

Mariano Féliz, Aaron L. Rosenberg (Eds.)

**The Political Economy of Poverty
and Social Transformations
of the Global South**

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**THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF POVERTY
AND SOCIAL TRANSFORMATIONS
OF THE GLOBAL SOUTH**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AbM	Abahlali base Mjondolo
ABSA	Waters of Buenos Aires
AC	Assistant Commissioner
AIDS	Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ALBA	Alternative for the Peoples of the Americas
ALO	Assistant Land Officer
ANC	African National Congress
ANSES	National Social Security Administration (Argentina)
AsgiSA	Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa
AUH	Universal Child Allowance for Social Protection
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BCRA	Central Bank of Argentina
BDPC	Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre
BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa Emerging Economic Federation
CAFTA	Central American Free Trade Agreement
CC	Constitutional Commission
CCR	Center for Coordination of Research
CCTP	Conditional Cash Transfer Programs
CDCs	Communal Development Committees

CDF	Constituency Development Fund
CECSO	Centro de Estudios para el Cambio Social
CEDAW	Committee on the Elimination Discrimination against Women
CELAC	Conference of Latin American and Caribbean States
CEPAL	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
CEPR	Center for Economic and Policy Research
CESCR	Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (United Nations)
CFK	Cristina Fernández de Kirchner
CIC	Chief Information Commissioner
CLACSO	Latin American Council of Social Sciences
CODESRIA	Council for the Development of Social Science Research
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CROP	Center for Research on Poverty
CS	Civil Surgeon
DAE	Department of Agricultural Extension
DAO	District Agriculture Officer
DG	Director General
DLR	Department of Land Records
DRC	Democratic Republic of the Congo

ECLAC	United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
ECM	Electricity Commission of Malawi
ENGE	Estudio Nacional de las Grandes Industrias
FY	Financial Year
G-20	International forum of twenty major economies
G-7	Group of Seven Industrialized Nations: Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States
GALZ	Gays and Lesbians Zimbabwe
GBCA	Giza Beautification and Cleaning Authority
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GEAR	Growth, Employment and Redistribution: A Macroeconomic Strategy
GNU	Government of National Unity
GoK	Government of Kenya
GOs	Government Organizations
HIES	Household and Income Expenditure Survey
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IC	Information Commission
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICCPR	International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights
ICESCR	International Convention on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

ICM	Integrated Crop Management
IDB	Inter-American Development Bank
IDIHCS	Instituto de Investigaciones en Humanidades y Ciencias Sociales
IFCU	International Federation of Catholic Universities
ILO	International Labour Organization
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INDEC	National Institute of Statistics and the Census
IPM	Integrated Pest Management
IPUs	Information Providing Units
ISO	International Socialist Organization
KCC	Kampala City Council
LPM	Landless People's Movement
LWB	Lilongwe Water Board
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MNCI	National Peasant Indigenous Movement
MOFPED	Ministry of Finance Planning and Economic Development
MOGLSD	Ministry of Gender, Labor and Social Development
MP	Minister of Parliament
MTESS	Ministries of Labor, Employment and Social Security
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement

NCA	National Constitutional Assembly
NEDLAC	National Economic Development and Labour Council
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NGOs	Nongovernmental organizations
NK	Nijera Kori
NPT	National Popular Tradition
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
PEL	Political Economy of Labor
PIC	Project Implementing Committee
PIE Act	Prevention of Illegal Eviction from an Unlawful Occupation of Land Act
PIO	Project Implementation Officer
PJJHD	Unemployed Heads of Households Plan
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PPT	Permanent People's Tribunal
PTMC	Programas de Transferencias Monetarias Condicionadas e Inclusión Financiera
RDP	Reconstruction and Development Programme
RER	Real Exchange Rate
RSA	The Republic of South Africa

RTI	Right to Information
RTIA	Right to Information Act
SAHRC	South African Human Rights Commission
SANCO	South African National Civics Organisation
SCE	Training and Employment Insurance
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SERI	Socio-Economic Rights Institute of South Africa
SKNS	Samata Nari Kalyan Samity
TAC	Treatment Action Campaign
UAC	Union of Citizen's Assemblies
UAO	Upazilla Agriculture Officer
UBOS	Uganda Bureau of Statistics
UCT	University of Cape Town
UDHR	Universal Declaration of Human Rights
UDWB	Urban Development and Works Bureau
UHO	Upazilla Health Officer
UMU	Uganda Martyrs University
UNASUR	The Union of South American States
UNCTAD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNHCR	United Nations High Commission for Refugees

