Poverty and Social Exclusion

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1. Social Exclusion

a. Origins of the term
The term social exclusion was first used in France by René Lenoir, former Secrétaire d’État à l’Action Sociale in the publication, *Les exclus: un français sur dix* in 1974: the *exclus* were people excluded from employment-based social security systems—the disabled, suicidal, aged, abused children, substance abusers and others. The French broadened their use of the term in the 1980s to refer to various types of social disadvantage related to new social problems such as unemployment, ghettoisation, and changed family life, with which old welfare state provisions could not deal. New programmes dealt with the insertion of individuals, families and groups (de Haan 1998, 11). The British picked up the term social exclusion in the 1980s, using it somewhat differently. In the United States, where the term is not common, social exclusion is written about in terms of the underclass, discrimination and disadvantage.

b. Definitions of social exclusion in the literature
De Haan (1998, 13) describes three paradigms of social exclusion. In France, the paradigm is one of solidarity, after Rousseau; exclusion is the rupture of a social bond between the individual and society that is cultural and moral. In the United States the paradigm is that of individual responsibility, after Hobbes; social exclusion reflects discrimination, the drawing of group distinctions that deny individuals full access to or participation in exchange or interaction. American commentators often find the causes of exclusion in unenforced rights and market failures. In the UK, the paradigm is that of hierarchical power, after Weber; social exclusion is a consequence of the formation of group monopolies that restrict the access of outsiders through social closure. The UK literature describes four dimensions of social exclusion: exclusion from adequate income or resources; labour market exclusion; service exclusion; and exclusion from social relations (Richmond 2002, 41).

The increasing number of studies of social exclusion in the literature requires an explanatory context, which Jock Young, the British criminologist, provides. Young (1999) sees the transition from modernity to late modernity as a movement from an inclusive to an exclusive society, that is, from a society that accented assimilation and incorporation to one that separates and excludes. This erosion of the inclusive world of the modernist period involved processes of disaggregation in the sphere of community (the rise of individualism) and in the sphere of work (the transformation of the labour market). Both processes are the result of market forces and their transformation by the human actors involved (Dixon 2001, 209).

In the context of the industrialized world, the transformation of late modernity occurs first in labour markets, which are fragmented, creating a society in which only a central but shrinking core of citizens enjoys secure, well-paid employment. A secondary labour market provides temporary work, which is often poorly paid. A section of the population, superfluous to the functioning of late twentieth century capitalism, is routinely denied the privileges of even this precarious existence. This population comprises the excluded, the marginalized, the underclass (Dixon 2001, 209-210). This is structural exclusion. In African terms,
structural exclusion may take one of two forms: instability, where civil order is maintained but relations between dominant groups are unstable, and warlordism, where hegemonic vacancy is manifested in violent civil disorder (Gore 1994, 6).

c. Citizenship

In some countries citizenship is a prerequisite, not only for political inclusion in society, but also for access to jobs and benefits. Whereas some liberal democracies have moved steadily from citizenship to personhood when allocating social rights, the recent combination of world economic downturn and the events of September 11th 2001 have resulted in anti-immigrant sentiment and new legislation to curb access to social investments such as job training and access to the labour market (Fix and Laglagaron 2002).

The citizenship debates are pertinent to Africa, not only because of the work of Mahmood Mamdani (1994) and others (viz. Ekeh 1975; Lonsdale 1986) on the way entitlements are attached to affiliation or social identity (Gore 1994), but also because of the breakdown of state control in so-called failed or collapsed states (like Somalia), in which (technically) no one holds citizenship.

d. Social exclusion’s corollary: social integration.

