WORKING Paper 20

Nasruddin's Key

Poverty Measurement and the Government of Marginal Populations

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Nasruddin's Key: Poverty Measurement and the Government of Marginal Populations

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Abstract

This paper considers the role of 'measurement' and other forms of poverty knowledge in a context where the nature and direction of global economic growth is creating 'surplus populations' suffering various forms of marginalisation in the global economy. It links the development of different forms of poverty knowledge with the ways in which states and non-state agents seek to 'govern' poverty and poor populations, and with the 'biopolitics' whereby calculations are made about the differential allocation of resources towards different sectors of the global population. The paper argues that addressing the root causes of poverty requires social actors to go beyond the narrow limits of institutionally sanctioned and bureaucratically invested 'poverty knowledge' that currently dominate policy thinking. Rather than seeking to understand poverty by measuring the characteristics of members of populations, they should try to understand poverty as an aspect of social relations, and try to come to grips with differential insertion of populations in the fields of force of modern globalised capitalism. Analysis should abandon simple notions of 'marginalisation, and come to grips with the agency of poor people and the complex relationships between informality, marginality, exclusion and incorporation. Ultimately, however, a more nuanced understanding of the role of poverty knowledge in present day biopolitics does not bring with it any easy answers: rather, it challenges applied social scientists to be more aware of the responsibilities they bear as producers of 'useful' knowledge in a time of increased global instability.

Acknowledgements

Working paper series

Once, a man found Mulla Nasruddin searching for something on the ground outside his house. On being asked, Nasruddin replied that he was looking for his key. The man also joined in the search. In due course he asked Mulla: 'Where exactly did you drop it?'

Mulla answered: 'In my house.'

'Then why are you looking here?' the man asked.

'There is more light here than in my house,' replied Mulla.

Traditional; Adapted from Idries Shah

1. Introduction

Poverty and inequality are being driven by social dynamics that are rendering significant numbers of people increasingly vulnerable and marginalised. This paper considers the ways in which such marginalised and vulnerable populations become 'visible' to states and other institutions of social agency as objects of knowledge and targets of action. My focus may therefore seem broader than simply 'extreme poverty and its measurement', which is how this paper was initially announced in the MARGIP conference programme.   Understanding the nature of extreme poverty and marginalisation, the dynamics that drive and entrench it, and the measures needed to address it, requires us to go well beyond 'measurement.'   Poverty measurement is *one* of the modalities at our disposal when we try to understand what is happening to vulnerable and marginal populations. It is useful and expedient, not least because of the resources that have already been invested in creating large datasets through which poverty can be systematically 'known' and which allow vulnerable populations to be bureaucratically acted upon. But to *privilege* measurement, and to make measurement the only or main lens through which we try to understand such populations, or to try to bring other forms of inquiry into poverty *back* to questions about how it can be operationalised as measurement is to misunderstand what marginalisation is, and how it is related to extreme poverty. It is to act like Mulla Nasruddin in the story: to look in the wrong place because that is where the lights of our models and datasets shine, rather than to head into the darkness on a more uncertain but perhaps more fruitful quest.

My argument builds upon, but in some ways goes beyond, the now routine demand for 'mixed methods', 'Q-squared' or multidimensional approaches to poverty (Kanbur 2002; Kanbur & Schaffer 2007). Disagreements about the status and use of poverty measurement are linked to deep underlying differences in our assumptions about what poverty is, why it matters, and how it should be understood. This means that it is not enough simply to argue that additional forms of knowledge (qualitative texture, in-depth illustration) need to be added to the insights afforded by quantitative poverty indicators. Nor am I, in some fit of obscurantist postmodern excess, arguing that the insights afforded by the operations of poverty measurement need to be rejected *tout court.*   Rather, my aim is the re-location of quantitative approaches to poverty within a more critical approach to understanding economic and social power relations.

In this paper, I will also argue that much more than knowledge is at stake in debates about poverty measurement, marginalisation and extreme poverty. The technical and methodological innovations of poverty measurement are but one aspect of a complex

and subtle institutional and political response to the problems posed by the existence of vulnerable, needy or demanding populations. It behoves us to be mindful of these politics. The intensification of inequality and marginality in an ever more unstable global economic environment poses methodological, strategic and ethical challenges for those involved in the production of knowledge about poverty. The apparent international consensus on the need to address poverty on a global scale belies a multiplicity of agendas and strategies, and these seem to be undergoing a significant differentiation. Those involved in 'poverty studies' are at a crossroads. Much depends on what agendas are served by the useful knowledge produced by applied social scientists.