UNO	Upazilla Nirbahi Officer
UP	Union Parishad
VGD	Vulnerability Group Development
VGf	Vulnerable Group Feeding
WAG	Women's Action Group
WB	World Bank
WC	Women's Coalition
WFA	The World Forum for Alternatives
WTO	World Trade Organization
WUAs	Water Users Associations
YPF	Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscale

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INTRODUCTION

Aaron L. Rosenberg and Mariano Féliz

What is poverty? This seems like a logical point at which we may begin the exploration of a constellation of investigations proposed by the editors and contributors of this volume. Such an apparently simple question, however, is, as these pages will eloquently and thoroughly reveal, fraught with complications and oftentimes petrifying ambiguities. That is not to say, of course, that there has been any shortage of individuals and organizations reluctant to propose and insist upon their particular visions and definitions of poverty.

As those who work in subaltern studies would hasten to point out, however, it is precisely those individuals most intimately acquainted with the specific conditions of poverty who are most limited in their capacity to articulate and provide force to motivate the dissemination of their definitions and understandings of this phenomenon. As Gayatri Spivak explains in her fundamental essay “Can the Subaltern Speak,” the mechanism of official authoritative discourse tends to exclude the voice of the powerless and disempowered precisely in the moment when their concerns are being explored and explicated.¹ Volumes such as *Voices of the Poor from Many Lands*² tend to play a decidedly secondary role in the formulation of policy and the scholarly and governmental understandings of poverty. This is, of course, aside from the fact of the problematic terminology employed in the text beginning with the title itself which attributes the presence of poverty to the “poor” who are implicitly associated with this quality as an intrinsic part of their being.

In part because of these limited if not blinkered perceptive capacities, scholars working on “the production of” poverty from a European or American academic post and background have tended to focus upon those aspects that coordinate most closely with their own societies’ perceptions and preconceived notions as to what exactly is this elusive thing called “poverty.”

¹ Spivak (1988, pp. 271–313).

² Narayan and Petesch (2002).

In large part because of the apparently functional and applied nature of existing poverty studies and the association of poverty with economic conditions and status, one of the earliest strategies adopted to describe poverty was to define the term purely in its quantitative form. One of the milestones achieved in this approach was defining absolute poverty in the 1990s as “an individual living on less than a dollar and ninety-nine cents a day.” Such notions have long held sway in the minds of analysts and lay individuals throughout the globe, including in many cases the very same communities that were ostensibly under scrutiny. Such descriptive tools have contributed, of course, to the establishment and solidification of notions in development studies and policy organization and implementation which have over the course of several decades attempted unsuccessfully to at least ameliorate the conditions of individuals and groups suffering from poverty. Such conceptualizations were (or are still) founded upon the erroneous notion that any problem related to “development” faced by a society, such societies being generally considered to be nation states, can be resolved adequately, if not perfectly, by an influx of capital in the form of foreign investment provided with a plethora of strings attached by the IMF or the WB together with a horde of other international aid organizations claiming to have the resources to solve such problems. Fortunately, these purely quantitative conceptions of poverty have given way to descriptions which are founded upon the idea of poverty as the lack of rights and possibilities for social participation as in the case of publications by the UN and WB. While programs dedicated to poverty eradication were possibly the most visible of these inundations of capital, there are numerous other areas in which such apparently good intentions once again led both aid givers and recipients down the proverbial road to Hell. Efforts to alleviate corrupt practices and the institutional presence of corruption in “developing” societies throughout the Global South as well as scholarship dealing with these thorny topics were at one time founded upon the notion that corruption was rampant in these nations because of lack of resources and that those who perpetrated these nefarious acts were doing so because of insufficient compensation in their places of employment. The naïveté and superficiality of these ideas should certainly be obvious to anyone who has an even perfunctory acquaintance with any developing geography and its circumstances. As a result of the failure of such ill-founded ideas to

come sufficiently to terms with the complex circumstances surrounding and giving form and force to corruption in the “developing” world, the system of thought now known as *Public Choice Theory* came into being through the work of scholars such as Duncan Black and Kenneth Arrow in the 1940s and 1950s. This theory has sought to provide a logical explanation for the enduring presence of corrupt practices in developing societies. Such explanations are designed to move beyond ideas of the ingrained nature of corruption as social practice based upon immutable cultural principles. This retrograde conceptualization feeds, of course, upon neocolonial notions of communities in the Global South at the same time as it is propagated in numerous spheres, including within the minds and mouths of members of these societies themselves. The works of scholars such as John Mukum Mbaku have gone a long way toward debunking such misconceptions and have demonstrated the extent to which corrupt practices are linked to weak state structures, misplaced intervention by foreign powers and corporations, and the impossibility of exacting punishment when corruption is carried out. Public Choice adherents, therefore, appeal for strengthening political mechanisms, treating corruption as a punishable offense—punishment severe enough to offset the benefits which any individual or group might receive from engaging in such practices.

