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Wellbeing in Developing Countries**

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**EXPLORING THE STRUCTURED DYNAMICS OF CHRONIC POVERTY:  
A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH**

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## **WeD - Wellbeing in Developing Countries ESRC Research Group**

WeD is a multidisciplinary research group funded by the ESRC, dedicated to the study of poverty, inequality and the quality of life in poor countries. The research group is based at the University of Bath and draws on the knowledge and expertise from three different departments (Economics and International Development, Social and Policy Sciences and Psychology) as well as an extensive network of overseas contacts and specific partnerships with institutes in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Peru and Thailand. The purpose of the research programme is to develop conceptual and methodological tools for investigating and understanding the social and cultural construction of well-being in specific countries.

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## **SUMMARY**

The dominant forms of international poverty research involve statistical analyses of household surveys and 'qualitative' information produced using 'participatory' techniques. The expertises of other social scientists are rarely used to inform development policy. The paper critiques the muddled conceptualisations of 'chronic poverty' in the World Development Special Issue on Chronic Poverty, and outlines a Dynamic Actor/Structure framework for analysing poverty processes based on human and social ontologies, which are clearly spelled out. The framework combines three structural levels, actor, lifeworld, and 'big structure', with the different conceptualisations of time implicit in the concepts of calendars and clocks, rhythms and histories, and is used to analyse and understand four episodes of chronic poverty in Brazil, Sierra Leone and Haiti. The sociological analysis of these anthropological studies reveals some of the complex structures and processes involved in the generation of poverty. A cross-disciplinary approach to poverty research would result in more realistic development policies and practices.

## **KEYWORDS**

Chronic poverty, dynamic actor/structure approach, multi-disciplinarity, sociology

# 1 INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

'Generating stability within the welter of conflicting interactional rhythms is a crucial problem. Both solipstic duration' [time as a subjective and individualistic experience] 'and clock time are in fact strategies for regularising this rhythmic cacophony. ...solipsism simply prioritises an arbitrary set of interactional presents around an individual [or group]. On the other extreme, clock time is simply a minimalist approach to adjudication of rhythmic complexity across interactions.' (Abbott, 2001b: 238)

Currently the dominant forms of poverty research in poor countries are to be found in two 'traditions' (Kanbur, 2001a): the 'quantitative' tradition involves formal mathematical models and/or descriptive statistics and regression analyses<sup>2</sup> using household survey data, while the 'qualitative' tradition describes 'participatory approaches' (see for example Narayan *et al*: 1999). Both these recently invented traditions are driven by narrow methods, applied at micro/meso levels, rather than theoretical thinking, and do not allow for a full social scientific analysis of international poverty. In particular neither approach has much to say about time and the relevance of its structuring for the understanding of the generation, reproduction and reduction of poverty.

The establishment of the multi-disciplinary DFID-financed Chronic Poverty Research Centre (CPRC) in the UK in 2000, and the increasing interest of poverty economists in the concept of 'vulnerability' (see for example Dercon, 2001), have put both 'time' and 'multi-disciplinarity' on the donor poverty research agenda. At the same time 'economists are grappling with models of how social and cultural factors shape human behaviour' (Rao and Walton, 2004: 1). There seems to be a window of opportunity for people active in international development-related research, policy-making and practice to adopt a truly multi-disciplinary approach to the study of poverty in poor countries. One thing this requires is that 'non-economist' social scientists act to assist 'development economics' to

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<sup>1</sup> This draft paper has been partially financed by my ESRC project 'Towards a Post-disciplinary Understanding of Global Poverty' (R000223987) [[www.bath.ac.uk/~hsspqb](http://www.bath.ac.uk/~hsspqb)] and partly by the University of Bath's ESRC Research Programme on Wellbeing in Developing Countries [[www.welldev.org.uk](http://www.welldev.org.uk)]. My thinking in this area has been assisted by interacting with other members of the WeD Programme, especially Ian Gough and Hartley Dean.

<sup>2</sup> Economics articles invoke formal action theories before settling into the comfortable technology of linear modelling.' (Abbott, 2001: 98).

descend gracefully from where it 'stands in beleaguered ascendancy, atop development studies and development policy' (Kanbur, 2002: 477).

In the same paper Kanbur proposes that the focus be shifted from 'the weaknesses of the economic method (which are well known and recognised by the best economists)' to 'the strengths of other disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and political science'. In line with this advice this paper combines some theoretical thinking from sociology with three empirical studies conducted by social anthropologists, to offer a way of looking at poverty dynamics that, taking 'structure' and 'time' seriously, can increase both understanding and policy and practice options.

In Section 2, I explore the ways in which 'time' is conceptualised and analysed in the recent CPRC-coordinated World Development Special Issue on Chronic Poverty and Development Policy (2003), concluding that there is scope for a much more 'joined-up' social science approach to the study of (chronic) poverty which can only be achieved through serious multi-disciplinary dialogue. In particular there is a need to negotiate our way to a shared human and social ontology<sup>3</sup>, against which to map the applicability of different methodologies, the goal being explanations, which are 'consistent' and 'interesting' (Abbott, 2001: 121). When consistent 'our theories, explanations, methods and research programmes should resonate with and support one another' leading to knowledge which produces 'a comprehensive, interesting and compelling account of social life.' (*ibid.*)

In Section 3 I introduce a methodological approach currently missing from the dominant international poverty research agenda; one which relies on 'cases' and 'stories' rather than 'variables' and 'populations' and which also builds on the 'foundational insight of sociology' which is that 'the social world is made up of situated actions, of social *relations*, not of independent stories.' (*ibid.*). The approach involves the inter-active use of conceptual frameworks at three structural levels, actor, lifeworld, and big structure, and the three different conceptualisations of time implicit in the concepts of calendars<sup>4</sup> and clocks, rhythms and histories.

Section 4 is based on four anthropological case studies, which, while this was not their purpose, can be seen as describing personal episodes of

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<sup>3</sup> What it is that exists 'out there' that researchers are trying to study, understand and explain. See Bevan 2004c for more on this.

<sup>4</sup> Defined here as a 'system by which beginning, length, and subdivision of year are fixed (*calendar* MONTH, YEAR)...' (Sykes, 1982)

chronic poverty. These are used to illustrate, in a necessarily superficial way, how application of this 'dynamic actor/structure' framework in particular empirical contexts can advance the understanding of particular instances of chronic poverty. The concluding section discusses some implications for poverty research and praxis.