I will begin by briefly setting the scene: describing in broad terms some of the processes that are driving increasing levels of inequality and marginalisation in the 'Global South'. Thereafter my paper briefly sets out some key themes and questions that should guide investigation into the nature of *social* and *governmental* action in relation to poverty and vulnerable populations. Specifically, my argument will emphasise the importance of the way modern governance focuses on the conditions of life of populations. I will discuss briefly the role of knowledge production, and technologies and strategies of representation that allow policy to act on and engage with such populations. This will allow me to highlight some strengths and weaknesses of 'poverty measurement' as a strategy for the production of useful knowledge. I will discuss the role of poverty measurement as a key component in what we could call the project of the 'government of poverty'. I will set out some of my concerns and reservations about this project, and I will also briefly sketch some ways in which present day trends are, I think, creating rising tensions and crises for this project. I will close by describing some possible responses to these tensions — and how a different approach to understanding the nature of poverty and the situation of poor populations might look.

2. Jobless de-agrarianisation, poverty and marginalisation

The central concerns of this paper grow out of the way the growth paths of many developing world are driving a process of deepening inequality. At the same time as development discourses are focusing on the progressive and partial realisation of the Millennium Development Goals, socio-economic processes in reality seem to be leading to a deepening inequality in the distribution of incomes, assets and risk (Gatzweiler et al 2011). In particular, the nature and direction of economic development is leading to a situation in which significant sections of the global population are rendered more and more vulnerable. The causes are various — increasing environmental crisis and resource scarcity, climate change, the depletion of non-renewable resources, the demand for biofuels, growing pressure on agricultural and 'under-utilised land', and escalating capital intensity, competition and buyer-drivenness in agro-food value chains are all leading to increasingly insecure agrarian livelihoods and processes of de-agrarianisation whereby millions of people are made to move off the land, to abandon agrarian livelihoods and to leave agricultural employment (Li 2011). Crucially, this process of de-agrarianisation (Bryceson & Jamal 1997) is not part of an 'agrarian transition' from rural to urban, non-farm livelihoods: rather, tens of millions of people find themselves reduced to the status of a 'surplus' population: not only landless, but

also unemployed and redundant to the needs of the global economy; relegated to what American sociologist Davis (2006) calls the Planet of Slums.

3. Biopolitics and bureaucratic power

These processes create important challenges for social policy and government, and for the institutions that regulate social conflict, accumulation, access to resources and the flow of entitlements at national and international levels. Here I am thinking not only about states, but also about the wide array of other bureaucratic, juridico-legal and formal structures of social agency in modern society that act alongside or within states, and which often take over key aspects of regulation from states. Michel Foucault has argued that such structures have a distinctive way of functioning in society. In modern society social regulation and power are not simply limited to exercising repression and force, and are no longer linked so strongly to particularistic patron-client relationships of loyalty, service and fiefdom. Rather, a key feature of modern governance is how it constitutes itself in relation to the *positive* organisation of the wellbeing and conduct of *populations*, concerning itself with the regular governance of 'each and all'(Burchell et al 1991; Lemke 2004).

The study of present-day power should therefore pay particular heed to the ways in which the organs of social power engage with, govern and shape the conditions of existence of populations — a realm of action Foucault called 'biopolitics.' As Li (2009) pointed out, a focus on biopolitics is useful in the context of jobless de-agrarianisation and rural dispossession because it allows us to look at the calculations and contestations whereby decisions are made about differential treatment of different sections of the global population: while governments and states can adopt 'make live' policies, investing resources and attention into policies that enhance the 'health and wellbeing' of populations, they can also adopt 'let die' policies, abandoning sections of the population to fend for themselves and consigning large numbers of people to lead 'short and limited lives'(*ibid*). In this way, investigating biopolitics allows us to highlight and problematise distinctions and differentiation processes usually 'naturalised' and presented as inevitable.

4. Poverty measurement

The key concern of this paper is the role of the production of knowledge plays in present-day biopolitics, particularly the ways policy makers and governments use poverty measurement to engage with and act upon marginalised and vulnerable populations. Biopolitics and the exercise of modern state power require very specific forms of knowledge and strategies of representation. As James Scott has argued (Scott 1998) before states can govern populations, they must be able to 'see' them and 'know' them in ways that abstract from locality and particularity.   The government of 'each and all' (Foucault 1979) requires knowledge of 'each and all': standardisable approaches that allow systematic comparison between individuals, between and within populations according to clearly defined features and indicators, and in terms of forms of knowledge and representation which can be generated through routine, definable,

and portable operations.   In this context, poverty measurement is not merely a neutral lens for seeing what is out there. Rather, it involves an enormously complex process that rests not only on surveillance, but on the labour of digesting and sifting information that arises out of surveys and censuses, transforming raw data into 'indicators' that can in turn be worked on to construct the 'evidence' that can be marshalled in the development of plans and policies (e.g. Latour & Woolgar 1979).