A similar depth of understanding needs to be sought in order to adequately understand the nature of what is bandied about in scholarly and political circles when poverty is under consideration. As with many such complex issues, one of the most significant sources of confusion and misdirection comes from the terminology that is often employed to describe and comprehend the phenomenon under consideration. It is certainly true that there have been some significant changes in the manner in which these concepts are expressed by some scholars but inconsistencies abound. Seemingly, a logical place to start is from the term “the poor,” which is frequently employed to refer to those who are living in poverty in a particular moment or over a given period, individually or collectively. John Iliffe’s book, *The African Poor: A History*, published in 1987, eloquently describes this problem in the Global South; Iliffe is a recipient of the Melville Herskovits Prize.³ Iliffe explains that “the hero-

³ Iliffe (1987).

ism of African history is to be found not in the deeds of kings but in the struggles of ordinary people against the forces of nature and the cruelty of men" (1). Although Iliffe does use the outmoded and derogatory term "the poor" to describe those individuals living in poverty in Africa, he does simultaneously recognize that "the poor are diverse, poverty has many facets, and African peoples had their own varied and changing notions of it" (2).

At the risk of pointing out the painfully obvious, it will be helpful to consider the gravity of this terminological blunder when applied to such individuals, families, and communities. The problem inherent in such an apparently neutral word is the manner in which the term "the poor" attributes those characteristics it seeks to describe the people under consideration. Use of the term "the poor" assigns a quality to these individuals, but it also implies a series of secondary attributes which cannot be accurately assessed and therefore should be cautiously considered before they are taken for granted.

Perhaps the most egregious of these implied messages is the notion that those people who are suffering the effects of poverty are intrinsically "poor." It needs to be realized that this descriptor carries with it an entire host of signifiers. To begin with, it implies that such people are disposed if not fated to live in poverty due to some innate debility on their part. Such ideas were previously explicitly propagated as a justification for the disparate treatment of individuals living in penury as well as an explanation for the enduring presence of poverty over the millennia. The complexity of these notions is masterfully elucidated in the work of Herbert Gans, who, in a 1971 article in *Social Policy*, entitled "The Uses of Poverty: The Poor Pay All," outlines the numerous ways in which "the poor" serve strong purposes in numerous societies—purposes which he divides into "social, economic, and political" functions of great significance.⁴ This is a version of humanity and its societies in which the reality of poverty is accepted as an inevitable and seemingly unalterable facet of human existence that should be accepted in this world and even embraced in order to reap the spiritual rewards that one has accumulated through such actions when he or she moves on to the next life and, it is hoped, their heavenly home. It goes without saying that in such a context

⁴ Gans (1971, pp. 20–24).

there is no perceived necessity to ask those living with poverty what they feel about their benighted (or possibly illuminated?) condition. The excellent volume of essays *¿El reino de Dios es de este mundo? El papel ambiguo de las religiones en la lucha contra la pobreza* (2008)⁵ explores the implicit and oftentimes explicit role of religions in reinforcing economic and political systems of oppression which work against those experiencing poverty. These authors demonstrate the facility with which policy and doctrine can and are often combined to ignore or even maintain conditions of poverty.

The likewise widespread idea that poverty is a purely quantifiable phenomenon draws on similar tendencies toward deliberate ignorance which mark the relative isolation that exists between scholars of poverty and the object of their studies. Defining poverty as a mere financial condition in which lack of money causes people to be “poor” is a problematic paradigm of inquiry for a variety of salient reasons. To begin with, such a limited understanding of the idea of “wealth” or capital, if you will, fails to take into account the myriad forms which resources may assume in the lives of individuals and groups throughout the globe, many of which continue to function to varying degrees and in diverse ways outside of the conventional money economy which is more often than not utilized to define success or failure, riches or penury in Western contexts, including the scholarly and the political.

