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Thematic Principles Framing WUN Critical Global Poverty Studies Project:

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Initial meetings of the CGPS in Seattle (2006) and Bergen (2007) generated the following thematic principles. These taken together, frame our approach to understanding and acting on poverty in a global frame. These will continue to be refined as the group evolves.

- We begin from the proposition that poverty occurs in all parts of the globe (both Majority and Minority Worlds). We raise research questions about the global dimensions of poverty processes. We take poverty to be relational, produced at once through social relations, and also understood in particular places in relation to global processes, global institutional and regulatory systems, wealth and privilege and context-specific histories, geographies and ecologies. We build a networked ontology for critical poverty studies that explodes boundaries between North and South. We argue that the ways in which poverty is pictured and addressed in different places need to be seen as connected: for example, how the poor are depicted in the Majority world (Global South) helps us understand constructions of the poor and poverty policy in the Minority world (West). We also consider the ecological connections between human beings and the places they inhabit as key to understanding poverty.
- We address the contradictions of purely market-based approaches to poverty reduction. This includes critiques of the extension of market relations into almost everything, and the implications of neo-liberal roll backs in institutional involvements in poverty reduction (at various scales with different profiles in different places). We work from the insight that market approaches to poverty reduction are deeply political (despite their apolitical claims) in how 'the poor' are categorized, who is counted as deserving/undeserving, in their exclusion of care activities and relations and how the state is reframed as an actor in policy reduction. We argue for a framing of poverty that avoids naturalizing the existing economic order as inevitable, and poverty as merely a problem of redistribution within existing economic and institutional frameworks. Instead, we argue for research on the ways in which the existing distribution of wealth and power results from existing regimes of rules and institutions. We argue that the current global economic and institutional order is not inevitable and instead of research/policy emphasizing redistribution within existing constraints, we argue for research on the ways in which reworking these regimes can result in more just and equitable social and economic arrangements.
- We analyze the cultural politics of poverty in addition to political-economic processes. We pose questions about how cultural productions and discursive formations come to frame people and places as 'poor'? We investigate how these cultural productions work to reproduce poverty through processes of exclusion, exception and arguments for the remaking of people and places? We highlight the importance of spatial

dynamics – the construction of geographical imaginaries and of spaces in which only certain things are possible into existing work. We also consider the co-production of poverty, attending to how people accommodate poverty, seeking to maintain dignity and civility rather than resisting either representations or material productions of poverty/inequality. We also consider how people interpret and challenge both the category of poverty and processes producing impoverishment. We consider how people ‘on the ground’ co-produce, contest, negotiate these poverty processes and discursive formations. We attend to their analyses of poverty processes and learn through their organized responses in the everyday, including an understanding of how they re-frame and reinvent socio-economic relations.

- We approach global poverty from an ethical perspective and as a question of justice -- not of charity. Various aspects are important to our work:

- A relational approach to global justice including insights from development ethics and global justice

- Insights from critical care ethics and arguments about global social justice and social inclusion including consideration of special attachments and obligations

- Research engaging fully with participants from other places who may define the issues quite differently

- Research that raises moral awareness for global poverty and that is policy and action oriented.

- Our CGPS group engages with a range of methodologies. We employ critical (including global) ethnography, qualitative field work and a range of quantitative analyses. We engage mixed methods and are committed to comparative research that considers the twinned dimensions of space and time. We bring these approaches into conversation both to expand the theoretical range of poverty analysis and to expand the range of evidence that enters into policy practice/action. We are committed to producing research results for a variety of audiences and in a variety of forms. As the composition of our group indicates, we are committed to an inter-disciplinary framing of poverty research.

In summary, we share a common conceptual orientation: a social constructionist political-economy approach to understanding poverty. Our CGPS group views poverty as produced through political, economic, and cultural mechanisms, that are connected and recurrent across space and also (co)produced through human actions and places. We argue for the simultaneity of the operation of material processes and social constructions of poverty. We have a central concern with social and global justice and we view the poor as creative agents with capacity to define their actions and futures. Our work has clear ethical dimensions that are concerned with global and social justice. We are committed to engaging multiple audiences including policy actors, academics, social movements, non-governmental organizations, and the public broadly. We explicitly separate policy and action, arguing that there are multiple forms of action and social change, emanating from multiple sites and politics.