## 2 'CHRONIC POVERTY'

The CPRC is particularly interested in poverty that is experienced for extended periods. While the duration of poverty experiences has not explicitly been an object of study by donor-influenced 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' researchers, the wider donor-funded poverty-research context has inevitably affected the research approaches to long-lasting poverty adopted by the Chronic Poverty Research Centre in its first years of operation. However, researchers associated with the CPRC come from a range of social science disciplines, and in their Special Issue overview paper, 'Conceptualising Chronic Poverty', Hulme and Shepherd (2003) do not draw explicit distinctions between 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' approaches to the topic. Rather they skip between concepts associated with neo-classical economic approaches (e.g. 'poverty', 'vulnerability', 'poverty dynamics'), Participatory Poverty Assessments (eg: God's poor, shame and humiliation), and those associated with other social sciences (e.g. social exclusion, violence and conflict).

### 2.1 Quantitative approaches to chronic poverty

In his Introduction Hulme defines the 'chronic poor' as 'those individuals and households who experience poverty for extended periods of time or throughout their lives...' (2003: 399). However, measurers must be more precise, and in 'Conceptualising Chronic Poverty' as 'a rough working definition' Hulme and Shepherd 'propose that chronic poverty be viewed as occurring when an individual experiences significant capability deprivations *for a period of five years or more*' (my emphasis) (2003: 405). They cite three arguments to support 'this crude five year criterion.' The first is that '(f)ive years is perceived as a significant period of time in an individual's life course in most cultures'. Second, in panel studies there is often a five year gap between data collection points 'so that in practical terms the study of the duration of poverty will often be based on a five year period'<sup>5</sup> and 'some empirical materials indicate that people who stay poor for five years or more

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<sup>5</sup> Although people who were consumption poor at time 1 and at time 2 five years later, they may not have remained in such poverty in the five years between.

have a high probability of remaining poor for the rest of their lives' (*ibid.*)

With minimum duration established Hulme and Shepherd describe two quantitative approaches to chronic poverty: one with neo-classical economics roots based on household survey data (of the Living Standards Measurement Study<sup>6</sup> type) which identifies and analyses *households* in chronic poverty, and the second which measures the number of *people* in chronic poverty and is related to the Millennium Development Goals. In the former tradition interest is focused on understanding the nature and degree of multi-dimensionality of income and other capability deprivation. The categories of *always poor*, *usually poor*, *churning poor*, *occasionally poor*, and *never poor* are used to classify households and to describe poverty transitions and the processes underlying them. Conventional poverty analyses have tended to rely on cross-sectional data but this is not possible when the focus is on long-lasting poverty, which can only be established retrospectively. There are also methodological problems around how to deal with premature deaths and with life course and inter-generational poverty.

With regard to measurement Hulme and Shepherd argue that assets and asset change must play a larger role in poverty and vulnerability analyses. They suggest that the length of a deprivation episode is likely to correlate with its severity and with the number of dimensions involved. There are problems in establishing the current global incidence of chronic poverty at an individual level. The HDI combines measures of GDP, life expectancy and education applied at national level. Household survey data collected for neo-classical economics analysis has not generated much information on 'who', in terms of social categories, is chronically poor (although appropriately-designed surveys could help to establish this in particular empirical contexts). Hulme and Shepherd provide a 'guesstimate' of between 450 and 900 million and chronically poor people in the world.

## 2.2 Qualitative approaches to chronic poverty

In the Hulme and Shepherd paper, interspersed among measurement-related definitions of chronic poverty, we find definitions that are more 'qualitative' in tone: 'intuitive idea of chronic poverty as persistent poverty' (p407); 'it is individuals who ultimately (!) suffer chronic poverty and whose life experiences should be tracked and analysed' (p405). They suggest

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<sup>6</sup> [www.worldbank.org/lsm](http://www.worldbank.org/lsm). See Bevan, 2001 for a detailed critique of LSMS surveys.

some ways in which qualitative data can be used in conjunction with quantitative data, for example, to generate understanding of the processes involved in transitions into and out of chronic poverty (p407). More widely, qualitative methods can usefully fill gaps in knowledge until panel data become available, and are necessary for the understanding of processes (p410). The growing need to analyse poverty from a 'multi-dimensional' perspective has been recognised. This 'can be done by more qualitative research methods, often with roots in anthropology and sociology' (p407).

They make use of some of the 'Voices of the Poor' information collected using PPA techniques (Narayan *et al*, 1999) and presumably would use more such information if it dealt specifically with the duration of poverty. Ghanaians responding to the PPA distinguished two categories of perennially needy: God's poor, who in the paper's terms need social protection, and the resourceless poor, who need livelihood promotion (p408). They also report the finding of differences in the ways in which chronic poverty is culturally understood and psychologically experienced and adapted to (p408). The notion that poverty is culturally constructed emerges again on p414 and connections are made with social exclusion approaches. Social exclusion also figures in connection with the identification of 'who' is chronically poor; the authors identify the following cross-cutting categories relating to:

- Stage in the life cycle
- Social exclusion within households (as a result of intra-household status/identity)
- Social exclusion (as a result of the status/identity/culture of the household)
- Spatial location (people living in remote rural areas, urban ghettos, regions where prolonged violent conflict and insecurity have occurred). (From p410)

Structural themes can be found in other places, initially in the opening quotation from Amartya Sen (1981), who argued that the 'poor' should be studied according to occupational class, distinguishing small peasant and landless labourers. The fortunes of these two categories are not tied together since they have different endowments and rather different entitlement relations (p403). Patron-client structures are mentioned in relation to Wood's argument (2003) 'that some people stay poor because their priority is to minimise vulnerability, and this is best achieved within a patron-client relationship that in turn limits possible exit routes from poverty.'

(p409). This (dynamically) structural notion of 'adverse incorporation' also has a cultural dimension (p414). The authors also make a statement about the importance of structures:

The study of chronic poverty is the study of poverty dynamics with a focus on those who are poor and have little or no mobility. The goal of research is to understand the evolution of social structures, mobility within them, and the particular immobility (if this is the case) of the chronically poor at the bottom of the structure. (p409)

However, I have to disagree with their subsequent statement that '(s)ocial structures evolve little over five years'. Social structures have the potential to change at all sorts of speeds and only some changes are meaningfully described in terms of 'evolution'<sup>7</sup>; for example the collapse of communism was pretty sudden and swift.

Later, using a livelihoods perspective, they suggest that the existence and extent of social and political networks may be important for the mobility of chronically poor people, but do not make the necessary links with what they say elsewhere. From a different perspective these networks constitute the power structures, which underlie unequal distributions of income and wealth (p413) at particular points in time, and therefore the incidence of chronic poverty; they involve relationships and processes of exploitation, adverse incorporation, exclusion, domination, and/or destruction and/or each of their opposites.

