

1 Introducing Poverty

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STARTING POINTS

In 2007, the University of California, Berkeley, undertook an unusual endeavor: it launched a new undergraduate minor in Global Poverty and Practice. Almost immediately, the program started to grow rapidly, drawing students from a wide range of majors and featuring classes with enrollments big enough to fill the campus's largest classrooms. The expansive scope of the program was perhaps most evident in its curriculum, which reached beyond the traditional social sciences, integrating material from diverse disciplines such as engineering, public health, and business. Despite its academic success, the Global Poverty and Practice Minor marked a departure from the normal format of the university's undergraduate curriculum. From the start, it aligned itself with students who were interested in troubling the divide between theory and practice, refusing to relegate the work they did in organizations and communities to the second-class status of extra-curricular activity. Instead, the program was inspired by the energy of a generation of students passionate about poverty action and intent on transforming an unequal world. The Global Poverty and Practice Minor was also unusual because, while it was housed

in a powerful and prestigious institution, it did not promote the conceits of a stereotypical global university. Students in the program were not meant to be vanguards of social change; they were not billed as global leaders; they were not given the charge to solve urgent human problems. Instead, they were invited to work modestly, reflexively, and persistently within both marginalized communities and communities of inquiry.

The starting point for *Encountering Poverty* is the collective labor that we—and many others who are not a formal part of this publication—put into creating and guiding this program. In the book, we share the analytical frameworks and methodological principles that underpin the Global Poverty and Practice Minor, not because they constitute a blueprint for an ideal curriculum or a handbook for poverty action but rather because they are a starting point for a new field of inquiry: critical poverty studies. Our premise is that the conceptual and pedagogical dilemmas faced by the program illuminate the debates and struggles currently being waged in the broad ambit of poverty knowledge and poverty action. Take the case of the following three dilemmas that recur throughout this book.

- Poverty has become a dominant analytic for understanding social difference. Yet this analytic tends to rely on categories such as “poor others” or “global poor” that obscure the histories and social relations of impoverishment. In this way, poverty experts and poverty actors come to believe that they can help poor others or eradicate global poverty, but rarely do they acknowledge how they are a part of the systems and processes that produce and reproduce poverty—that poverty is not inevitable but actively constructed. This also means that they are comfortable relying on those very systems and processes, with just a bit of repurposing, to mitigate poverty. Philanthrocapitalism and ethical consumerism are only two of many possible examples of poverty action that relies on the same forms of wealth and types of global markets that produce impoverishment. This topic is complicated, and entire careers—academic and professional—are made through studying and acting on poverty.
- As the global university gears up to find “real-world solutions to poverty”—a tag line that, for a while, was used by the Blum Center for Developing Economies, where our program is partly housed at the University of California, Berkeley—it draws on disciplines that promise to provide the tools for such solutions or, at the very least, knowledge about the lives of the poor. But these disciplines—engineering,

economics, public health, urban planning, architecture, anthropology, education—have a long history of failed interventions in the problem of poverty. In some cases, they are even implicated in producing and deepening poverty, due to roots that stretch back to colonial administration and rule. Yet, somehow, there is faith that this moment of poverty knowledge and poverty action will be different.

- Activated in the context of a digitally interconnected world, the problem of poverty is of global scope and concern. Across great distances, it makes visible the plight of the poor, motivating self-styled global citizens to take action. But these global citizens, poised to act, are usually located in the global North. From their dispersed efforts to the “real-world solutions” launched by global universities, today’s poverty action seeks to spread ideas and interventions from the West to the Rest. Writing of an earlier moment in development, anthropologist Arturo Escobar describes this process as an “enframing” of the non-Western world through tropes of “poverty and backwardness” (1995, 7). Escobar’s *Encountering Development* is an important starting point for this book. But at least three vectors clash and collide with the efforts to solve Third World problems with First World benevolence and big ideas. The first is the renewal and reinvention of development in and by countries of the global South. The second is the globally interconnected poor people’s movements that cut across North and South. The third is the persistence of poverty, especially racialized poverty, in the prosperous countries of the global North. If this racialized poverty is seen not as an anomaly but as a necessary supplement to wealth, then the dilemma of poverty action is even more daunting.