One key advantage of this labour is that it allows a transformation in the nature of poverty judgements — formal decisions by which differentiations are made between those who are considered to be poor and those who are not. Such judgements are never innocent. They are almost always embedded within underlying political narratives and processes that imbue them with consequences, conferring social obligations and influencing the resource allocation. The development of poverty measurement and the embedding of the institutionalised production of standardised quantitative knowledge into the institutions of governance allows poverty judgements to be made in new ways. Poverty judgements rooted in religious or ethical discourses, or in discourses of social solidarity are often justified in highly personal, individualistic, moralising or locally situated ways, and may indeed be linked to conservative or repressive notions of social virtue. Basing poverty judgements on frameworks of justification that appeal to objective measurement and the application of impartial rules can liberate social action in respect of poverty from ad hoc or inconsistent application, and can play a key role in delinking such judgements from the politics of patron client relationships.

Poverty measurement thus has a central place in the production of knowledge about poor and vulnerable populations required by biopolitics. It allows such populations to be made visible to the concerns of policymakers and planners in a way that gives them, as common parlance would have it, 'policy traction'. In South Africa, this has been well illustrated by the massive increase in quantitative knowledge since the transition to democracy: while the Apartheid government collected only the most cursory information about the black population in surveys and censuses, the transition from Apartheid has been accompanied by the roll-out of services and resources towards the population as a whole, and an explosion in the extent and detail of quantitative knowledge (Seekings 2001).

But, as I have been arguing for some time (Du Toit 2009) poverty measurement also involves some real problems. One set of concerns relates to the *meaning* of poverty: what it is and what we are saying when we are making poverty judgements. Here it is worth remembering that the word *poverty* is not in the first place a sociological or analytical category: It is a *political* term, and its political utility lies in the way it allows the problematisation and contestation of the allocations of resources in society. Its roots are complex and hybrid. Debates about poverty in media and public contexts draw on a wide range of divergent and sometimes discordant traditions (Du Toit 2010). This messiness, and the availability of the notion of poverty for interpretation in wildly varying ways, is indeed one of the reasons for the currency and significance of the concept of 'poverty'. It is available to be harnessed in different ways, and in the service of different interests, to struggles about the allocation of social resources, and it resonates with a wide variety of moral and political traditions.   But this also means that there is no possibility of deriving a neutral conception of poverty. Any specific conception of poverty is linked to completely different underlying narratives and assumptions about the nature of society.

This means that the development of 'poverty measurement' goes hand -in -hand with the risk of simplification. Very often, the seemingly technical task of developing poverty indicators can involve surreptitiously or unconsciously adopting or imposing highly specific political agendas. An example is when economists, seeking to avoid political or controversial poverty measures, try to develop poverty lines based on 'objective' criteria, e.g. the calculation of calorie requirements (see, for example. Baulch & Masset 2003). While this may seem sensible, it imposes — through apparently neutral and technical means — a deeply conservative notion of poverty, in which people are only really poor if they are actually at risk of starvation. Situations in which bare survival is possible, but where any kind of dignity or participation in social life is not, are thereby excluded from the ambit of poverty judgements.

This raises a set of issues that have in my view generated more heat than light in the field of poverty measurement. Very often, concerns about the conservatism of such narrow approaches to poverty are framed in terms of the distinction between 'absolute' and 'relative poverty' (Townsend 1985) or by trying to define poverty in terms of 'socially acceptable norms' which may refer to much more than hunger, but below which people can still be considered to be poor (Wright et al 2007).Useful as such approaches may be in directing attention to the link between poverty and inequality, and allowing shared values around 'socially perceived necessaries' to be made conscious, this response to the problem misses an important point: As Sen (1983) has argued, the difficulties with this narrow approach to poverty are not entirely resolved by adding a range of 'nice-to-haves' above and beyond 'absolute', objective poverty. Rather, what is at stake is a very different understanding of what poverty *is*, and why poverty matters: poverty is significant, not simply because it involves a state of deprivation from assets, resources or entitlements; but rather because that deprivation renders it impossible for people to live fully human lives, marginalising and undermining their agency in their own lives and in the communities of which they are part. It is this state of social and economic disempowerment — and not the particular underlying shortcomings (to money, to capital, to housing and so on) that drive it — that defines poverty (Sen 1985).