On what terms are the exclus to be integrated? All three paradigms (solidarity, individual responsibility and hierarchical power) lend themselves to the neoliberal model of privatisation, although the French paradigm implies the nation’s responsibility, presumably not just the government’s responsibility but also that of all members of society. All three paradigms lead to dependence on private, charitable provision of services. World Bank publications have the clearest articulation of the neoliberal paradigm. According to Campbell (2000), the World Bank has not begun to incorporate economic and social rights as understood in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Social equity, in the Bank’s vocabulary, is secondary and subordinate to the promotion of the private sector. The State’s first task is to create the appropriate institutional foundations necessary for the proper functioning of market forces. The redistributational role of the State is conditional on its ability to fulfil its basic economic functions, which are to establish the foundations of lawfulness, maintain economic stability, invest in social services and infrastructure (i.e., the rudiments of public health, universal primary education and a minimal social safety net). Even that minimal provision is tempered by the claim that ‘markets can provide a variety of private goods and services that in many countries have somehow wandered into the domain of public provision, such as higher education, curative health services, and pensions and other forms of insurance.’ (World Bank 1997, 59-60) What is the Bank’s advice? ‘Countries with weak public institutions should assign high priority to finding ways to use markets and involve private firms and other nongovernmental providers in service delivery.’ (World Bank 1997, 60) It seems to me, not just that the World Bank is using notions of equity and poverty reduction to legitimise the neoliberal agenda, but that the World Bank is defining equity and poverty reduction in such a way as to promote and advance the neoliberal economic agenda.

e. Uses of the term social exclusion
If policymakers were articulating concepts of social exclusion in order to ensure programmes of social inclusion, there would be little debate. But it appears that social exclusion, as interpreted by neoliberals, is meant to reinforce political exclusion. The substitution of charities for State services subverts the democratic process by bypassing planning mechanisms and thereby disempowering people in regimes that use an electoral process to determine national priorities (even if that process is only nominal). When the private sector sets the agenda, it is neither national nor nation-wide but local and fragmented; the process undermines the authority of the State and substitutes the profit motive for intrinsic social values.

The struggle for redistribution is a political struggle because privatisation, in the guise of public/private partnerships and State funding of charities, really takes power out of the hands of the people and gives it to unelected boards of corporations and philanthropies that are not accountable to anyone and certainly not answerable to an electorate. More than resources are being redistributed when privatisation occurs, power is also being concentrated at the top. Charities that create programmes for the exclus do not bring them into the democratic arena where they can participate in debates over national priorities and vote their preferences, but into an autocratic arena where philanthropists decide on which programmes they wish to fund, i.e. what is good for them (‘them’ being deliberately ambiguous, referring either to philanthropists or to the target population). Yet political inclusion is central to—even a prerequisite for—social inclusion (Beall, Crankshaw and Parnell 2002).

US policymakers are not articulating concepts of social exclusion in order to reorient policy to reintegrate the excluded; evidence for this assertion comes from current budgets. The extensive defunding of State services and the funding of ‘faith-based’ programmes in the private sector are consistent with US insistence on the withdrawal of the State from service provision. In the current philosophy in Washington, it is clear that the Bush administration desires social inclusion for the macroeconomic stability it promises. In this instrumentalist perspective, equality is important to economic efficiency and effectiveness, which Washington believes is greatest in the private sector. Greater equity is not a reflection of intrinsic values at the centre of strategies.

2. Can the Concept Be Applied to Africa?

a. Exclusion in the African literature

In the African literature exclusion applies to practices and processes by which social collectivities monopolise (usually economic) opportunities. For example, powerful elites have monopolised resources through the exclusion of foreign owners in key economic sectors and by periodically expelling international migrant workers (Gore 1994, 8). Bureaucratic or business elites monopolise opportunities through the manipulation of identity. In this analysis, the elites are the beneficiaries of indigenisation. The exclus are either the whole of sub-Saharan Africa (in relation to the rest of the world), refugees, or people designated as aliens; and at another level, the exclus are women, female-headed households, pastoralists and hunter-gatherers, internally displaced persons, the rural poor, and at-risk minorities (Gore 1994, 9).
There are a number of problems in this analysis. First, if we add up these groups, beginning with women, who comprise at least 50 per cent of society, then we arrive at a large majority, once again subverting the meaning of social exclusion, which makes sense when speaking of no more than 15 per cent of the population. Second, there is no class analysis here, yet it would seem that at the heart of social exclusion is the idea that class encompasses more than income, that it involves economic, political and social relationships, concepts of ownership and property. The processes of dividing Africans into those included in societies and those excluded are poorly understood, although some newer work is making progress in analysing aspects of the marginalisation and dispossession of communities in colonial and post-colonial societies (Jeeves and Kalinga 2002).