The Hulme and Shepherd paper allows quite a bit of voice for non-economist, non-PPA poverty researchers; but it is a muddle of interesting insights arising from studies produced in different disciplines, in different parts of the world, rather than a theoretically-grounded, 'joined-up' voice. Two factors particularly contribute to this muddle: 1) 'chronic poverty' is conceptualised from a research methods standpoint rather than an ontological one and 2) the problems involved in reconciling generalising approaches with approaches that acknowledge diversity are ignored rather

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<sup>7</sup> See Stephen Jay Gould (1997: Chapter 15) for a strong argument from a Darwinian biologist against using the concept of 'evolution' to describe cultural change. See Byrne (1998) for a discussion of possible trajectories of social systems, which can, at a point in time, be characterised as lying somewhere on a continuum of relationships from chaotic (far from equilibrium), through complex, to (rarely) linear.

than considered. The first of these issues is addressed in Sections 3 and 4. I return to the second in the concluding section.

### **3 A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH TO LONG-LASTING POVERTY**

The theoretical approach involves the development of a simple conceptual framework or model to guide empirical analysis. The empirical content is provided by three anthropological studies in which the experiences of four poor people are 'thickly' described (Geertz, 1973).

#### **3.1 Ontological assumptions: people, small structures and big structures**

With regard to human ontology I assume that people are biologically, psychologically, and socio-culturally constituted actors, with agency, located in space and time. This underpins a social ontology, which can best be described in three steps:

- Throughout their lives, 'from the cradle to the grave', people are continuously interacting with others and with 'things' of various kinds, in relationships involving differential power which socially construct a range of diverse interlinked dynamic livelihood structures (including 'households') and lifeworlds. Everyone in the world, from Presidents to the poorest babies, socially constructs, and is constructed by, dynamic local livelihood structures and lifeworlds.
- Taken together these small unequal structures constitute larger unequal social structures (political economies/cultural structures) which must also be seen as dynamically constructed, reconstructed and occasionally destroyed through ongoing inter-actions among people with differential power.
- In turn these larger social structures (which may or may not coincide with national state boundaries) constitute and are embedded in the global political economy and cultural structures.

#### **3.2 Ontological assumptions: poverty**

Ontologically speaking individual poverty is an ongoing process involving an

interlinked uniquely structured<sup>8</sup> set of varying experiences of suffering, unmet needs and false beliefs<sup>9</sup> which have harmful knock-on effects for the person involved in the process. Poverty is always experienced in time, and while every individual's experience is unique, at an abstract level it is possible to identify commonalities. Suffering can take a variety of physical, psychological and social forms. It can result from the direct harmful actions of others, from self-harming actions, or from the absence of 'needs-satisfiers'. The abstract universal human needs for competence (including health), relation, autonomy and meaning<sup>10</sup>, which if not met cause lasting harm, are instantiated and met (if they are) through 'needs-satisfiers' or resources in diverse ways, according to sex and age, and across different cultural livelihood figurations and lifeworld contexts.

The question then is how social scientists can accumulate knowledge about poverty and the processes underpinning it. To my mind this requires conceptual clarification purposively linked to custom designed research methods appropriate to the conceptual framework and to the question in hand. Such an approach runs counter to the dominant approaches in which 'poverty' is either 1) a household collectively not having enough income, or enough to eat, in the last month or three months, or 2) what (unspecified kinds of) people, in communities about which we are often told little, say it is.

### **3.3 The structural dimension of the framework**

The approach to long-lasting poverty in this paper locates (1) people living in long-lasting poverty, in (2) structured and dynamic livelihood/lifeworld

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<sup>8</sup> Both in terms of the particular constituents (e.g. not enough to eat, inability to participate in local social life...) and in their sequencing.

<sup>9</sup> These three problems have been identified by 'critical social scientists' such as Bhaskar (1989) and Collier (1994). See Sayer, 2000: 159.

<sup>10</sup> See Doyal and Gough (1991) for a thorough discussion of the concept of human needs which identifies two basic human needs (health and autonomy); conceptual discussions among members of the WED research programme have convinced Gough to add a need for relationship with others [WeD Programme in Outline, [www.welldev.org.uk](http://www.welldev.org.uk)]. I have added the need for meaning, which relates particularly to spiritual dimensions of life and broadened the notion of 'health' to 'competence' in line with Ryan and Deci's identification of three psychological needs (autonomy, competence and relatedness) which if thwarted will lead to negative consequences in all social and cultural contexts (2001:147).

figurations<sup>11</sup> which are often in long-lasting crisis. These figurations are themselves located *in* (3) structured and dynamic globally-situated political economies/cultures riddled with long-lasting inequalities which benefit rich and powerful people, and cause suffering to the poor and weak people whose poverty is sometimes<sup>12</sup> measured in household surveys and participatory research exercises. Conceptual frameworks for data collection and analysis should be developed for all three levels.

### 3.4 Conceptualisations of time: calendars, rhythms, and histories

“ ‘I know what time is if I am not asked’ a wise old man once said, ‘if I am asked, I no longer know.’ ” (Elias, 1992: 1)

Any study or discussion of ‘chronic poverty’ involves assumptions about the meaning of ‘time’. In the Hulme and Shepherd paper complex understandings of time are implicit in a number of the concepts and methods they mention including: vulnerability; poverty dynamics; transient poverty; life course poverty; social mobility; economic processes; investment; growth; shocks; trajectories; stage in the life cycle. However, the authors do not analyse any of these concepts or consider how time is important to them.

This is not the place to explore ‘time’ in any depth. Among others, mathematicians (e.g. Hawkings, 1988), physical scientists (eg: Coveney and Highfield, 1991), anthropologists (Gell, 1992) and sociologists (eg: Elias, 1992, Adam, 1994 and 1995, and Abbott, 2001b) have written whole books about it<sup>13</sup>. However some conceptualisation is clearly relevant to a

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<sup>11</sup> The concept of lifeworld comes from Habermas (1988) and of figuration from Elias (1978).

<sup>12</sup> The administration of household surveys and participatory exercises require relatively high levels of peace and security.

<sup>13</sup> The gap between such theoretical treatises and practical research methods for understanding poverty-related issues in poor countries is currently yawning. There are at least three areas of interest here. The first involves exploration and analysis of the in-time structuration of the real poverty processes which poor people experience in their bodies, minds and souls, which is the major focus of this paper. The second concerns the ways in which, and the reasons why, different understandings of time are socially and culturally constructed in different contexts, including remote rural areas in poor countries as well as the social sciences, and taking in the many diversities in between. The third relates to conceptions of time as socially and culturally constructed power resources used in unequal relationships.

discussion of long-lasting poverty. In the Hulme and Shepherd paper it is possible to identify two approaches to time: calendar time and historical time. With regard to the first we, in modern societies, have grown so accustomed to living with quantifiable calendar and clock time that, although these have been socially and culturally constructed over millennia, we tend to see them as 'naturally occurring' (Elias, 1992). This represented or objectified temporality, for example five years between 2002 and 2007, is one important conceptualisation of time. There is an assumption that there is something 'universal' about five measured years wherever and whenever they (have) pass(ed).