This notion of poverty as social disempowerment has important implications for understanding extreme poverty and marginality — implications that in some ways go well beyond those commonly emphasised in discussions of Sen's 'capability' poverty. Four points are particularly relevant: Firstly, we should notice the depth in the difference of the underlying normative world view that underpins Sen's understanding: it does not just offer a fuller, more accurate, more empirically adequate definition of poverty. Rather, it is rooted in a tradition very different from liberal philosophical and political traditions that inform British and American poverty studies. It owes a lot to Marx and Rousseau and draws on an ultimately republican (in the classical sense) understanding of humans as social beings, of freedom as 'positive' freedom, and of the relationship between individual and society.

Secondly, in this perspective, social and economic marginalisation and the lack of agency is absolutely central to what 'extreme' poverty and marginalisation are about. The distinction between 'bare survival' definitions of poverty, and approaches to poverty that emphasise poverty as a state of social disempowerment is *not* coterminous with and cannot be 'mapped onto' the distinction between 'extreme' and not-so-extreme poverty; neither is it the same as the distinction between 'absolute' and 'relative' poverty.   Extreme poverty is not simply the poverty of 'bare life'; and is not appropriately understood by understanding it as merely a more severe form of the

usual kinds of deprivation (hunger, child mortality, etc). To be sure: hunger, mortality, going without medicine or water, housing or clothing all are important *aspects* of the state of extreme poverty. But in the approach to poverty proposed by Sen, they are only moments within and components of the dynamic and self-reinforcing state of social disempowerment that poverty *is* (Sen 1985). And this is true also of 'extreme' poverty. Indeed, I would agree with those who argue that states like indigence or destitution are best understood not in only in terms of the state of material want or need that underpins them, but also in terms of the ways they are often linked to the denial of full personhood (Stec 2006).

Thirdly, a conceptual point: The careful reader (and even the not so careful one!) will by this point have noticed that the concept of poverty, so understood, has a significant amount of conceptual 'sprawl:' while 'relative' concepts of poverty — because they locate individuals within the distributions of a population — entangle it very much with notions of *inequality*; the concept of poverty as disempowerment overlaps greatly with that of *marginality*. Purists, or those who like their poverty concepts tidy, might object to this, arguing that poverty and marginality need to be separately specified so that we can better understand and more clearly trace the causal links between them. But that is like trying to turn the chicken and egg into separate species. The underlying and pre-existing moral, religious, ethical, social and political discourses that have bequeathed us the concept of poverty as it has been delivered to us in modern times, and which still give it its political bite, have been as much concerned with the lack of personhood, power and status as they have with the particular forms of lack that feed it. Modern, 'expert' forms of knowledge still depend for their authority on their claim to have something to say about these broader debates, and should be respectful of the full burden of meaning the concept carries.

Fourthly, important as Sen's work on capability poverty has been in linking the understanding of poverty more effectively with philosophical and political traditions that emphasise positive freedom and social empowerment, it still suffers from a crucial limitation: it involves trying to grasp poverty, a complex *relational* reality, by constructing it as an attribute of *individuals*. For one thing, focussing on indicators of deprivation tends to focus our attention on the most obvious *outcomes* of poverty, not the factors that drive it. More seriously, understanding poverty as state of social disempowerment requires us to engage with and understand the social *processes* and social *relationships* that constitute it. Poverty measurement is very bad at this. This does not mean that measurement-based indicators are useless or that indicators cannot or should not be devised to measure aspects of 'disempowerment': indeed, devising such indicators of 'capability' poverty and marginalisation is an interesting and worthwhile project. But the indicator is not the state itself, and the relations and processes that underpin poverty as marginalisation have to be grasped in their own right (Du Toit 2009). Poverty measurement, for all its power, needs to be linked to forms of knowledge that can reveal the state of poverty as a product and aspect of social power relations, that can engage more clearly with its causes, and that can grasp it directly in the context of social processes of impoverishment, distribution, differentiation and enrichment.

If this is not done, poverty measurement can become part of a limited form of knowledge that disconnects the study of poverty from the understanding of social relations. It can turn the study of poverty into the study of the poor, and can turn attention away from social processes in which the disadvantage of some is linked to the profit and advantage of others. Like Nasruddin looking for his key, the partial

illumination provided by the understanding of populations as aggregations of individuals can lead our attention away from the complex relationships, processes and dynamics that could inform a more nuanced and more powerful understanding.

