism and the feminisation of the unskilled sector (2003). One of the few options for young men to earn good money in the neighbourhood is through the illegal drugs trade, selling highly profitable crack cocaine to a client group consisting of addicts from outside the Puerto Rican community. Of course only a minority of men in the neighbourhood earn their living in this way, but the high rewards and glamour of the big dealer lifestyle make an appealing, and rational, career option for those men willing to practice sufficient violence to gain `respect' and ensure that their supply networks are protected .

Bourgois shows how involvement in violence, drugs and crime perpetuate the stereotypical images of the neighbourhood, effectively a `no go' zone for those who see themselves as law abiding and the for the better off who can afford to live elsewhere. The poor, Puerto Rican and black, are forced to live in the ghetto, unable to afford rents elsewhere, while legitimate business either moves out or doesn't move back in, making those who work it the legal sector daily commuters out of poverty only to commute back in.

Outsiders blame ghetto poverty on the drugs and guns culture of the ghetto. Bourgois shows how the ghetto and its culture are best viewed in social and historical context, as the products of and reaction to particular social and economic configurations in the United States and the ongoing colonial subjugation of Puerto Rico. Puerto Rican poverty has very little to do with the cultural practices and attitudes of Puerto Ricans but rather serves US interests, both within Manhattan where Puerto Rican migrants provide a source of cheap labour and in Puerto Rico where industrial production can take place for US firms free of the constraints for the firm and protection for the labourer provided by US labour laws.

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[8] Aid, Mary Anderson points out, and the way in which its is delivered conveys implicit and explicit ethical messages (1999:55).

Interestingly, the values of the men that Bourgois worked with, the drug dealing macho hard men of the ghetto, were not very different from those of mainstream American society- a desire to get on, make some money, a belief in the free market and individual freedom, and the belief that poverty is both individual responsibility and an index of moral failure. [9] It is these values of individual responsibility and effort which motivate dealers in the micro capitalist enterprise of crack dealing, the main difference between their business and those of the middle class entrepreneurs downtown and in the suburbs is in the classification of illegality and the problems this poses for crack entrepreneurs who find their avenues to participation in legal business thwarted by their criminal convictions and lack of bureaucratic experience.

Power and Knowledge
The social critique of the society of the poor, rather than the society that produces poverty, is equally present in development thinking, even in the very paradigm of international development as a moral imperative itself . Certainly, where the development paradigm is premised on an explicit desire to transform societies deemed as poor and thus as somehow unfunctional, a moral judgement implying social failure is never far away. Although small scale sanitation and latrine projects may seem very different on the surface from the recent drive to foster strong social networks and relationships of trust through civil society support programmes, both types of interventions depend on shared assumption about the unsuitability

or inappropriateness of kinds of social organisation and social practices for achieving development, or conversely, the association between poverty and particular social and institutional forms.[10]

This kind of thinking explicitly informed the strategies of colonial Christian mission which strove to associate their ideas of desirable society with what was termed `civilization', implying a wholesale devaluation of the societies that were the targets of conversion (Comaroff & Comaroff 1991; Green 2003b). Similarly, the sanitation policies so vigorously pursued in colonial Fiji (Thomas 1994) , the mass campaigns for the eradication of sleeping sickness (Lyons 1992) and tsetse fly which involved mass reorganisation of rural communities into new and governable social forms were premised on the notion of the inappropriateness of a range of social forms for what was defined as positive change.

These strategies which involve changing the poor to get the poor out of poverty are interesting not only for the discourse of moral judgement they reveal from the powerful over those with little power, but their continuity into the post colonial social relations of international development. Although international development may claim to be less coercive in the ideal than colonial strategies of social transformation, the bottom line of compulsion continues to blight large scale infrastructure projects that are increasingly subject to harsh external criticism and are falling out of favour (Goldman 2000) . Even where governments and local communities enter into development relationships voluntarily the power dimension remains. Although accounts of the one sidedness of developer developee relationships are no longer an accurate reflection of development partnerships in which poverty reduction strategies are created nationally and in collaboration with a wide range of

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[9] 'Like most other people in the United States, drug dealers and street criminals are scrambling to obtain their piece of the pie as fast as possible. In fact, in their pursuit of success they are even following the minute details of the classical Yankee model for upward mobility. They are aggressively pursuing careers as private entrepreneurs; they take risks; work hard and pray for good luck' (Bourgois 2003:326).