Do the forms of exclusion practiced by elite monopolists necessarily lead to poverty? Are they identical to poverty, as Elliott (1975) claims? Are poverty and wealth two sides of the same coin as are social exclusion and social inclusion? It is worth noting that in the United States, since the passage of the Welfare Reform Act in 1996, known colloquially as workfare, the category of the working poor has been growing. These are fully integrated families, working full-time in formal sector jobs, yet living well below the poverty line.

Gore (1994, 11) concludes that his ‘synthesis of the scattered literature on access to resources and other social goods suggests that poverty is becoming more and more closely linked to exclusion.’ And, he adds, social identity and poverty are both interrelated and relatively important as determinants of exclusion.

b. Poverty or social exclusion?

African development programmes have addressed problems of poverty rather than social exclusion. The poverty alleviation strategies of the international agencies have evolved over time, beginning in the 1950s with growth through industrialisation, moving in the 1960s to agricultural intensification and trickle-down theories, to redistribution in the 1970s and a focus on meeting basic human needs. The 1980s saw the neoliberal push for structural adjustment, rollbacks of State services and the use of charities to alleviate the poverty aggravated by these policies. De Haan (1998, 16) claims that the 1990s brought a new consensus in favour of broad-based labour-intensive economic growth, human capital development and social safety nets for the vulnerable. Many critics see more continuity than change in the strategies of the last two decades.

Is social inclusion the equivalent of poverty reduction? What does the concept of social exclusion add to the debates about poverty in Africa? Current definitions of poverty in the UN system range from UNDP’s work on human development1 to the World Bank’s ranking of GNP per capita, an admittedly narrow measure. Amartya Sen’s (1999) work on capabilities and entitlements has influenced the UNDP in particular. According to Sen, the determinant of deprivation is not what people possess but what enables them to meet social conventions, participate in social activities and retain self-respect.

Feminists have joined the debate to point out the feminisation of poverty and to redefine concepts of national security to include aspects of human security, pertinent to this debate (Heyzer 2001; UNDP 1994).2 I mention this because the
literature on social inclusion, especially about Africa, is so often blind to gender differences, as if men and women experience poverty or exclusion in the same ways, a singular omission considering the focus on institutions and actors. The feminist literature on the impact of structural adjustment programmes on women is clear about women bearing the brunt of these policies (Sparr 1994).

The term used in development circles that most closely corresponds to social exclusion is vulnerability, meaning insecurity, defencelessness and exposure to risks and shocks (de Haan 1998, 15; Chambers 1989). To my mind, the emphasis on vulnerability shifts the focus from structural exclusion to subjective perception, a change that depoliticises the discussion. Social exclusion, with its focus on the societal mechanisms, institutions and actors that cause deprivation, is a step forward from neoliberal preoccupations with individual attributes of the deprived.

In the North, the socially excluded represent 10-15 per cent of the population, but in Africa, upwards of 50 per cent of the population of most countries live in absolute poverty (46 per cent in sub-Saharan Africa are without access to safe water, 52 per cent are without access to sanitation, 35 percent are not expected to survive to age 40, 41 per cent of adults are illiterate, and 31 per cent of children under the age of five are underweight [UNDP 2000, 171]). Where such a large majority is unable to meet basic needs or enjoy social rights, the social exclusion classification seems to me to be meaningless.

De Haan and Maxwell (1998, 2) believe that the concept of social exclusion does offer something new to those who work on developing countries, particularly in its focus on the institutional processes that lead to deprivation. Rodgers (1997) argues more strongly than de Haan and Maxwell for the use of social exclusion, writing that institutional processes are at the heart of the poverty debate and that the social exclusion framework helps to focus on the institutions and actors involved in the processes that cause deprivation and so has immediate implications for policy.

c. Reasons social exclusion has no application in Africa

It seems to me that the applicability of social exclusion to Africa is questionable for reasons in addition to those already stated (namely North/South gaps, the likelihood of greater political exclusion in Africa, and the continuing decreased provision of State services, leading to political instability as State authority is further undermined).

First, in the North where the exclus are a minority, the majority contributes both materially and morally to social institutions into which the exclus can potentially be integrated. In Africa, not only do the majority live in absolute poverty and deprivation, but there are few social institutions or even viable economies into which the poor can potentially be integrated. For example, social exclusion remedies are directed at the formal labour market, a solution that has little purchase in African countries with large, informal and subsistence sectors (de Haan and Maxwell 1998, 7).