5. The government of poverty

Thus far my discussion of poverty measurement has engaged with it more or less entirely on the ground of methodology and theory. Such concerns are important, but they are only part of the story. Discussions of poverty knowledge matter because (to use once more a Foucauldian phrase) the 'will to know' poverty arises in historically located situations, takes historically specific forms and is imbued with moment and consequence by being embedded within elaborate institutional forms and strategies of social power. Poverty lines are not merely convenient abstractions: they are formally adopted by bureaucracies and institutions, and they are actively used in the differentiation of populations and the allocation of resources. Every stage in the production, interpretation, dissemination and use of poverty knowledge is thoroughly shaped by its status as useful information in the deliberations of such structures. So an engagement with poverty knowledge also needs to look at the ways in which it becomes useful to, and is made use of within, national and global projects of governance and regulation.

Trying to understand how this works in South Africa, I have proposed that much of what is happening both in the 'will to know' poor populations and in the design of 'make live' strategies aimed at supporting their well-being and survival, can be understood to make political and strategic sense as part of the broader meta-political project of the government of poverty (Du Toit 2011).   It could very well be that many or most of those involved in 'poverty reduction' strategies, in the formulation of pro-poor policy and so on genuinely intend to reduce or even eradicate poverty, and that the roll-out of services and resources toward the poor is informed by a genuine desire for the transformation of South African society and the transcendence of the malign legacy of Apartheid. But 'people do not know *what* what they do does' (Foucault 2001): while all these measures and policies have signally failed to greatly reduce, let alone even start eradicating poverty, they play a very useful role in the rather more conservative project of *managing* poverty: constituting both poverty as an issue, and restive poor populations themselves, as objects of knowledge and regulation.

In South Africa, this imposition of a limited, managerial agenda is indeed to a large extent what has happened.   The South African government's commitment to poverty eradication and reduction has been linked to the dominance of a depoliticised and ahistorical 'grand narrative' about poverty. This narrative depicts poverty not as the systematic outcome of the main structural features and normal processes of the capitalist economy in South Africa, but as a 'residue', a product of 'not enough' growth and 'not enough' development, a legacy of the irrational, racist and oppressive policies of racial discrimination that can essentially be addressed through project of modernisation and rational global economic integration. This has allowed a bifurcation in terms of which the policies that drive economic growth and the labour market are disconnected from those concerned with poverty and social welfare. Thus economic policy is largely concerned with creating enabling conditions for the private sector and corporations, while poverty and social development is the ambit of government. This has meant that for the first fifteen years, post-Apartheid economic policy has involved turning a blind eye to the central and structural economic and social

dynamics that continue to perpetuate and entrench inequality in the mainstream South African economy. In fact, it has been accompanied by the promulgation of a wide range of policies that work together to deepen, instead of interrupting, the marginalising dynamics that divide 'insiders' from 'outsiders' in South African society.

At the same time, the 'make live' politics rolled out by the South African state have had a limited ambit. While such policies are, in the context of what is possible and thinkable for middle income countries in 'post Washington consensus times,' quite generous, involving relatively significant expenditure on 'social items', they are still thoroughly informed by what Barchiesi (2011) and Ferguson (2007) have called a 'productivist' bias. Cash transfers, social insurance and welfare policies are all designed in terms of assumptions of full employment, and in terms of the notion that — even in a heavily distributive society — access to social entitlements needs to be founded first and foremost on the central figure of the independent, self-activating, employed able-bodied worker. In terms of this biopolitical segmentation of the population, those too young, too sick or too old to work can have access to redistributive resources; but able - bodied workers are excluded. But this assumption of full employment is misplaced. Significant numbers of able-bodied people find themselves superfluous to the needs of the formal economy. As a result, post-Apartheid make live' investments in South Africa's vulnerable populations are characterised by enormous holes.

One of the most striking aspects of this situation is the way this vast process of exclusion is normalised and seen as inevitable. A case in point is the South African government's failure to adopt a basic citizen's grant: Not only have government and central policymakers resisted calls for such a grant, but outside of the relatively narrow ambit of the organised trade union movement, the notion of a citizen's grant has found surprisingly little support among poor people. One reason for this is that aspirations to 'full time work' and normative ideas about 'independence' still have a powerful hold on the collective imaginations of middle class, working class and unemployed South Africans (Marais 2011; Barchiesi 2011).