Critical poverty studies, as we have conceptualized it, takes the (seemingly solvable) problem of poverty as its starting point. But it uses the dilemmas generated by this proposition, such as those outlined above, to stage a conceptual and pedagogical shift. In particular, it foregrounds social relations of impoverishment, a historical understanding of development, and a reflexive approach to action. While it takes these dilemmas seriously, however, critical poverty studies is not paralyzed by them but rather views them as occasions for creating frames of thinking and acting in a highly unequal world.

This, we believe, is the role of critique in relation to the problem of poverty and the aspirations of poverty action. The practice of critique requires that we subject everything, including our desire to do good and our urge to act, to unrelenting scrutiny. Nothing is sacred. None of us can

claim innocence. None of us can hide behind good intentions. Yet critique is also always the search for alternatives, an impulse akin to the motto, “another world is possible,” which has attended so many of the anticorporate globalization movements. Put another way, this book is premised on the argument that it is through the patient work of critical theory that we can sustain thoughtful and meaningful social change. However, to do so requires interrupting dominant frames of global poverty that present poverty as a problem to be solved through immediate action. Indeed, this is the mandate of the book series in which this book appears, *Poverty, Interrupted*. We borrow the idea of interruption from two texts of critical theory: Nancy Fraser’s *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the “Postsocialist” Condition* and Vinay Gidwani’s *Capital, Interrupted: Agrarian Development and the Politics of Work in India*. Gidwani (2008, 218) interrupts conventional accounts of capitalism by devoting attention to “regions of life,” such as “culture” and “nature,” that are not fully assimilated into capital’s restless movement. He thus provides us with a critical understanding of capitalism that allows us to imagine ideas and practices “beyond capital’s reach.” Fraser (2007, 3) writes that amid “resurgent economic liberalism,” when “egalitarian commitments appear to recede, a globalizing wall-to-wall capitalism is increasingly marketizing social relations, eroding social protections, and worsening the life-chances of billions.” But it is from this location that she insists upon conceiving “provisional alternatives to the present order that could supply a basis for progressive politics” (Fraser 2007, 4).

CONTACT ZONES

We undertake the work of critical poverty studies in this book by examining three encounters with poverty. First, in seeking to understand the global context of the discovery and visibility of poverty, we focus on how college students and young professionals—who are part of a generation dubbed “millennials,” a term especially common in the global North—encounter and seek to help “poor others.” They are the foot soldiers in the proliferating global campaigns to end poverty; they are the ubiquitous presence in the global conscience that is marshaled to attend to each new

global crisis, each new human disaster. We argue that new scripts for global citizenship and personhood are being negotiated at the site of such encounters. We also argue that this newly articulated and young global citizenry must be seen as a new type of poverty expert, one that is producing distinctive forms of poverty knowledge in the crucible of volunteerism, charity, aid advocacy, and humanitarian engagement.

Second, we foreground the encounter between systems of knowledge and the problem of poverty. Accompanying the prominence of global poverty are new types of intervention and new methodologies of assessment and evaluation. No longer consigned to the realm of social work or sociological investigation, poverty is being refashioned in engineering labs and through microeconomic field experiments. What is of interest to us in this book is that the study of global poverty entails a breadth of disciplines and professions that far exceeds the traditional work of development. A new knowledge landscape is in the making. Business schools are embarking on global social venture competitions, fields such as “poor economics” and “development engineering” have been formulated, the field of “public health” has been recalibrated as “global health,” and centers and programs concerned with information and communication technologies for development have been launched. On the one hand, the question of poverty is reshaping powerful disciplines and professions, from economics to engineering. On the other hand, the conceptualization of poverty is being profoundly determined by the involvement of such disciplines and their worldviews.

In the encounter between knowledge and poverty, we highlight another plot line, one that challenges the reframing of poverty in the dominant languages of science and economics. The poverty concept itself, we note, is today most robustly claimed by governments, banks, development practitioners, development economists, and the founders and employees of international organizations. It delineates a community upon which to act, and it appears to justify such action. The alternative plot line we highlight is the importance of exploring—as an anthropologist might—how the poverty framework is a construct, one that is not always aligned with the social experiences of the people who are deemed poor but is always productive, generating its truth claims, its institutions, and its accompanying sets of practices. Critical poverty studies thus foregrounds both the

multiple frameworks that people deemed poor employ themselves in acting and making sense of their lives and the work that the poverty concept does in the world.