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[10] For an account of how these notions inform thinking about poverty as social pathology in the United States see Adair (2000).

stakeholders, the scope for equal partnerships is obviously limited by the political considerations of aid and the economic influence of donors (Lewis 1998; Crewe & Harrison 1999).

The content of development strategies and plans, even when these are prepared under substantial national or local ownership and where participatory modalities have been encouraged, reveal remarkable similarities across countries and continents. This uniformity comes about through the effects of a range of mechanisms, some intentional others arbitrary. These include the policy influence of a limited number of organisations such as the World Bank, the standardisation of development planning and analytical practices across many organisations in development from NGOs to multi-laterals, and the relatively restricted pool within which the same professionals circulate from agency to agency (Green 2003 c). Equally significant is the constitution of what is constituted as authoritative knowledge about development, and thus development itself (Cooper & Packard 1997: 24; Goldman 2001; Moore 2001).

Current claims to authoritative knowledge are dispersed through the development satellite agencies as part of the World Bank's strategy to become, as 'knowledge Bank', the centre of knowledge about development (Mehta 2001). The Bank not only conducts research on development but assimilates different knowledge on development into its understanding of development to present a unitary but evolving vision. This perspective informs the increasing complexity of the Bank's accounts of development and of the factors which may be significant for its realization.

Dealing with poverty is at the heart of the Bank's vision of development which currently entails a mixture of growth and social protection policies to provide safety nets for the poor. Making the vision into reality requires measurement of growth and more

recently of poverty. It was only once the Bank realigned its policy priorities to the elimination of poverty that poverty assessments became central (Finnemore 1997). Thus, what the current emphasis on poverty assessment reveals is not so much the scale and magnitude of poverty in the world, as the power of development institutions to make it visible (Escobar 1991: 664).

This power to reveal is also, inevitably, the power to judge. Just as notions of the deserving poor and the culture of poverty seem natural to apply at the level of individuals within wealthy societies, so the same moral judgements are implicitly made when advocating mass social transformation or cultural change as precursors to 'development'. And, as with the intrusive state's power to invade the domestic space of welfare mothers in the US to assess whether they have spent their rations wisely or have cheated the system (Adair 2001: 460), so the inequalities of power mean that the benefactor also claims the power not only to judge the moral claims of the poor to assistance, and to police them, but to set the terms of the assessment.

Poverty as defined through millennium targets and consumption measures is a construct of international development organisations. We do not know what such categorisations mean for diverse individuals within diverse social and economic contexts. What poverty as a scale means for development is a justification for intervention and a means of ranking units, countries or regions, on a poverty scale. Assessing poverty, locating the poor and trying to measure comparatively the incidence and depth of poverty assumes that poverty is a state universally accessible to such devices. In reality, it is such devices which make poverty visible and generalisable, as a state which shares commonalities across diverse settings.

Participatory poverty assessments permit, at least formally, the poor themselves to engage in framing the terms by which poverty in particular places is recognised. They do not radically shift the relations of power through which the non-poor and the outside determines when and how poverty is to be recognised and assessed. New modalities for facilitating local ownership of development strategies through the PRSP process potentially offer space for local definitions of poverty and strategies for action to emerge within the global discourse of poverty reduction. The extent to which such mechanisms provide an opportunity to address inequality and poverty must remain open to question. Given that poverty is neither an absolute condition, nor a readily identifiable entity, and that the content of the category is ultimately politically determined, it is not surprising that the new institutional structures for perceiving poverty become politicised contexts where poverty can be claimed not so much as a problem for some social categories but as a potential asset by others who stand to gain from the inputs of the development relationship.[11]

This process works itself out in different ways depending on the power relations involved in the construction of poverty. In South Africa under Apartheid for example, what was in effect a participatory poverty study although termed as a `commission of inquiry' financed by the Carnegie Foundation, a US charitable entity, became a forum where the politics of apartheid could be publicly critiqued, within and outside South Africa. Local ownership and involvement in the design of the study created credibility and ensured that the product was viewed as an indigenous, rather than an outsider, vision (Bell 2002).