Poverty measurement — by creating the fiction that poverty can be constituted as an object of scientific, neutral knowledge, and by privileging surveillance of populations composed of poor individuals and households, facilitates the depoliticisation of poverty. It allows discourses and narratives to develop that legitimise limited, marginal, and incremental approaches.   Rather than transforming social relations, the key concern of anti-poverty policy becomes the achievement of marginal changes in poverty indicators. In addition, the convenient and arbitrary fiction created by the essentially political and ideological institutionalisation of a poverty line can all too easily acquire a life of its own, as when officials start linking it to the notion that individuals and households can be 'graduated' from poverty — and that such graduations would shape populations' entitlement to social goods in the form of access to welfare programmes, indigent funds, etc. This managerial imaginary also shapes the challenges mounted by critics of government: The failure to address poverty is still popularly understood essentially as a failure of delivery and political will, and is often criticised within the terms of the 'technicist' managerial framework of poverty government itself.

This argument should not be taken in a simplistic way. It would be all too easy to slip into conspiracy-theorising and functionalism, and to characterise even well-meaning poverty policies as involving a cynical sleight of hand, in which governments pretend to do something about poverty, while actually doing nothing to interrupt underlying

dynamics. Pro-poor policy, 'make live' policies, and the attempt to measure and understand poverty are then all too simply dismissed as an ideological mystification cloaking the reality whereby the world is being delivered to the ravages of an unbridled exploitative capitalism. But this underestimates the extent to which the project of the 'government of poverty' itself is the subject of contestation and struggle.

6. Poverty knowledge at the crossroads

Biopolitics are politics, and regimes of biopower are ultimately still subject to questions of political legitimation. This is particularly relevant at the time of writing. Present day processes of de-agrarianisation and the creation of surplus and marginalised populations are creating a number of crises and tensions within the conservative project of 'poverty management.' Firstly, one problem is that though *populations* may be subject to governance, many aspects of present day corporate behaviour essentially are *not*; the unbridled activities of powerful multinational corporations — either directly involved in dispossession, or indirectly involved in the externalisation of costs onto society (e.g. in climate change, in the destruction of stable employment, etc.) and so on) are undermining and rendering subject to crisis many 'make live' policies previously central to the post-war world order. Secondly, people who find themselves marginalised or at risk of being marginalised may be the objects and subjects of government, but they often also turn out to have ideas and agendas of their own. From the food price riots that took place in many parts of the world in 2008 (and the xenophobic violence we experienced in South Africa that same year) to more recent unrest in the Arab world and also in OECD countries staring down the barrel of 'austerity' policies, we are clearly entering a time of greater and more volatile public contestation about who benefits from economic growth and activity and how.

These crises and tensions do not mean the end of a managerial discourse of 'poverty government', but they imply that incremental, apolitical managerialism is less able to resolve and contain the consequences of processes of immiseration and marginalisation of immiseration and marginalisation. In South Africa, for instance, the increasingly unstable nature of ruling party politics — the bruising, brutal battle between the 'Mbeki' and 'Zuma' factions in the tri-partite Alliance, and signs that the triumphant Mr Zuma may now be facing the wrath of those who supported him into power — are directly related to the inability of the project of 'poverty government' to adequately resolve the contradictions facing the ruling part in its commitment to both facilitate unbridled capitalist economic growth and address chronic poverty (Marais 2011).

This means that the poverty industry is arriving at a fork in the road. The production and use of poverty knowledge, and the crafting of policies around the governance of poor and vulnerable populations, can serve a number of different agendas. One way of dealing with the increasing contradictions and tensions is to link the concern with poverty and instability with a focus on global political 'security'.   There are signs that in many parts of the world, we are seeing two interlocking trends: on the one hand, there is an increasing 'securification' of discourse about poverty and vulnerability, in which researchers and policymakers explicitly frame hunger, landlessness, marginality and poverty as *security* risks (Naylor 2011). At the same time, there also seems to be a 'socialisation' (for want of a better term) of security discourse, linked to the tendency

of apparatuses (previously concerned mostly with military and political conflict) to explicitly frame their agendas in 'biopolitical' ways. In South Africa, for instance, the Ministry of State Security (responsible for the Secret Service and the National Intelligence Agency) is defining its ambit as including issues that reach well beyond the traditional concerns of spies and intelligence agents: it has created a Centre for Environmental, Food, Energy and Water Security, which explicitly sets itself the task of monitoring hunger and poverty *as national security issues*. Though of course, it is possible that the inclusion of the physical wellbeing of citizens is part of a benevolent biopolitics, the possibility also exists that this securitisation of poverty knowledge and governance could have enormously conservative, even repressive impacts. As Mark Duffield (2008) has pointed out, a security-centred approach to development, poverty studies and biopolitics contains the possibility that international development discourse becomes increasingly a politics of *containment*, defending and protecting the 'security societies' of the industrial north against the marginalised and impoverished South.