One justification Hulme and Shepherd give for the selection of five years as a way of distinguishing between poverty and chronic poverty<sup>14</sup> is that '(f)ive years is perceived as a significant period of time in an individual's life course in most cultures.' (p6). This assertion is not supported by any evidence, but there is a reason why it is intuitively acceptable, which relates to the biological/psychological/socio-cultural rhythms governing people's lives. To provide just three examples: a person can not exist at time  $t=0$ , but be a relatively socialised 4¼ year old member of society at time  $t=5$ ; a boy of 9 thinks and acts in a very different way from a boy of 14; most British people see the move from 36 to 41 as very significant as a result of particular cultural attitudes towards ageing.

This illustrates a second useful conception of 'time' in terms of 'rhythms'. This conception, relates to the 'powers' and 'liabilities'<sup>15</sup>, or structures and dynamics, built into people, 'things' and social structures as, metaphorically speaking, they move through time, developing, evolving and decaying according to their natures<sup>16</sup>.

The third conception of time shifts attention to history and the particular way

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Here the 'quantity' of time a person has at her own disposal, and the 'quality' of time use are important.

<sup>14</sup> In an ideal world there would be no need to do this since the duration and timing of all poverty episodes would be key foci of poverty research. The focus on chronic poverty arose out of a concern that, in pursuit of the Millennium Development Goals, international and government policymakers would focus on the easier target of the 'transient' poor.

<sup>15</sup> These concepts are taken from the 'critical realist' approach described by Sayer (2000).

<sup>16</sup> 'Every bodily process is pulsing to its own beat within the overall beats of the solar system' Michael Young, the Metronomic Society, quoted in Coveney and Highfield, 1991: 298

in which people experience<sup>17</sup> 'time'. While the durations of each second, month, and year, as measured by mechanical and digital clocks, the movements of moon, planets, sun, and stars, and/or the time it takes for a particular atom to decay, are in one sense the same, and there are human and social rhythms that can be identified as 'universal', every second, month and year is unique and unrepeatable. We constantly live in a 'moving now' and as time 'passes' there is path dependence between what happened yesterday, what is happening today, and what will happen tomorrow. History matters for people, livelihood figurations and big structures.

### 3.5 A DA/S Framework for Analysing Chronic Poverty Structures and Dynamics

These three conceptions of time can be brought together with the three levels of the structural framework to generate a theoretical or analytical framework that can be used to increase understanding of particular episodes of chronic poverty (see Table 1). This framework arises out of the 'dynamic actor/structure' (DA/S) approach described and used in Bevan, 2004a/b/c and d.

**Table 1: A DA/S Framework for Analysing Chronic Poverty Structures and Dynamics**

Level of analysis	Timeframe		
	Calendar	Rhythms	History
Actor			
Livelihood figuration/Lifeworld			
Big structure			

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<sup>17</sup> This has universal as well as culturally-constructed features.

## *Calendar*

In the calendar boxes we have the same period of time, based on the chronic poverty of the actor<sup>18</sup>. It potentially can range between five years and 100+<sup>19</sup>.

## *Rhythms*

At the actor level there are key periods and transitional times when people have particular physical/ psychological/social needs which, if not met at a minimum level will lead to lasting harm. For example not having a dowry at the time when, according to the local culture, marriage should happen, a war breaking out when a man is young, not being able to afford a school uniform, eating poor food as a toddler, or being excluded from ancestral burial sites.

Elements of people's livelihood figurations and lifeworlds also have particular time rhythms, which are ecologically constrained, structurally linked and culturally constructed. For example in rural livelihood systems there are agricultural and livestock cycles, seasonal market cycles, religious cycles (eg: for fasting and feasting), and in some societies age-set cycles and/or political cycles. In many societies there are biologically and culturally-constructed times to become adult, times to be married, times to die. A locally widespread episode of long-lasting poverty can cause structural and cultural disruptions, which affect the longer-term 'health' of the society. At this level household formation, cycles and collapse also play an important role. The passage of 'household time' relates to the ways in which roles, relations and identities within a household interact and change as household members age.

The big structures or large complex open systems in which livelihood figurations and lifeworlds are embedded also have their own rhythms. Individual and livelihood figuration chronic poverty episodes are embedded

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<sup>18</sup> It would be possible to focus on the poverty duration of the livelihood figuration, or the larger in/security regime (Bevan, 2003a/b).

<sup>19</sup> Since poverty is always experienced in time it would be sensible from a research point of view to consider the duration of an episode as one variable with important implications, others of particular relevance being when in the lifecourse it occurred, what 'dimensions' of poverty were involved, what was happening with the other dimensions' etc. However, from a policy point of view it is important to provide a focus on people in long-lasting poverty.

in larger episodes of structured inequality, or insecurity regimes (Bevan, 2004a), involving dynamic unequal relations, processes and actions of exclusion, exploitation, domination and/or destruction. These reside in particular spatially, socially and historically located passages of 'historical time' as the following broad examples show. Race-based social exclusion, linked to historical exploitative processes, has created huge long-lasting pockets of chronic poverty in South Africa and many Latin American countries. Exploitative relations, linked to exclusionary practices, underpin chronic poverty among landless peasants and child labourers in South Asia. The state apparatus in many post-colonial African states has been used by dictators and their cronies to serve their own interests in ways, which have destroyed or undermined livelihoods and entrenched long-lasting poverty. Long-running wars in many parts of the world, for example Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Chechnya, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Haiti, have contributed to widespread chronic poverty episodes for people and for the livelihood figurations and lifeworlds in which they live.

### *Histories*

Time rhythms can be seen as 'social mechanisms' (Hedström and Swedberg, 1998), which arise from the structural and dynamic features, or powers and liabilities, of the people, things or relationships involved. Social life involves the 'in time' interaction of these mechanisms. The history of what actually happens in any interaction varies according to the starting point, the particular mechanisms involved, how they are sequenced, how they interact, and the choices that key 'mega' and 'macro' actors<sup>20</sup> make during the interaction. (Sayer, 2000; Tilly, 1997). Histories are constituted by sequences of activities, events and interacting mechanisms. Sometimes these involve relatively little social change: the system is maintained and reproduced. At the other extreme there are histories marked by disjunctions, turning points and deaths.

People build their histories as they age, depending on what happens to them and what they make of it. A five-year or more chronic poverty episode may involve endless repetition of the same activities and experiences of deprivation, a seasonal pattern of bad times and worse times, or a sudden descent into terror and deprivation; or a mix of these; or some other patterns. These experiences and their consequences will be continuously 'laid down', with different effect depending on the age of the person and his interpretation of the experiences, contributing to his 'human resources' and

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<sup>20</sup> Mouzelis, 1995

'habitus' considered at any point in time. Livelihood figurations and associated lifeworlds vary as a result of diversity in divisions of labour, figurations of power and dynamic ecological and technological contexts. In some cases the chronically poor individual will be isolated – perhaps one of only a few scattered chronically deprived people in the locality. In others the experience will be culturally shared over the five plus years in livelihoods and lifeworlds characterised by long-lasting poverty.