Third, we situate such encounters with poverty in the historical context of development, which we understand to be both an ideology and project of human progress achieved through economic growth. Our title draws inspiration from Escobar's landmark 1995 book, *Encountering Development: The Making and Unmaking of the Third World*, in which he presents the idea and practice of development as a Western project imposed on the societies of Asia, Africa, and Latin America during the post-World War II period. These societies were diagnosed as poor and backward, and development sought to spread "indubitable models" of prosperity and modernity from the West to the Rest (Escobar 1995, vii). The contemporary encounter with poverty, we argue, emerges from this history of development, which is itself in a new and confounding phase with the emergence of developing nations in the global South and of the globally interconnected poor people's movements. To encounter poverty today, we contend, we must reckon with this history as well as with these emergent forces. Such a reckoning is vitally important for critical poverty studies.

For us, each of these three encounters with poverty is a terrain of contestation, sometimes with the potential to imagine and create alternatives. None is fixed in its enlistment. None is rigid in its meaning. Following geographers Victoria Lawson and Sarah Elwood (2014, 211), we seek to uncover and foreground the critical junctures at which encounters with poverty become "contact zones," "boundary-breaking, transformative moments" that "lead to new negotiations of identity, privilege, political responsibility and alliance." Thus, as we discuss poverty action, we are keenly aware that eager global citizens from the North travel to the South seeking to solve the problem of poverty, thereby rehearsing an old coloniality of power in a newly configured global order. Yet we are also attentive to how such action stirs up self-doubt and self-critique, which can lead college students to reject "voluntourism" and enlist them in struggles against the forms of neoliberalization that are deepening poverty as well as enmeshing them in debt. Similarly, we explore how a powerful discipline such as economics, long entangled with the project of development, seeks

to rationalize poverty expertise through models and metrics. Economics wields considerable influence because of its use of models, which can provide an abstract depiction of human behavior. But the encounter between the discipline of economics and the problem of poverty stirs up questions that cannot be fully addressed by these models and metrics. As evident in welfare economics (for example, the work of Amartya Sen), or in the new economics of inequality (for example, the work of Thomas Piketty), such questions remind us that economics has its origins in moral philosophy. Political economy, which now seems to be a separate discipline, was in fact the domain of economics, such that a discussion of the allocation of resources was also a discussion of the power-laden distribution of resources. Moral philosophy has come to be obscured in contemporary economics, but the problem of poverty might just force a return to these original questions.

Once again, this is the important work of critique. We critically examine the relationship between our home disciplines—in economics, anthropology, education, and urban planning—and the problem of poverty. Take, for example, the field of education, which conceives of itself as being uniquely positioned to tackle poverty. The discipline views poverty as a structural condition that impacts students' lives, constrains their learning, and shapes their educational outcomes. In this conceptualization, the school is a site of possibility, the location within which lives can be improved. Whether schooling is in fact effective at lifting individuals “out” of impoverished conditions is not the question—there is evidence that this has happened and does happen. However, a vast body of scholarship also points to the role schools play in the social reproduction of inequality and to the history of schooling as tied to policing and the maintenance of social class, and there is clear empirical evidence of schools acting as a sorting mechanism, preparing the rich and the poor to take on their respective roles in the economic life of society. How can this be reconciled with the idea that the right combination of resources, policy priorities, and effective techniques will be enough to “lift” individuals out of poverty and that the cumulative effect of this will alter the economic landscape?

When our Global Poverty and Practice students are confronted with this contradiction, they are forced to contend not just with the “conditions” of injustice and inequality in schooling but also with the roots of

those conditions. It is a moment in which their understanding of education shifts from believing in the power of an institution whose potential has not yet been realized because of structural constraints to understanding that these constraints are engineered, crafted, and designed in accordance with the broader social order. We ask them if they are familiar with the language around “failing schools,” and there is always a chorus of agreement; they see information about this on the news, read about it in articles, and hear about it in their education classes. Perhaps more significantly, it resonates with what they have seen in their own lives—young people with enormous potential who fall through the cracks. They have been taught to approach this conundrum with the belief that the educational system is failing and that it is doing so because there are not enough resources provided to schools. At this point, we pose our students a different set of questions: What if we consider the opposite? What if we were to consider the possibility that the education system is not failing but rather is working exactly the way it was intended to? What if we entertain the idea that the difference between schools in wealthy communities and schools in poor communities and the differential outcomes for wealthy students and poor students is by design? It is a moment of reckoning because it not only shakes the foundation of a system they believe in but also forces them to reconsider their own location within it, calling out the structures of meritocracy, credentialism, and success. It is from within this moment of profound discomfort that we insist on challenging systems of education and their designed reproduction of inequality.