But this is not the only response. Biopolitics, as I have said, are politics, which is to say that they create a field of somewhat open-ended, somewhat unpredictable contestation. Alongside the 'conservative,' security-oriented responses to the failure of the 'government of poverty,' a number of other projects seek to broaden and radicalise 'make live' politics. One important set of interventions, for instance, relates to the renewed effort, in debates about economic policy, to push back 'neoliberal' trickle-down orthodoxy and to argue for 'inclusive', 'employment-intensive' growth policies. Such attempts may be limited: Marxists would probably argue that the 'inclusive growth' agenda is hardly likely to resolve the powerful contradictions created by the present direction of capitalist growth. Barchiesi (2011) and Ferguson's (2007) critique of 'productionism' should also alert us to the extent to which dreams of fuller (if not full!) employment are still ideologically deeply wedded to normative ideas about the place of employment in the organisation of social entitlement – dreams that may have little traction in the real world of large-scale structural unemployment. But at least such policies are involved in bringing previously marginal issues into the heartland of economic debate.

Another set of interventions exist somewhat independently of employment policy, and involve the development of an increasingly vocal politics pivoting on the notion of a 'rightful share' (Ferguson, pers. comm.) : Demands for a basic citizen's grant, innovations in respect of employment guarantee schemes in India (Li 2011) and South Africa (Philip 2010) the pressure on governments in the developing world to develop social programmes, and calls by leading development writers to 'Just give money to the poor' (Hanlon et al. 2010) are all attempts to go beyond the limited ways in which 'make live' policies have been deployed in the past.

7. Understanding marginalisation

The development of new and more hotly contested political struggles about marginalisation and poverty, in which significant numbers of activists, policymakers and planners are seeking to engage with the social fallout of jobless de-agrarianisation and marginalisation to find biopolitical strategies that can support the well-being even of the millions of newly vulnerable people, poses significant challenges to the production of poverty knowledge.   One set of challenges entails finding a response to the critique about the difficulty of grasping social relationality through the lens of 'indicators' and

the quantitative surveillance of populations understood as aggregations of individuals. Policymakers need forms of poverty knowledge that can help them come to grips with social power relations and social processes. This is not a trivial issue. In closing, I set out three challenges that need to be resolved.

The first set of issues is conceptual, and it relates to the need to develop a more rigorous and useful concept of marginality. Elsewhere (Du Toit 2004), I set out at length some of my reservations about the use of notions of 'exclusion' to understand the position of the poor in the developing world. In essence, my objection has been that the concept of social exclusion is often very poorly specified analytically; that it tends to be used within a simplistic meta-narrative that sees all forms of exclusion as 'bad', and that naively assumes that the difficulties of poor people will be resolved if only they can be 'included' in modernising capitalist markets. This simplistic assumption, I have argued, is not supported by the facts: a careful analysis of the real situation of poor people, at least in South Africa, needs to consider not only what they are excluded from, but also the adverse, exploitative ways in which they have been incorporated *into* modern capitalism.

In a subsequent paper (Du Toit 2008) I attempted in a small way to add some conceptual rigour to this discussion by observing that the concept of 'marginalisation' is often used to denote a number of quite distinct situations. There are in fact at least two axes of differentiation. The first axis of differentiation refers to the degree to which people are integrated into or external to a particular set of institutions. Marginality here refers to the degree of externality, and the extent to which livelihood systems are 'tightly coupled' to or disconnected from other social formations (e.g. formal markets). The second axis refers to the extent of people's social agency, and the 'heft' and 'impact' that they can bring to their interactions within a given social system. Marginality here refers to a situation of circumscribed power.

These two axes are independent of one another. In many colonial and post-colonial countries, externality from a system and the ability to opt out can be a source of empowerment. Conversely, where people's livelihood systems are highly integrated into a broader system within which they wield little power, one can speak of a situation of adverse incorporation, where marginalisation is produced by *too much* integration. (A third axis of differentiation refers to the extent of formality or informality, but that is not essential to my argument here.) Much more work needs to be done to understand the differential ways in which people can be integrated into or decoupled from broader economic systems, and the factors that can act to empower or disempower them within it.