As with other sorts, livelihood figurations and lifeworlds suffering chronic poverty may be stable over long periods, they may get even worse gradually, they may improve gradually, they may suffer regular sudden shocks they can sustain, they may evolve into something else gradually, or they may suffer a catastrophic shock that destroys them and transforms place and people.

Episodes of individual and livelihood chronic poverty may be features of in/security regimes in longer-term equilibrium or associated with regime transitions, including 'contentious episodes', (McAdam, *et al*, 2001) as system contradictions and social conflicts either 1) are sufficiently contained to produce episodes of stability or 2) construct periods of rapid transition. Highly unequal regimes with large pockets of chronic deprivation may persist for centuries; or episodes of structural chronic poverty can result from rapid transitions, which in some cases may be violent.

### *Summary*

In this view individual and local episodes of long-lasting poverty are embedded in unequal structures and dynamics. They can produce long-lasting harm, at three levels: long-lasting harm to people's bodies, minds, relationships and subjective quality of life; long-lasting harm to local political economies, societies and cultural repertoires (Dean, 2003); and long-lasting harm to global relations, values and interactions. In the next section the analytical framework described above will be used to explore four case studies of personal episodes of chronic poverty in their livelihood and big structure contexts.

## **4 FOUR CASE STUDIES: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS**

To illustrate the value of this approach to long-lasting poverty I have chosen four case studies of suffering and unmet need related to long-lasting poverty from material written up as part of much larger studies by three social

anthropologists. One episode involves a young male teenager involved in the civil war in Sierra Leone (Richards, 1996). The second focuses on a woman in her forties from an urban slum in NE Brazil (Scheper-Hughes, 1993), while the third and fourth involve the experiences of a young man and a young woman from a rural area in Haiti who both lived and died in long-lasting poverty (Farmer, 1997)<sup>21</sup>. Using the analytical framework set out in Table 1, Table 2 provides a brief summary of the events involved in the four episodes of long-lasting poverty.

The comparative analysis that follows expands on the summaries in Table 2. For each of these people I asked the same seven questions, developed out of the approach described above:

- What was the person's location in the gendered lifecycle?
- What was person's location in his/her lifeworld network?
- What was the location in the wider political economy/socio-cultural context?
- What choices made by others contributed to this suffering?
- What choices did the person make?
- What were the consequences for the person?
- What were the consequences for other people?

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<sup>21</sup> These have been chosen from a bookshelf accumulated during five years of teaching courses on the sociology of development and poverty and policy. The basis of choice is the very high quality of the research, the vividness of the writing which brings these people to life, and the variation - in individual experiences (particularly according to gender and age), in livelihood figurations and lifeworlds, and in the different in/security regime structures and dynamics found in NE Brazil, Sierra Leone and Haiti. In what follows I keep referencing to a minimum.

**Table 2: The Four Case studies**

<b>CHARLIE: A CHILD SOLDIER FROM SIERRA LEONE</b>			
	<b>Calendar</b>	<b>Rhythm</b>	<b>History</b>
<b>Actor</b>	1989-94	From boyhood to adolescence (9 to 14)	1989 – 92 schoolboy? 1992-94 child soldier
<b>Lifeworld</b>	1989-94	Local rhythms disrupted; household collapsed 1992	1991 village attacked 1992 attack kills grandfather
<b>Big structure</b>	1989-94	89-90 declining patrimonial regime 90-95 (and beyond) civil war regime	'A drama of social exclusion'
<b>ACÉPHIE: AN AIDS VICTIM FROM HAITI</b>			
	<b>Calendar</b>	<b>Rhythm</b>	<b>History</b>
<b>Actor</b>	1965-91	From babyhood to womanhood mostly in gradually increasing poverty; improvement between 22 and 25 then sudden shock.	1965-84 farm, primary school 1984-87 no school, trading, affair 1987-90 maid in capital 1990 – pregnant, goes home 1991 – dies
<b>Lifeworld</b>	1965-91	Small community in entrenched poverty; military presence; landlessness, hunger; household - parents plus twin brother.	Parents lifeworld and livelihood disrupted in 1956 by building of dam.
<b>Big structure</b>	1965-91	Bottom rung of social ladder in an unequal racialised insecurity regime stabilised by state violence sometimes with US aid.	Military regimes, Papa Doc, Baby Doc, etc Poorest country in Americas

## CHOUCHOU: A VICTIM OF STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE FROM HAITI

	Calendar	Rhythm	History
<b>Actor</b>	1967-92	From babyhood to death aged 25 in severe poverty.	2 yrs primary school; early teens worked land. Blacklisted in 1991, murdered in 1992.
<b>Lifeworld</b>	1967-92	Rural village in entrenched poverty; military presence; landlessness, hunger; first household - parents plus older sister; second household - wife plus child(ren?).	Peasant agriculture in steep and infertile highlands of Central Haiti; little change.
<b>Big structure</b>	1967-92	Bottom rung of social ladder in an unequal racialised insecurity regime stabilised by state violence sometimes with US aid.	Military regimes, Papa Doc, Baby Doc, etc Poorest country in Americas

## BIU: A MOTHER OF FOURTEEN CHILDREN FROM NORTH EAST BRAZIL

	Calendar	Rhythm	History
<b>Actor</b>	1944-86	From babyhood to 1986 in severe poverty; 1 period of destitution; things better in 1986 than childhood	Hunger, begging, sugarcane work, 2 partners, 15 births (6 dead; 1 street daughter; 1 fostered; 3 taken by partner; 3 girls living with her).
<b>Lifeworld</b>	1944-86	Rural area until 1952 then shantytown (home to sugarcane workers and others); very unstable 'households'.	Shantytown dominated by sugarcane workers; little change between 1952 and 1986.

## 4.1 Four people in long-lasting poverty

### *A child soldier from Sierra Leone<sup>22</sup>*

'Charlie' lived with his grandfather (who was his guardian) in Pujehun district, which was invaded by the RUF in 1991. In 1992 when he was 12 Charlie's grandfather was killed by the RUF, leaving Charlie with no source of livelihood. For two years he became a child soldier, living in ULIMO<sup>23</sup> camps, taking 'crack' cocaine, fighting in villages, watching Rambo films, and occasionally killing people. In 1994 ULIMO moved out of Pujehun district and Charlie decided to leave the militia; he returned to secondary school during term-time and a camp for ex-fighters during the holidays.