Second, the equation of social exclusion with poverty is a problematic trend that focuses attention on the demand for services, away from the problems of supply. The equation of social exclusion with poverty carries the implication that
services are there for those who can afford to buy them, but in most African countries such services do not exist, especially not outside the major cities.

Third, the equation implies that poverty is an absolute barrier to a better quality of life that includes health and education services, but this is also untrue. Equitable social organisation, which includes the even distribution of assets and resources, can ensure access to basic services even in the face of national, household and individual poverty. Equitable distribution was the policy at various times for Algeria, Mozambique, Tanzania and Zimbabwe, just as it was in the UK before Margaret Thatcher took office. The effects of this approach to equality and universality of service delivery and coverage are demonstrated in data from an unpublished World Bank study presented by Khama Rogo at the IUSSP Seminar on ‘Macro-Meso-Micro Social Influences in Health: Changing Patterns of Morbidity and Mortality’ held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, 5-8 June 2002. Rogo showed that countries investing in and equitably redistributing primary health care had better health outcomes than countries that made no such investment, even twenty years after policies changed and the original system had deteriorated. Simon Szreter, commenting at the IUSSP meeting, estimated that the effect of such investment lasts for two generations, an estimate he based on studies of the National Health Service in the UK.

Fourth, following Young’s analysis of the erosion of the inclusive world, the development of labour markets has barely occurred in sub-Saharan Africa; outside of South Africa, few jobs are to be found in the primary labour market and most people work in the informal economy.

Finally, the issue in Africa is not the exclusion of a minority within countries but the global failure of the world economy to integrate African countries. Social exclusion has nothing to say about unfair trade relations, structural adjustment programmes and other conditions of aid, or the legacies of the cold war, which tore apart more than half of the nations of Africa.

d. Reasons for attempting to apply the concept in Africa

South Africa under apartheid is a classic case of social, political and economic exclusion; in this case the white minority excluded the black majority. The National Party government, in power from 1948-1994, excluded blacks physically from their land in rural areas and ejected them from urban areas (like Sophiatown and District Six). The apartheid government regularly destroyed squatter camps outside cities, and the townships and bantustans were the dumping grounds for the millions of people who were removed. The minority government excluded the black majority socially by effectively denying them health and education services, and it excluded them economically by barring them from all but the most menial and labour-intensive jobs. Although South Africa was an extreme example, similar analyses of exclusion in the colonial period might be made throughout Africa. Today, it should be noted, formerly dominant groups have become the excluded—Europeans, Asians and Lebanese.

The paradigms of social exclusion do move analyses away from a single dimension—income and poverty—to an array of factors. In most of the literature pertaining to the North, multidimensional conceptualisation emphasises process and diminished capacities for work. The problem in the transfer of the paradigm
to Africa is that these dimensions are far too few and too narrow to account for extremely complex situations that encompass drought, famine, civil strife, and environmental degradation.

At a world scale, paradigms of social exclusion may be used to draw attention to the social fallout of globalisation. It is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate on this topic.

Depending on one’s viewpoint, one might regard the use of the paradigms of social exclusion to move societies from models of the welfare state to notions of individual responsibility as positive (see section 1.e. above).

3. Specific Applicability of Social Exclusion to AIDS and Declining Life Expectancies in Africa

Barnett and Whiteside (2002) suggest that the key variable affecting the spread of AIDS is the degree of social cohesion present in the society. But how is social cohesion to be understood, as social relations within communities (e.g. traditions of mutual aid) or as solidarity at a high level involving the power structures and the government? How can an epidemic of the scope of AIDS in Africa (UNAIDS predicts that half of all youth 15 years old in the sixteen most severely affected African countries will die from the disease) be reduced to issues of social cohesion or social exclusion? The AIDS epidemic is not solely a biomedical problem or one rooted in behavioural practices, whether individual or communal. The AIDS epidemic, it seems to me, must be analysed in the context of historical configurations and political circumstances.

a. What is the relationship of poverty to AIDS?