This indirectly leads to the second set of issues around the need to engage much more effectively with the agency of the poor. Traditional 'governmentality' tends to conceive of poor people very simply as passive recipients of benefits — or as self-sustaining rational actors in a market. We need to develop much more sophisticated models of how poor people act: Framing them simply as 'beneficiaries' misrepresents their formidable social agency; while understanding them as brokers of and investors into their own capacities is to see individuals as mini-firms, and to miss many of the nuances and complexities of how they make their choices and why. Populist, romantic notions that construct the poor either as victims of the depredations of the powerful or as heroes of a struggle which is always understood to dichotomise social space, does not capture the diversity of the complex and artful ways in which poor people engage with the agencies of government and regulation.

The trickiest and most difficult issue, however, is how such more nuanced kinds of knowledge can be linked in useful ways to social action in the service of 'make live' policies. It is a fairly simple matter, within the theoretical and scholarly traditions of social anthropology or critical geography, to critique the methodological individualism and to advance complex and layered accounts of reality that show just what such accounts miss. But it is very difficult to make such understandings available for use by planners and policymakers who have not been trained in those arts themselves, and to make such knowledge available in forms that provide traction for collective social agency.

An example is the work currently being done by the Regional Vulnerability Analysis and Assessment committees that operate within the Southern African Development Community (SADC). Classical 'biopolitical' institutions, these committees are multi-agency institutions that act within and alongside local states in the region to 'embed' livelihoods analysis within the operations of governmental structures tasked with engaging with food insecure populations. They have for some time been working on institutionalising forms of quantitative analysis and modelling that use the 'sustainable livelihoods' framework to develop a 'portable' approach and workable model that can be used by government policymakers and planners.[1] But increasingly food insecurity and vulnerability in the region are not being driven simply by 'access to resources' and the issues affecting small farmer productivity that usually form part of the 'FAO tradition' of understanding food insecurity. More and more, as populations move off the land and have to fend for themselves in the non-farm economy, securing their food needs within the commercial food system, the issues impacting on forms of vulnerability and hunger these institutions are trying to understand relate to the political economy of 'adverse incorporation' and the ways in which vulnerable populations are situated in relation to the formal economy. In this context, understanding hunger and acting on it requires approaches that go well beyond the quantitative modelling of food security as it has been done until now: it means that structures like the RVAAs have to understand the complex position of people dependent upon but marginalised in buyer-driven food systems and the complexities of survival in informal self-employment.

James Scott (1998), in writing about the fatal flaws of the simplifying optics initially used by modernist states, argues for what he calls *metis* — a kind of located, practical knowledge and understanding that builds on experience, local knowledge and adaptability. This is an attractive, though somewhat romantic notion. Can it serve as a guide in helping us think about more appropriate forms of poverty knowledge? Can *metis* root and embed itself in more flexible structures of governance? Can 'make live' policies be developed that can deal with the particular forms of vulnerability and marginality created by late globalised capitalism? Can this be done when the resources at the disposal of states are decreasing, and when they have less and less leverage in controlling or regulating the actions of large and powerful corporations? In South Africa, for one thing, the centralised, rigid and top down nature of government certainly stands in the way of the empowerment of such flexible ways of knowing in local government.

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1   For more information, see http://www.sadc.int/fanr/aims/rvaa/

I started this paper by somewhat mischievously invoking the old parable of Nasruddin, and using it to suggest that the 'econometric imaginary' of traditional, quantitative poverty studies often results in our attention being misdirected, rather like the old mystic scuffling about in the road while the key is lying, waiting to be discovered, in his house. Although the story is engaging and powerful, and allows me to make my point, my use of it was also somewhat disingenuous. It suggests that the choice before Nasruddin and his students is a simple one: they can continue to look in the wrong place, or they can try to look for the key where they actually have a chance of finding it.   But Nasruddin's stories often have hidden complexities: in the words of Idries Shah, they are like peaches, whose sweetness on the outside belies the hard kernel within. What is Nasruddin to do? Like the koan about one hand clapping, the answer is not easy.   One popular gloss on the story is the gnomic assertion that 'looking' *is* the key (Epstein 2002). That's very comforting, and probably appropriate when explicating Sufist thought. But in our present context that would be smug and obscurantist. I very much fear that the 'hard kernel' of the story in this case is that we have to let go of our fond belief that there *is* a key in the first place. The optimistic verities of 'neoliberal' ideology and trickledown theory have not opened the door. And it is not clear that any other simple answer can be found that allows for a win-win solution in which everything can come out all right, and the careening, lurching train of economic progress is finally set on the right track. Looking, in this case, leads not to the key, but to knowledge about difficult choices and indigestible trade-offs. Hopefully it can also be linked to an awareness of the ends (foul or fair) that knowledge serves. And to a willingness to take responsibility for the consequences.

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