### *An AIDS victim from Haiti*

Acéphie was born into long-lasting poverty. She attended primary school for a couple of years. At the age of 19 Acéphie started passing the military barracks on her way to sell goods in the market. She met a married army captain who seemed interested in establishing a long-term relationship. However, after only a month Honorat developed unexplained fevers and returned to his wife; a few months later she heard he was dead. From 22 to 25 she was a servant in the capital and began to pool resources and plan marriage with Blanco. However when she became pregnant and returned home he abandoned her and their daughter. Shortly after the birth she was diagnosed with AIDS and she died aged 26. Acéphie's mother, twin brother and small daughter mourned her death and her father hanged himself.

### *A victim of structural violence from Haiti*

Chouchou grew up in a small village in the steep infertile highlands of Haiti's central plateau. He attended primary school for a few years but left when his mother died to help his father work their land. His other main activities were going to church and listening to the radio. When he was about 22, he moved in with pregnant Chantal. Two years later, in 1991, while travelling on a

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<sup>22</sup> There is no information about how well Charlie lived when his grandfather was alive although it seems he was attending secondary school; his parents were not dead but he did not turn to them once his grandfather died. While Charlie may or may not qualify as living in chronic poverty if the 5-year rule is applied, there are other child soldiers who have lived similar lives for longer periods (growing up in the process).

<sup>23</sup> A militia with its origin in Liberia.

truck he made a remark about the bad roads which could have been interpreted as a criticism of the regime which had just come to power as a result of a coup. An off-duty soldier dragged him off the truck at the next stop; he was beaten by soldiers and taken to the barracks for several days where he was tortured. He was put on a blacklist but although he mostly stayed away from his home village he was arrested in 1992, while visiting his sister. He was taken to the nearest checkpoint where he was tortured; three days later he was left in a ditch and three days after that he died.

### *A sugarcane worker and mother of 14 from North East Brazil*

Biu was born in a rural area in 1944. She began work as a beggar as soon as she could walk. Her father left her mother soon after she was born and she and her sister were fostered by an 'aunt'. They went hungry many times and were forced to eat wild greens, grass and cactus<sup>24</sup>. When she was 8 they moved to the shantytown; at 15 she ran away with a 50-year-old widower. She had five children with Vladimar, two of whom died, before he hanged himself (unemployed, alcoholic, depressed). She took the children 60 km to the city, lived in the centre on a piece of cardboard and begged. Her baby son died and her eldest daughter ran off with a band of street children. The third was rescued and fostered by her older sister. Biu returned to the shanty town and the sugarcane fields, had 9 more births with Oscar (6 survived) who left her for a younger woman when she was 43 taking with him 'his pick of the children, our two healthy sons, to help him in the fields and our beautiful fat Patricia.' (p470). She was left with four daughters one of who died shortly afterwards.

### *Discussion*

There are three striking things about these stories, none of which figure prominently in current analyses of chronic poverty. The first is the importance of relationships and interactions. People suffer partly as a result of the actions of other people; and their actions cause suffering to other people. The second is the important ways in which gender affects chronic poverty experiences. The third is the importance for 'what happens next' of the (gendered) stage in the lifecycle when the long-lasting poverty episode occurs. People of different ages and sexes face and make different choices, and their actions have different consequences because of age-related

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<sup>24</sup> 'Compared to this kind of suffering, life today is much better. Today you can always show up in the house of a neighbour and your *comradre* will never deny you a piece of bread or some cornmeal to take home. ..' (p466)

variations in biological and psychological structures and needs, which change as the years pass. Charlie was only 12 when he became a soldier; '(u)nder-age boys are good soldiers, slipping through the bush with ease and little fear, treating battle as an extension of play'<sup>25</sup>. However his experiences will have left a lasting mark.

'Child soldiers were treated very harshly. The boys were inducted through a process of initiation by which they were drugged and forced to commit some atrocity such as raping, killing or throwing someone into a well or river, on pain of being shot themselves for disobedience. At other times, they would be lined up by force to witness the execution of members of their family or friends, and if they refused or failed to applaud the executions, or cried or screamed, they were themselves executed.' (Abraham, 2000:10)

In the NE Brazil shanty town there is a cycle whereby many of those weak, sickly and malnourished baby girls who survive develop into 'stunted' and unhealthy women who in turn produce weak and sickly babies. 'The problem is that stunting from malnutrition is almost invariably accompanied by delayed maturation, reproductive problems (including high risk of miscarriage and low-birth-weight infants), ill health, reduced energy, lowered self-esteem, and adverse effects during childhood on the ability to learn' (Scheper-Hughes, 1993: 156)<sup>26</sup>. In the context of 'structural violence' of the kind found in Haiti, chronically poor young women and young men face different, but equally fatal threats. 'Acéphie Joseph and Chouchou Louis shared, as noted, a similar social status, and each died after contact with the Haitian military.' (Farmer, 1997; p274)

## **4.2 Four lifeworld/livelihood figurations in long-lasting crisis**

### *Household and livelihood figuration collapse in Sierra Leone*

Charlie's household consisted of two people, and he was dependent on his grandfather for food and shelter. With his grandfather's death this household collapsed and for the next two years his 'household' was a series of ULIMO camps. After leaving ULIMO he had two main 'households': his secondary school and the camp for under-age ex-fighters. He visited his mother at Gondama refugee camp 'from time to time' (p93) and said his father in Freetown (the capital) 'treats me fine'. There is no information about the

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<sup>25</sup> 'Girls also became combatants but they tended to be older.' (Richards, 1996: 89)

<sup>26</sup> This is something explored in the World Development paper by Harper, Marcus and Moore (2003).

livelihood figuration that supported Charlie and his grandfather. ULIMO was an armed faction mostly recruited from Liberian refugees driven by Charles Taylor into Sierra Leone through the rainforest where most of the diamond areas are located. Charlie was paid \$30 (a month?). It is probable that diamond mining and looting were the main sources of this income.

The long-term decline in respectable livelihoods in Sierra Leone is indicated by a fall in GDP per capita from \$277 in 1966 to \$151 in 1998<sup>27</sup>. Diamond smuggling has been part of the informal economy since the 'diamond rush' of the 1950s, and since 1991 war has led to the destruction of many regular agricultural and urban livelihoods. Apart from some assistance from humanitarian NGOs, people had largely to rely on their own efforts to survive. Many of these caused harm to other people. For example, bandits and soldiers involved in 'sellgame' (looting) disguised themselves as rebels. Local civil defence units (kamajors) mobilised and refugees fled to Guinea, Liberia, and other parts of Sierra Leone. Resources were raised through the trafficking of children and young people, including sex slavery. There was also some creative informal livelihood and social protection activity including self-help schools. There was a search for patrons by war widows and orphans. Many women were widows or responsible for provisioning for family needs and this was reflected in high levels of prostitution.