COLLECTIVE LABOR, PLURAL AUDIENCES

Who we are and where we come from is an important part of how we, the four authors of this book, have conceptualized our approach to critical poverty studies and how we teach and share our organizing frameworks for it. We are a Ghanaian political economist of development, an Indian-born anthropologist of the Indian public and of global volunteerism, a critical urban studies scholar who was born in India and later became an American, and a Chicana scholar of political activism and undocumented migrant students. We come from diverse fields, draw on divergent

disciplinary and methodological training, and make our intellectual home in different spaces in the academy. However, our work is bound by shared theoretical commitments and genealogies of thought. Specifically, our version of critical poverty studies is rooted in an understanding of the development of capitalism as a global economic system. Using the economy as a focal point of analysis does not presuppose a reductionist approach that renders social struggle, civil society, or resistance to a subjugated status. Instead, we situate the production and protection of global capitalism as an ongoing process, one that is continually being contested and remade. This articulation forges a direct link not only to the colonial histories and anticolonial struggles of our collective recent past but also to the civil rights movement and the ongoing struggles for economic and social justice led by grassroots groups in the United States and across the globe. Embedded in this analytical trajectory, then, is a theory of change that contests the idea that justice can be legislated through the courts or won at the ballot box, that poverty can be alleviated once we discover the right technological fix or the correct social intervention, and that inequality can be mitigated by the integration of the poor into the global marketplace through selling their labor power, selling their goods, or becoming indebted.

Above all, we come to this book as teachers. Our students are coming of age politically in a moment that is marked by a coalescence around neoliberal sensibilities and market fundamentalism that portrays their massive student debt as the logical and commonsensical price of being educated, that situates the market as uniquely capable of fixing the problem of poverty, and that is wary of aid, welfare, and “handouts” (unless the recipients are the capitalist elite). This moment, however, is also marked by the fundamental failure of the capitalist state to protect its most marginalized subjects. In North America, it is the moment of Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and Freddie Gray. It is the moment of massive fee hikes at public universities across the country, including at the University of California, Berkeley, the very institution at which this project was born. It is the moment of the disappeared students of Ayotzinapa in Mexico. Yet it is also a moment marked by mass social unrest and grassroots activism that is fighting back against these attacks and demanding that the state be held accountable. It is within such contradictions that we

find our students negotiating power and privilege. These students represent the possibility of an alternative future, but a critical piece of that potential lies in making a clear, unequivocal connection to the genealogies of thought that are outlined here. The pull to eliminate poverty is not only insufficient but also misguided unless the attempts to do so are rooted in analysis that acknowledges that poverty is an integral part of the growth of capitalism, that it is mapped onto colonial histories, and that it is connected to global social movements.

This book is our effort to share collective and ongoing poverty studies scholarship with plural audiences: college students, high school and university teachers, scholars of development, development professionals, social justice advocates, and many more. To students, we offer a book that takes seriously their aspirations to create a better and more just world but that also insists that existing frameworks cannot be simply repurposed to accomplish such goals. In the same way that one cannot successfully hammer a round peg into a square hole, trying to make old frameworks act in new ways will not yield the progress we strive for. Critical poverty studies, we hope, will allow students to learn about—and act on—the histories, institutional arrangements, and structural conditions that have created poverty. However, this book is not a workbook, nor is it a field manual or a blueprint. It provides a methodology and pedagogy for critical thinking and transformative action, one where doubt and contradiction rather than certainty are seen to be generative of social change. The analytical starting point for this inquiry centers the (dis)juncture between theory and action rather than treating it as peripheral; a praxis-based pedagogy grounded in an analysis of wealth and inequality reminds us that building a field of inquiry also relies on a kind of public intellectualism which prioritizes teaching and learning. Through the vector of praxis, we push back against both anti-intellectualism and obscure theorizing.

Our use of the term “student” includes those who are no longer enrolled at colleges and universities. This takes into account all of the young people who are finding their way in the field of poverty studies—as teachers, non-profit workers, community organizers, advocates, and practitioners—who no longer have student IDs but who still desire to maintain an engagement with learning. They tell us that they want to bring theory to bear on their hard work on the ground and that they are hungry for a way to

inhabit and transform an unequal world. This book is an invitation to them as well.