The simple truth which these versions of poverty effectively obfuscate is, we would like to argue here, the real and most important aspect of this phenomenon. The chapters contained herein utilize a variety of methods, including both qualitative and quantitative strategies, in order to illuminate the various and changeable natures of poverty in the Global South. One element which they all have in common, however, is an emphasis on an understanding of poverty as what can be called a “lived experience.” That is, the authors here strive to do much more than merely focusing upon purely quantifiable aspects of poverty as lack and deprivation, facts and figures which can be approached, collected, and disposed of in an apparently abstract and sterile manner. Instead, the studies undertaken in this volume seek to study poverty in an integrative manner, maintaining a comprehensive vision throughout. The lives of

⁵ Zalpa and Offerdal (2008).

individuals living in poverty are affected by and in turn influence an immense variety of social factors, forces, and histories. These elements exist at personal, local, national, and international levels, often simultaneously. It is imperative, therefore, that any scholar grappling with issues of contemporary poverty delve into these complex and interwoven circumstances with both sensitivity and a flexibility of intellectual spirit which allow him or her to both describe and understand the phenomena of poverty as a multiplicity of feelings and encounters—which are both subjective and objective, scientific and emotional. The responses that people have to their lives can and should be a central part of our efforts to explore the geographies of poverty and to ameliorate the severity of these circumstances. Such a variegated approach to poverty as both problem and reality allows all parties involved to be heard and considered, ideally at any and all stages of the interpretive process, starting with the initial scholarly intervention and leading all the way up to the development and implementation of any relevant policy measures. Each chapter, therefore, capitalizes on these multiple potentialities:

Pérez Bustillo explores how hegemonic versions of human rights discourse and practices undermine contemporary struggles for social transformation and for the prevention, reduction, and eradication of poverty in the Global South. His study attains to recall the limits and distortions imposed upon the emancipatory potential of human rights attributable to the capitalist imperatives inherent in liberal and neoliberal appropriations of their content.

The second chapter constitutes an intriguing and groundbreaking qualitative intervention in our understanding of poverty and the manner in which it is discursively constructed and debated through popular works of creative art, specifically songs and cinema. Here, Rosenberg proposes a comparative analysis of two works of performative art and their relation to the contexts from which they emerged. From the analysis of the film *The Harder They Come* from Jamaica and the popular song “Mariana” from Kenya, the author attempts to comprehend the nature of poverty in these postcolonial settings and the tactics used by both institutionalized authorities and impoverished individuals to ameliorate such circumstances. In turn, he proposes to understand how these narratives provide valuable insights into the reasons behind violent aggression as acted out by alienated individuals.

Pérez and Brown, in their contribution, discuss the various related ways in which countries in Latin America have tackled social risks. They explain the role of conditional cash transfers in the development of a new consensus on social policies. In a provocative manner, they underline the limitations of such policies and show the extent to which these policies have been helpful in the attempt to combat income poverty in these complex and constantly evolving settings.

Féliz, in the fourth chapter, analyzes the main characteristics of the neodevelopmentalist project in Argentina, and its barriers and limitations to promote poverty reduction and social change. He provides a rich characterization of such sociopolitical projects to show that their inability to confront poverty as a widespread phenomenon comes from the articulation of structural continuities with neoliberalism and novel sociopolitical innovations in Argentina.

In their contribution, Ssempebwa and Nakaiza propose to provide a discussion on the political economy of poverty and social transformation in five sub-Saharan countries. Their analysis provides important understandings on the working of self-help and microfinance in attempts to alleviate poverty. In particular, they provide an account of how poverty alleviation programs/projects were more successful in instances where “the poor” at whom they were targeted were involved in the definition of poverty.

Kazi Haque in his study focuses upon the effectiveness and manifest limitations of the Right to Information legislation that has recently been instituted in Bangladesh. His analysis focuses upon both the users and providers of this newly legislated data and, through a variety of detailed case studies, demonstrates the capacities and pitfalls inherent in such a dispensation given the significant contextual barriers faced by individuals and groups in Bangladesh.

In his chapter, Chirisa provides a critical analysis of peri-urbanization in Africa. His insight explains how people in poverty are not just passive agents, but they take on actions to cope with their situation and build on it. He attempts to show how communities struggle to survive and resist vulnerability, tapping into their inbuilt mechanisms of resilience.

Moving farther south on the African continent, Chiweshe focuses upon the patriarchal forces in postcolonial Zimbabwe which combine with a variety of international factors linked to the nature of nongovernmental

organizations (NGOs) in this moment in order to make the realization of viable women's activism an increasingly distant possibility.

Finally, Thomas presents a study on how South African post-apartheid economic policymaking followed globally hegemonic neoliberalism and worsened unemployment, inequality, and poverty, consequently increasing dependence on welfarist state support. He shows how social movements have developed in opposition to government's neoliberal policies and contemplates whether socioeconomic rights adjudication creates opportunities for reforms, bringing relief to impoverished subordinate classes.

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