*Two households in a livelihood figuration in very long-lasting poverty in Haiti*  
Acéphie's first household was based in Kay, a community of less than 1500 people that stretched along an unpaved road cutting northeast into Haiti's Central Plateau. M. Joseph was a farmer and his wife a market woman; Acéphie and her twin brother were born in 1965. Thirteen years earlier the Josephs' original home, most of their belongings, their crops and the graves of their ancestors were drowned by a reservoir and they moved to Kay. Acéphie stayed in her first household until she was 22 when she became a housekeeper for a middle-class Haitian woman. She was paid \$30 a month and sent as much as she could save back to the family in Kay. She returned to her first household when she became pregnant aged 25. Chouchou's family household consisted of his parents and an older sister. In his early teens Chouchou joined the other three in working in their hillside gardens in a small village in the steep and infertile highlands of the Central Plateau. In early 1989 Chouchou moved in with Chantal who was pregnant and continued to work the land. Following his death he left a widow and one or more babies.

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<sup>27</sup> This information is taken from the Sierra Leone case study in Bevan 2003b.

Acéphie was a 'node' in a social network linked by the HIV/AIDS virus. Honorat's first wife grew thinner each year and with no means of feeding their five children made a union with another soldier. Honorat had at least two other partners; both poor peasant women. One was HIV positive with two sickly children. Blanco was still handsome and well with plenty of girlfriends at the end of the case study, but who knows now? The isolated and insular village of Kay where Acéphie was born and died 'owes its existence to a project conceived in the Haitian capital and drafted in Washington D.C.: Kay is a settlement of refugees, substantially composed of peasant farmers displaced more than thirty years ago by Haiti's largest dam.' (p264) The valley where the Joseph's farmed before the dam was built was relatively fertile and the inhabitants made a decent living. However most of the Central Plateau is chalky and arid, 'hostile to the best efforts of the peasant farmers who live here. (p262). Chouchou was one of those farmers. There is widespread landlessness and hunger and high infant mortality.

#### *Shanty town 'households' in the sugarcane economy of NE Brazil*

Biu's story illustrates the flexibility of household structures in the shantytown. 'People of the Alto form households and families through an inventive bricolage, fashioning and making up relations as they go along, following a structured improvisation.' (p475). Men often engage in informal practices of polygyny. 'These loosely constructed, improvisational families are sustained consensually and continue only for as long as they are useful or gratifying.' (p477)

'Because of the implicit rule of reciprocity among the squatters, household composition shifts radically, even over very brief periods of time. For example, in July 1987 Dona Maria d'Água seemed quite overwhelmed by a household very nearly splitting at the seams. Into two and half tiny rooms were crammed Dona Maria, her two adult daughters, their children, an adult son, his child and two other grandchildren sent home by a daughter working in São Paulo. In addition there was the occasional visiting father, mother or boyfriend.' (p99). When Scheper-Hughes returned in February of the next year the household consisted of Dona Maria, one adult daughter, a two year-old granddaughter, and an eleven year old grandniece. When she asked where 'the others' were 'Dona Maria looked perplexed'; she could not remember who had been in the house the previous July.

Many people living in the shantytown worked in the sugarcane fields, which had been cultivated since the 16<sup>th</sup> century. During the late 19<sup>th</sup> century slave

labour gradually gave way to wage labour and the modern industrialised factory replaced the traditional mill. 'The transformation of the plantation economy, completed by the mid-twentieth century, had a disastrous effect on the traditional peasant class ...: the tenants, sharecroppers, and conditional squatters. A process of evictions began in the 1950s to increase the land under sugar, which produced a growing class of rural day labourers who settled in shantytowns on the edges of towns. In the 1980s women and children entered the rural industrial labour force in increasing numbers. Some women also worked as servants for the upper and middle classes of the town.

### *Discussion*

In many stressed parts of the world 'households' are not the stable entities imagined by the constructors of household surveys. As Biu's experience illustrates the continuous social (re)construction of 'households' is an element in many individual and social coping strategies, while after his grandfather's death Charlie did not live in a 'household' at all. The examples from Haiti and Brazil show that stable livelihood figurations can contain more or less stable household structures.

Chronic livelihood poverty can emerge in a range of livelihood figurations, including those based on peasant agriculture, rural day labour and conflict. In these conditions actions taken to improve quality of life can be risky for those taking the actions and for others. Charlie faced an economic environment sustained by illicit diamond mining and trading, and looting, and in becoming a child soldier he damaged both himself and other people. Acephie succumbed to AIDS as a result of an attempt to find a patron who would contribute to support for her and her family of origin. Biu lost two children as a result of her decision to try her luck in the big city.

Livelihood figurations in long-lasting poverty have different niches in wider global economic and political structures. While the figurations described here are marked by hunger, violence and illegality their contexts vary and their local histories are affected by local circumstance as well as the wider insecurity regime context. Acephie's home was in a refugee village built to accommodate people displaced by a reservoir. Her family were suddenly made poor. Biu's parents had been even poorer than she was. It is likely that Charlie came from a relatively wealthy family, given his secondary schooling, but the conflict destroyed the livelihood figuration he had been born into.

### 4.3 Three globally-located political economies with long-lasting inequalities

#### *Civil war in Sierra Leone*

Suffering in 1990s Sierra Leone involved deaths, dismemberment, and displacement leading to loss of loved ones and livelihoods, societal destruction, the rupture of inter-generational links, and psychological devastation. During the period 1990-95 estimations are that 15,000 civilians were killed, there were 100,000 mutilation victims, 40% of the population were displaced, and refugee-filled camps sprang up in which boredom, sexual and physical violence were endemic.

Failing patrimonialism and social exclusion (Richards, 1996: 161) were two elements underpinning the civil war. 'In much of Sierra Leone *de facto* citizenship remains a privilege for those domiciled in old villages registered for tax collection'. Young people, itinerant workers and other low status people 'find themselves in attenuating orders of precedence in access to basic rights and properties.' (Fanthorpe, 2001:363). Generally women and children lack voice and power.

The war also required outside participants. 'Charlie's' local insecurity regime flourished as an episode of a wider West African insecurity regime, involving wars that were simultaneously civil and international, which was constituted by the Sierra Leonean Government plus its allies and the RUF plus its allies versus 'the people'. The linked conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia have been sustained for more than ten years as a result of the building of sophisticated international commercial and political networks; for example rebels, and the ECOMOG soldiers who were meant to be controlling them, engaged in commercial cooperation to exploit diamonds. Other interests being met were those of Bulgarian arms dealers, South African mercenary companies, Belgian diamond dealers, Asian timber importers, the UK army, French business, the Presidents of Burkina Faso and Togo, the UN, Nigeria, ECOMOG, and humanitarian NGOs (Bevan, 2004b).