In contrast, the weight attached to development rankings in relation to determining priorities for spending makes the positioning in rankings critical for governments or regions seeking to maximise their credibility as deserving recipients of international assistance, even where these rankings are determined by outsiders. It is in the interests of some countries to be categorised as poor and to be ranked as amongst the poorest in order to justify claims for development support juts as it is in the interests of donors to represent them this way.

Development rankings, including poverty, will be differently interpreted and assessed depending on the policy priorities of different donors and different governments (Viopio 2000:189). These rankings and indicators are never just perceived as data (nor are they intended to be), but as `message, meaning and judgement…the most strongly identified and perhaps contested messages… (are) … official social and cultural values and open or hidden policy agendas seen to be *driving*, not driven by, numerical scores and rankings' (Apthorpe 1997:24, my emphasis).

Institutionalising Poverty
Although poverty has been a focus of the international development effort since the 1970's, it is generally acknowledged that the centrality of poverty as a proxy for development became institutionally enmeshed within a range of influential multi-lateral and bilateral agencies as a result of James' Wolfensohn's presidency at the World Bank. The Bank set about trying understand its enemy better through developing, methodologies for poverty assessment and promoting the study of different dimensions of poverty. Quantitative and qualitative dimensions of poverty were incorporated into Bank poverty assessments, at the same time as the Bank's policies became increasingly assimilationist of civil society and activist positions.

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[11] In the form of contracts, large scale, resource transfers, opportunities for employment, study tours, capacity and institution building, etcetera.

While the Bank relied on consultants and national offices to work with local research institutes and governments to provide date for assessments, UNDP were working with national partners to establish national systems for monitoring poverty that would provide indicators for progress in the implementation of National Poverty reduction Strategies and Development Visions. The introduction of Poverty Reduction Strategy papers as vehicles fro the formalisation for what are in effect national development strategies based on the development visions and poverty reduction plans legitimated the institutionalisation of poverty monitoring within governments as a function of state. With the institutionalisation of poverty came the need to formally integrate poverty into policy and planning. This entails making policies relate to what has become the overarching policy objective of poverty reduction.

In practice the linking of anti-poverty polices with an evidence base about poverty is far from straightforward. Not only are national statistical and information systems under resourced and weak, but the indicators selected to stand in for poverty do not necessarily capture its multifaceted dimensions and may not be responsive to the proposed interventions (Lucas 2000: 100). Moreover, it is far from clear in poor countries where the line should be drawn, if at all, between degrees of poverty, resulting in a tendency to categorise virtually all policies as poverty reducing and in the imposition of poverty as a blanket label justifying a broad brush approach to resource allocation which manages to maintain current imbalances in spending.

These processes are clearly visible in the present drive to create poverty focus in Tanzania and Zanzibar, the outcome of an initiative spearheaded by multi lateral agencies, notably UNDP. What emerges from a brief comparison of the establishment of poverty as a development priority in these two settings is the politically constructed content of the category poverty and the ways in which poverty, once defined as the main development problem, comes to assume status as an analytical device which is used to account for a range of other problems accorded a significant place in the poverty chain.

Zanzibar is formally part of the United Republic of Tanzania, although it exists as a separate country within the Union, with its own parliament and own spheres of responsibility. Excluded from access to EU aid for much of the past decade, as a consequence of political conditionalities over the management of elections (amongst other things), Zanzibar is in the process of seeking readmission into the ambit of Western development assistance. Excluded from the HIPIC initiative (and hence the necessity to produce a PRSP) due to the aid boycott and the fact that development assistance is a responsibility, formally at least, of the Union Government, Zanzibar is nevertheless striving to demonstrate its commitment to the core aims of international development in a bid to strengthen its relationships with development partners. Zanzibar has adopted the poverty reduction model piloted on the mainland, and is seeking to frame its current development policies in terms of a Zanzibar Poverty Reduction Plan.