The mechanisms of the relationship of poverty to AIDS are complex, as Paul Farmer and his colleagues have shown (Farmer 1999; Farmer, Connors and Simmons 1996; Kim, Millen, Irwin and Gershman 2000). Social exclusion does not seem to be a precipitating factor (though it may be a consequence) of AIDS. Three major policies impact the AIDS pandemic in Africa and contribute to poverty: the continuing, uncontrolled sale of arms; the low prices for African primary commodities and the volatile prices of hydrocarbons and minerals; and the failure to cancel the debt. These policies threaten African social cohesion and security, destabilise African governments, increase poverty, and deprive people of needed social services.

b. Does AIDS create exclusion?

Does the stigma of being HIV+ cause social exclusion? According to Jock Young (1999) social exclusion is a strategy that neoliberals developed in response to the vicissitudes of late modernity. To provide a central bulwark against ontological insecurity, they promoted multiculturalism as the solution to existential anxiety. Multiculturalism reduces myriad cultures to their different and separate essences. This essentialism facilitates the demonisation of others on the fringes of society—illegal immigrants, drug dealers and users, the homeless, and people with AIDS. This exclusion of people with AIDS seems to be an epiphenomenon rather than a fundamental factor in the epidemic.

Young’s analysis differs from much of the empirical research carried out on stigma in relation to HIV and AIDS, which is based on or derived from Irving Goffman’s 1963 classic, Stigma: Notes on the Management of a Spoiled
Identity. The empirical research focuses on the beliefs and attitudes of those who are perceived to stigmatise others, giving rise to interventions aimed at increasing tolerance of persons with AIDS (Parker and Aggleton 2003, 15).

In contrast to the empirical work, Parker and Aggleton (2003) theorise how individuals, communities and the state use stigma to produce and reproduce social inequality, and how this framing of stigma and discrimination encourages a focus on the political economy of stigmatisation and its links to social exclusion. They view stigmatisation as a process linked to competition for power and the legitimisation of social hierarchy and inequality, highlighting what they believe is often at stake in challenging HIV and AIDS-related stigmatisation and discrimination. Parker and Aggleton (2003, 19) agree with Young about the relation of new forms of social exclusion to globalisation, and they note that ‘economic restructuring and global transformation have almost everywhere reinforced pre-existing inequalities and exclusions, such as racism, ethnic discrimination, and religious conflict.’ There appears to be no threshold for stigma. Stigmatisation persists even when prevalence and death rates reach epidemic levels.

4. Preliminary Conclusions

This paper concludes with a set of questions. Who are the socially excluded in Africa? Women? Farm workers? People with AIDS? Orphans? What is the meaning of these identities and why should they be preferred to more global analyses of social class? Is AIDS making the analysis of social exclusion a self-fulfilling prophecy? Are the economic effects of AIDS so dramatic that they are reducing affected families, especially orphaned children, to destitution, street life, prostitution and extreme forms of exploitation (especially child labour)?

Destitution, street life, prostitution and extreme forms of exploitation indeed evoke the classic description of the *exclus*. But note that traditionally in many parts of Africa, the extended family would normally absorb orphans, and it is only the new poverty (and the economic, social and political dislocation caused by wars for independence, civil strife, structural adjustment programmes and debt) that has kept families from taking the children in.

The sources or causes of discrimination in Africa have deep roots in the legacy of colonial land law, the unresolved tensions between statutory and customary law (customary law often discriminates against women; statutory law discriminates against noncitizens); and the current economic, social and political dislocation. Finally, is AIDS the cause of economic, social and political dislocation in Africa or is economic, social and political dislocation the cause of the AIDS epidemic?

References

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1 The HDI measures longevity, education and standard of living. The GDI measures gender disparities in basic human capabilities, and the HPI reflects the percentage of people who suffer from deprivation relating to survival, knowledge and a decent standard of living. All of the measures focus on national averages, not on specific groups, and on outcomes rather than on the actors and processes that cause them (de Haan 1998, 14).

2 Human security means safety from chronic threats like hunger, disease and repression; it includes job security, income security, environmental security and security from crime. It also means protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life (UNDP 1994, 23).

3 Thus, the United States Congress extended programmes of affirmative action (originally conceived as a gesture of reparation to the descendants of slaves) to other nonwhite groups.