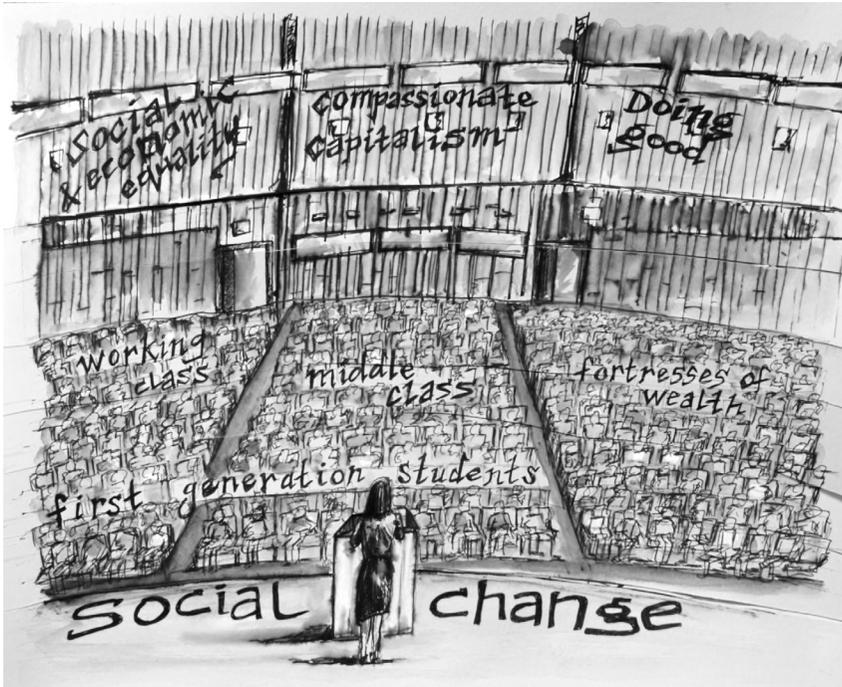
Our book also speaks directly to teachers and scholars because we engage a crucial question facing higher education today: How can curricula remain relevant to society and prepare students to grapple with the world's problems? Educators will find that *Encountering Poverty* does more than simply provide the kind of historical background, conceptual understandings, and description of skills required to conceptualize poverty and inequality in interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary ways. In this book, as we have done in our Global Poverty and Practice curriculum, we consider how public health might benefit from sociology, how anthropology raises useful questions for public policy, and how the professional schools invite historians and social critics of all kinds to apply themselves to the problems of the day. It is as important for a public health educator to question the modern forms of governance and management of society that are endemic in poverty reduction strategies as it is for anthropologists to ask how their forms and subjects of study might be usefully applied to an existing poverty intervention or state welfare program. Thus the questions that we raise are ones that can and should be raised in any discipline and across many disciplines. Our students are hungry for smart and conscientious ways to live and be in the world. To this end, we bring to our pages the work of scholars who are applying their critiques to real life, writing of “real utopias,” as sociologist Erik Olin Wright (2010) describes them, of experiments in city planning, of livelihood generation, and of cooperative living. Telling stories of such experiments is vitally important as a counternarrative—counterpropaganda, we might say—to the “market fundamentalism,” to use Joseph Stiglitz’s (2002, 36) provocative phrase, of our times.

Finally, we hope that this book will also be of interest to policymakers and development professionals. As we recognize the aspirations of young global citizens, we distinguish the personal and professional aspirations of those enlisted in the institutionalized work of making and implementing policy. We are certain that they face considerable uncertainty, doubt, contradiction, and ambivalence in their lines of work, that they struggle with the sorts of puzzles and dilemmas that we outline throughout this book, and that they constantly negotiate the boundaries of privilege and social class as

they act on poverty. Above all, they know that expertise is a political, not just technical, process, one in which the safety net of abstract models and metrics does not easily hold. This book makes explicit the politics of knowledge that inevitably accompanies the practice of development. It is not just that policymakers need more answers to their questions or that they need better ways of answering their questions but that, most of all, they urgently need a unified way to ask the right questions and to be comfortable with the discomfort those questions provoke. Although policymakers are classically and deservedly trained to minimize policy uncertainty, they need not look very far to understand why our proposal is critically important. The global poor face crucial dilemmas daily—such as how they will survive and live to see another day—and on some level, their questioning never truly ends. Certainty is thus a luxury that policymakers will have to sacrifice. A critical step to reconciling the mindsets of the global poor and policymakers, then, is reimagining and reconstructing economic thinking—the bread and butter of most policymakers—as dilemma-driven narratives that empower authoritative policy specialists to discover strengths in their own limits. Embracing dilemmas as a way of thinking and acting against poverty is a complementary yet distinctive way to bring experts, organizations, and institutions closer to the people they seek to serve.