#### *'Development' and structural violence in Haiti*

Through the 1980s, Haiti was ruled by the Duvaliers; Papa Doc, and then Baby Doc. They governed through violence, most of which was directed at people in similar positions to Chouchou. The growth of a pro-democracy movement caused Baby Doc to flee in 1986 but he was replaced by a military government, which received over \$200 million of US aid in its first

eighteen months (Farmer, 1997). In internationally monitored elections held in 1990 the leader of the pro-democracy movement took almost 70% of the vote. However, he was overthrown in a military coup in September 1991 and it was only a month after this coup that Chouchou was blacklisted for his remark about the roads.

### *Exploitation, patriarchy, and racism in Brazil*

Scheper-Hughes divides the residents of Bom Jesus into 'somebodies' and 'nobodies'. The 'somebodies' include the traditional landed gentry – the old families with names 'heavy with the history of sugar and cotton plantations and cattle *fazendas* – and 'the aggressive commercial and industrial middle class holding the new wealth and power, those who would transform Bom Jesus from a traditional patriarchal town of patrons and clients into a thoroughly modern, more open, and "republican" but still class-, gender-, and race-stratified society.' (p80) The middle class is in an unstable social position since social standing depends on certain levels of conspicuous consumption.

At the bottom of the social hierarchy is the undifferentiated mass of 'nobodies'; the humble population or *os pobres* (the poor) (p84). Legally they are referred to as 'the illiterates' who were unable to vote until recently. However, among themselves they make distinctions: the working classes; the respectable poor; the disreputable poor; and the "beyond the pale" under-underclass' (p84).

### *Discussion*

The three larger insecurity regimes in which the livelihood figurations of the case study protagonists are embedded each occupy a particular niche in the global economy and polity (Castells, 1996/7/8). Charlie's suffering can be linked to an uncontrolled illegal global capitalism interacting with widespread social exclusion and warlord structures. These have long histories rooted in colonialism (Bevan, 2004b). Acéphie was partially a victim of a 'Development' which had benefits for foreign investors and urban dwellers but no compensation for those damaged as a result of it, while Chouchou was murdered by a regime supported by US aid. Biu was one of the many poorly-paid and exploited sugarcane workers who subsidise cheap global sugar prices and generate large profits for shareholders and company executives.

## 5 IMPLICATIONS FOR POVERTY RESEARCH AND POLICY

In this paper I have offered a language for talking about poor people's experiences and a framework for analysing the causes of their poverty, which are different from those found in the currently dominant poverty discourse. This is a much more complex picture of 'the poor' which takes account of the different, gendered, powers and liabilities to be found at different stages of the life cycle. Real poverty is not a 'multi-dimensional' mix of inadequate consumption, stunting and failure to go to school, but an integrated daily experience of suffering and unmet needs. Also it is recognised that men, women, boys, girls and gendered babies act in relationships; harming and helping each other. There are rich people as well as poor ones; powerful policymakers as well as people with no voice. Chronically poor livelihood figurations, more or less constructed of 'households', 'communities' and 'markets', are constituted of poorly understood, unequal power structures and actions involving exploitation and exclusion, domination and destruction, and are characterised by informal social protection as well as hunger, death, violence and illegality. Local structures, or some elements of them, may be extremely unstable. These poor livelihood figurations occupy more or less long-term niches in wider, possibly unstable, economies and polities which may or may not coincide with national economies and 'the state' and which all fit somewhere in wider global structures which are characterised by larger (poorly understood) unequal power structures and actions involving exploitation and exclusion, domination and destruction.

This is one of a number of possible approaches to understanding what is only one 'reality'; the reality of the day-to-day experience of poverty by poor people. It provides a view of the dynamic relationships, which generate the 'outcomes', measured in household poverty distributions and PPAs. I believe it is important to measure, but that it is not the place to begin, especially when some environments are so bad that measurement is impossible. In reality there are no lasting 'outcomes'; they are transient elements in the 'moving now' and can be seen simultaneously as 'inputs' for later 'outcomes'. Household surveys and PPAs capture 'outcomes' at a particular point of time and as such cannot bear the research or policy weight that is currently required of them in the PRSP process. Also their focus is restricted to individual and household levels. There is little serious development-related poverty-focused research at meso, macro and global levels where the talk is all of 'absences': market failures, governance failures, public service failures, the need to build 'social capital' and

encourage 'civil society'. This talk is carried into development and policy practice, usually with an unstated assumption that these 'absences' denote empty spaces to be filled rather than ongoing economic, social, political and cultural activities, relations, structures and processes of a different nature from those assumed to be desirable. While these are not captured or understood in the language or research methods of the dominant development discourse they constitute the world in which the real consequences of development interventions are worked out (Porter, 1991; Ferguson, 1990).

The unrealistic language, research methods and policy recommendations associated with the dominant development discourse is related to the 'beleaguered ascendancy' of development economics 'atop development research and policy'. Neoclassical micro-economists, who currently dominate poverty research, do not have the expertise necessary to study the social and cultural construction of power structures and dynamics at meso and macro levels, but they have left little (financial and policy) space for other social scientists that do. The challenge for multi-disciplinary research centres like the CPRC is how to navigate a way through the current chaotic structure of disciplines with something useful to say about poverty in poor countries, which integrates the best concepts, theories, and methods in a synergetic way. This entails a 'both-and' approach with the eventual aim of undermining binary distinctions, which seem no longer useful. There is a need for both: variables and cases; generalisation and identification of variation; universal and local; objective and subjective; quantitative and qualitative; linearity and non-linearity; 'positivism' and 'interpretivism' and 'critical realism'; short-term, medium-term and long-term and the *longue durée* (Braudel, 1995). Once attention and effort is focused to work beyond, or underneath, the bivalences, we enter an exciting world of multivalence and complexity. We need to re-examine and negotiate ontological and epistemological assumptions, be clear about concepts, develop theoretical frameworks appropriate to the realities of poverty, design integrated multi-method strategies and find languages for presenting empirical conclusions that are comprehensible to all social scientists, to policymakers, to political activists and to others with an interest. We need to do this in full awareness of the unequal power structures and complex normative issues involved in doing 'Development' (Rao and Walton, 2004).

The goals of such an empirical research programme should be 1) theory-oriented - to identify the universal mechanisms which operate, at personal, household, livelihood/lifeworld and big structure and global levels, to

produce, reproduce, intensify, and reduce poverty in poor countries; 2) situation-oriented – to understand how, in particular country or livelihood/lifeworld contexts, the historical and path-dependent interactions of locally-relevant mechanisms have generated current structures of inequality and experiences of poverty; and 3) policy-oriented – to enable responsible parties to respond rapidly and effectively to particular events, trends or actions likely to increase poverty, and to design poverty-reducing measures on the basis of a good understanding of local situations<sup>28</sup>. Neoclassical household survey analysts and participatory poverty assessors have roles to play in such a research agenda, but not dominant ones.

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<sup>28</sup> These three purposes of research are described by Gasper, 2001.

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