The poverty reduction plan approach is promoted equally by UNDP, who provide the technical assistance to adapt approaches developed elsewhere to the new setting. What is interesting about this process is what happens to problem analysis when poverty becomes the predetermined principle of, and principal, cause and effect. The ZPRP represents the current situation in Zanzibar as defined by poverty which is equated, in background studies, to the extent and intensity of poverty on the mainland. Poverty on Zanzibar is attributed to various causes, and assigned various solutions, some of which are economic and industrial.

The ZPRP analysis omits reference to the political conflicts which have disrupted governance and public services in the islands since the 1960's and contributed to asymmetrical subsidisation of the islands' tiny population of less than one million from the United Republic's coffers. Indeed, according to some estimates Zanzibar has received massive subsidies y from the United Republic of Tanzania in excess of $870 million US dollars between the years 1983 and 1999, during which period Zanzibar derived substantial wealth from its ease of foreign exchange and tariff regimes that made its ports a channel through which international goods could be easily imported (Maliyamkono 2000: 213, 187). The total transfer from the URT to Zanzibar `is greater than the eleven years of Tanzania's development expenditure from 1986-1997' (op cit 214). Against this background, poverty as an effect emerges as a result of significantly more complex relations and processes than represented in the document with its emphasis on feeder roads and access to markets.

The analysis of poverty and equation of Zanzibar poverty with mainland poverty creates the impression that we are dealing with a phenomenon which is fundamentally similar in the islands and on the Tanzania mainland. While this may be the case at the level of manifestation, that is of effect, the *causes* of poverty, and hence realistic solutions to it are radically different in the two countries which have radically different economies, different histories and in all likelihood, different trajectories of development. The use of `poverty' as a justificatory category for development in such contexts becomes largely devoid of meaningful content. As an analytical tool , it is a blunt instrument. As both cause and effect of the respective problems of Zanzibar and Tanzania recourse to poverty says virtually nothing about the very different economic and social profiles of the two countries, nor about the very different historical and contemporary political relations which have contributed to the way they are today.

The Poverty of Representations
If poverty as a category in development is the outcome of politically contested processes of negotiation, with variable content, what then does it mean to assert that so many people live in poverty or that poverty needs to be attacked? As we have seen, the content of the category of poverty is not specific. It conveys a range of associations, including consumption measures and access to basic services, aggregated at rather crude levels with an emphasis on magnitude and scale. The quantification of poverty permits the homogenisation of poverty across time and space. This drive to generalise permits the construction of poverty rankings which aim to compare the amount and depth of poverty, rather than its causes and consequences. The tendency to generalise equally informs qualitative approaches to apprehending poverty which have concentrated on how poverty is similarly manifested in different places rather than on the historical and social factors which differentially contribute to poverty in different places.

The emphasis on poverty as the problem and the locus of analysis diverts attention from the social relations, local, national and international, which produce poverty as an attribute of people. Very often it is not among the poor that we should be looking for those relations which have contributed to most to the poverty of others. The reification of poverty deflects from the issue of agency. Poverty is not a 'thing' to be attacked, but the outcome of social inequalities. Only an emphasis on how the rich and powerful came to be so can fully bring to light how this process works. The poor are poor not because of `poverty' , but are poor because of other people.

Focusing on people highlights the centrality of the actions and strategies of rich and poor alike in determining poverty outcomes, and the quality of the embodied experience of poverty. Chambers reminds us that for the most poor what stands between them and destitution is their bodies, the only asset they have (2002:303).

While they strive to protect this asset with limited resources and inadequate access to health services, some have to resort to the market. Prostitution, slavery and the sale of human organs are the ultimate reminders that wealth buys life, literally, and other people. It is not so much the threat posed by the poor but the threats to the poor that should concern us. Quantification can capture the extent of the incidence of such practices. It cannot capture the nexus of desperation which forces people to consider them as choices. As well as encouraging us to be more reflexive about our categories and labelling, perhaps anthropology can make a contribution here.

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