A MAP OF THE BOOK

Encountering Poverty provides the conceptual and pedagogical frameworks for a field of inquiry that we are calling critical poverty studies. In doing so, what we have most drawn upon is the Global Poverty and Practice Minor at the University of California, Berkeley. Our examples are drawn as much from our experiences in creating the curriculum and teaching the classes for this program as they are from our research and scholarship. It is possible to think about these examples as an ethnographic account of teaching. We hope that this ethnographic voice provides a fine texture to our analysis. However, we also recognize that, like all ethnographic narratives, ours is fraught with problems of representation. Thus, in discussing specific interactions with our students, we not only disguise various markers of identification but also create composites



so that an individual student would not recognize herself or himself in the story. We have also borrowed from each other's experiences in a writing process that has been iterative and shared. With this in mind, we often use "we." Sometimes, when an experience only pertains to one of us or when the details are uniquely biographical, we speak in the first person. By using this collective voice, we hope to have conveyed a sense of the collaborative labor that we have valued so much while retaining the distinctive disciplines and worldviews we each bring to this shared work.

The book's second chapter, written by Ananya Roy, elaborates on the various meanings of "encountering poverty" that anchor this book. She focuses on how, in an age of digitally visible poverty, college students and young development and advocacy professionals create a sense of self through encounters with poverty, both spatially distant poverty and spatially proximate poverty. It is often in and through such encounters that they negotiate the boundaries of social class, make sense of the global economy, articulate theories of social change, and even produce poverty

expertise. She asks whether such encounters also carry the possibility of understanding and acting upon social relations of impoverishment. Neither denigrating nor celebrating different types of poverty action, she highlights both the aspirations and the self-critiques advanced by millennials. Such encounters with poverty must be understood in their historical context, and Roy analyzes that historical context as an age of poverty, one in which global development institutions have taken up the problem of poverty as something to be solved. Drawing on the legacies of development studies, she interprets the age of poverty as a new moment in a long history of development interventions. This moment, which she describes as a rearranged world, is one in which geographies of prosperity and sovereignty are being redrawn across North and South. This global order, no longer that of Bretton Woods, necessitates a rethinking of poverty knowledge and poverty action. Roy suggests that globally interconnected social movements have already initiated such critical thinking, drawing attention to the predations of financialization and corporate globalization and imagining alternative institutional arrangements.

In the third chapter, “Governing Poverty,” Roy returns to discourses of development and their framing of the problem of global poverty. Focusing on the iconic debate between economists Jeffrey Sachs and William Easterly about the causes of and remedies for poverty, she examines how college students respond to the recurring frame of market failure versus state failure. But both Sachs and Easterly, she argues, pin their hopes on the ineluctable sweep of economic growth and democratic transformation. In doing so, they elide what she calls the “puzzles of poverty”—the relationship between capitalism and poverty and between colonialism and (under)development. Stepping outside the frames of this debate, she insists, is vitally important if we are to understand how poverty is produced and how and why it persists in a world of prosperity. For this, she turns to three problem spaces of poverty actions, each of which amplify the challenges of thinking wholly within economic liberalism and its assumptions of opportunity and equality: microfinance, post-disaster rebuilding, and urban social movements. In each of these problem spaces she highlights ways of thinking and acting that challenge social relations of impoverishment and that view poverty as more than merely the lack of economic and technological resources.

The master painter and physician of market society, of course, is the discipline of economics, and that is what Kweku Opoku-Agyemang discusses in the fourth chapter, “Modeling Poverty.” Economics, he argues, is on a quest for answers about how to solve global poverty. In particular, economists seek out solutions that are definitive, verifiable, and certain. In turn, the effectiveness of policy makers and development professionals depends heavily on these aspirations. Perhaps because of this single-mindedness, economics has repeatedly turned to the science of evaluation to tackle questions of global poverty. Given its influence, this is not an approach or a language that invites one to tarry with it, and yet this is just what Opoku-Agyemang does in his portrayal of economics as a series of dilemma tales. The format of dilemma tales, he suggests, is used in Ghana and other African countries to present children with logical and philosophical questions. The goal of these tales is not to pinpoint a correct answer. Rather, their aim is to replace the search for answers or action blueprints with the refinement of human debate about a reality that can never be perfectly modeled but at best only approximated with useful insight. So it is and should be with economics as well, Opoku-Agyemang suggests. Writing as a development economist, he notes that it is necessary to admit that there are more questions than answers about global poverty. For example, what *is* global poverty? He argues that economists know less about how to engage this question than they would like to admit. This is partly because global poverty as a lived experience is so much more than the lack of economic and social resources. It is very hard to succinctly state what “being poor” is, what it means and does to a human being, without sacrificing much of the meaning of the term. This uncertainty though, he argues, is something all economists must become more comfortable with. Opoku-Agyemang thus promotes a critical, humanist, storytelling approach, fully cognizant that this might cost the sense of certainty that science has comforted economists with for so long. To understand global poverty from an economic standpoint, he contends that a dilemma-based approach has much to offer policy makers, development professionals, and even economists.

While the first few chapters describe and diagnose key and dominant approaches to understanding today’s poverty and inequality, the final two chapters reach for alternatives. In chapter 5, “Fixing Poverty,” Clare

Talwalker notes that the battle to end poverty often seems to be stuck in a rut. Capitalism produces wealth but also inequality. The modern nation-state puts out a partial safety net for some, thereby supporting capitalist growth, notwithstanding its accompanying inequalities. Therefore, much of where capital goes and what capital does on the global stage is out of its control. In this chapter, Talwalker uses the term “utilitarian” to refer to the range of current attempts to grapple with poverty and inequality, all of which assume and are contained by the particular interplay of the market and the nation-state in liberal societies, an interplay to which there is widely assumed to be no alternative. But simply fiddling around with the inevitable interplay of market and state for any society is stifling, unsatisfying, and frustrating and demands precisely a search for alternatives. As its particular contribution to critical poverty studies, Talwalker’s chapter marks this longing for an alternative—a longing that we know is out there today in so many places around the world and, we think, also in the hearts and minds of the readers of this book. It is an inchoate longing—perhaps deliberately so. Noting, as philosopher Charles Taylor did, that it was the Romantics that answered back to nineteenth century utilitarianism, “Fixing Poverty” is partly a call to consider the Romantic critique again to see what solutions it might be able to offer for our current concerns with poverty and inequality. Can it offer anything at all? Yet, informed by the various post-Marxist writings of Erik Olin Wright and J.K. Gibson-Graham, the chapter is also a celebration of ongoing attempts to challenge the liberal tradition, pressing up against its limits through documenting and analyzing different existing experiments by people and communities around the world who are reaching for alternative economic forms and political arrangements.

In the sixth and final chapter, “Teaching Poverty,” Genevieve Negrón-Gonzales circles back to the beginning of our project with an analysis of pedagogy, since it was the navigation of the complexities of teaching a new generation of poverty actors that provided the impetus for this book. Thinking through the Global Poverty and Practice Minor as a pedagogical example foregrounds our efforts to forge a relationship between theory and action, specifically through a praxis-based pedagogy grounded in an analysis of wealth and inequality. This praxis-based pedagogy, which is concerned with the production of inequality and not just with the “alleviation”

of poverty, embeds critical poverty studies in the legacy of anticolonial struggles, the civil rights movement, and struggles for racial justice in marginalized communities. It is our assertion that academic work must remain connected to grassroots struggles to end inequality and that the cultivation of poverty actors armed with critical-thinking skills is a vital part of that process. In the chapter, Negrón-Gonzales resists the idea that the aim of such inquiry or cultivation is the production of a blueprint or a plan. Instead, drawing on the pedagogical relationship with our students and an acknowledgement of the neoliberal context within which they are both configured and also configuring, she invites an engagement with ambiguity, uncertainty, and complexity. In particular, she situates praxis-based pedagogy amid the tangled dialectics of wealth, inequality, poverty, capital, and power. She asks: How can we use these imperfect spaces as locations to wage the ongoing struggle against injustice? She notes that this also means that we must train our focus on the very institution from within which we launch such questions. How do we contend with the neoliberalization of higher education, not as inevitable in a moment marked by fiscal austerity and the death of the “public,” but as a project that was constructed and thus can be dismantled? This, for us, is a broader message—that systems of entrenched power are necessarily incomplete and often contain within them the space for resistance.

THE POLITICS OF LOCATION

Students arrive in our classrooms asking: *How do we end poverty?* We honor that desire, and we admire that aspiration. But, through our teaching, we shift their question to the following: *How is poverty produced, and why does it persist?* We then invite them to ask: *How are wealth, power, and privilege produced and reproduced?* This book outlines how we make this shift and why such shifts are the first steps toward the field of inquiry that we call critical poverty studies.

But all inquiry is located in and all questions are asked from a place on the map. We place the impulse of our students to do good and to empower the poor within the long histories of colonialism, imperialism, and development. For us, this often means turning the gaze of our students from

poor others in the global South to inequality in the global North. We do so by reminding them, and ourselves, that there is nothing inherently virtuous about fighting for a living wage in Berkeley, planting community gardens in Richmond, or providing legal aid to undocumented immigrants in Oakland—all of these places are cities that constitute the “backyard” of our global university. These practices require reflexivity; they require an awareness of our “politics of location.” Our attention to the politics of location is inspired by feminist poet Adrienne Rich’s (1984, 210–231) essay “Notes toward a Politics of Location,” in which she articulates the paradoxes of the location that is the United States: prosperity with persistent poverty, democracy with enduring racialized exclusions, an immigrant country with militarized borders. In a poem titled “Hunger,” dedicated to Audre Lorde, which we read to our students on the first day of our Global Poverty class, Adrienne Rich (2002, 134–136) writes: “I choke on the taste of bread in North America / but the taste of hunger in North America / is poisoning me. Yes I’m alive to write these words.” It is from this deeply contradictory location that we present this book.

But our location is not just North America, it is also the global university. We care to transform teaching and learning because we believe that the university is a terrain of social change, a place where ideas are debated and from where authoritative knowledge is produced and disseminated. It is not easy to create new communities of critical inquiry within the global university. Increasingly neoliberalized, often enslaved to the interests of the powerful, and inherently conservative in its approach to curriculum, the university can be a gated, even walled, space. Forms of knowledge that have chiseled away at these walls, those that have trespassed these gates, find themselves always facing the threat of retrenchment. Some of us four authors of this book have first-hand experience with the barricades and occupations that have sought to protect programs and pedagogies against closure and enclosure. Indeed, we present the Global Poverty and Practice Minor itself as an inherently fragile entity. With one foot in the Blum Center for Developing Economies, which is an enclave of private wealth amid the austerity of the public university, and the other foot in the university’s International and Area Studies Program, which faces ongoing structural adjustment by the university, our program is both an expression and a defiance of the neoliberal university.

It is from this deeply contradictory location that we educate our students to consider how they can interrupt the ways in which the university acts on the problem of poverty—how they can speak back to their disciplines and professions. A poignant example comes from one of the first students to complete the Global Poverty and Practice Minor, Emma Shaw Crane. When she graduated from the University of California, Berkeley, in 2009, Emma was the recipient of the University Medal, the highest academic honor conferred on a graduating senior. At her commencement speech in the hallowed Greek Theater of Berkeley, Emma spoke back to the university and acknowledged her politics of location:

It is a gorgeous day. I am so very proud. I am also heartbroken. I am heartbroken because, for me, attending UC Berkeley was to live devastating contradictions. The week I received this award, two young men I knew were shot and killed a few miles from this campus where, because they were Black and poor, they lived a world apart. Their names were Larry and Maurice. Their murders hardly made the news because, in this country, there is nothing uncommon about the unnecessary death of young African American men. I celebrated this honor knowing their families were drowning in grief.

Emma's unconventional commencement speech went on to highlight her practice experience for the Global Poverty and Practice Minor, which she completed at a continuation high school diploma program for students deemed at risk of not completing their education. The young men that she worked with, who were mostly Black, would never enroll in a four-year college or university. Less than a mile from Emma's classrooms at UC Berkeley, this was a world apart. Emma, an intellectual partner in the writing of this book, describes the Global Poverty and Practice Minor as permission to speak about that apartness. We hope that this book will similarly grant permission to see and name the worlds apart through which global poverty is constituted, lived, and regulated. We also hope that the book will serve as permission to transform the university and similar knowledge-producing institutions, along with their annals of poverty expertise and formats of poverty action.

