

Causal Attributions for Poverty among Low Income Communities of Badia, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT A preponderance of poverty attribution studies have been on middle class adults from developed countries. Where cross cultural studies were extended to developing countries, samples have been of university students or those not experiencing poverty directly. Possibilities of extending generalizations across cultures have therefore been difficult. A modified causes of poverty index was administered on a sample (n=383) from Badia, a low income community in Lagos, Nigeria. The results of the study showed that poverty attribution was understandable in terms of respondents' Social and Economic Status (SES). However, while the results confirmed earlier findings that disadvantaged persons preponderantly adopted external, structural attributions for poverty, it was however shown, unlike in previous findings, that the disadvantaged are likely to combine fatalistic and structural attributions in compromise explanations. These results therefore indicate that the neglect of fatalistic explanations in many previous studies may be unfounded.

INTRODUCTION

The economy of Nigeria, like that of most of the Third World, took a nosedive with the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the 1980s. Government investment in social services and education became virtually non-existent thus forcing citizens to fend for themselves. With important services like education and housing becoming available on a cash-and-carry basis, the lower classes were the losers. In addition to the above, political instability, frequent coup d'états and general insecurity in the country scared away investors. Bad governments, corruption, ostentatious consumption and irresponsible elite had watched the nation's infrastructure, built with the enormous oil wealth of the 1980s, go into a rot. Public infrastructures like electricity, water supply, roads, the railway and communication, which were turned into public monopolies in the days of the policies of economic nationalization, collapsed (Orji 2005).

Over 70% of Nigerians subsist on less than \$1 a day; two-thirds are described as 'critically poor' (UNDP 2004). Ironically, this proportion increased when the country received higher oil revenues (Agbese 2000), over 85% of which accrued to 1% of the population (Watts 2005). Rather than cure poverty, oil revenue deepened corruption and inequality as extremities of opulence and poverty flourish side by side (Kola-

wale and Torimiro 2006). While the rich are holed up in gated mansions, the poor are concentrated in slums characterized by poor housing conditions, deficient access to safe drinking water, poor sanitation and severe overcrowding (UNFPA 1996). About two-thirds of Lagos, Nigeria's financial capital, is made up of slums and shanties (Davis 2006). Badia, the setting for this study, is one of Lagos' oldest slums. The level of poverty in the slums contrasts sharply with the lifestyle of the wealthy that live nearby and possibilities of upward mobility for the poor and their children fade as educational and occupational openings diminished (Oyekanmi 1989).

Under these conditions, frustrations from dashed expectations of a better life might be expected to lead to social tension, protests and 'class consciousnesses' among the poor. Remarkably, a recent study reported that Nigerians are the happiest people in the world (BBC 2006). It is unbelievable that people who live with such levels of poverty and inequality in a country with so many resources could be described as happy. However, Hirschman (1973) has argued that income and stratification inequality can be tolerated where there is a perception that mobility is possible for the talented and diligent, while the unskilled are unfortunately eliminated in the competition for these scarce resources. Suhrecke (2001) also posited that in a 'tunnel effect', people will justify a system if they perceive that

they have chances of upward mobility within it. While there have been protests in Nigeria, like the *Agbekoya* peasant uprising in the 1960s, the *Bakolori* riots, student demonstrations, mob actions and strikes over wages, taxes, and structural adjustment policies leading to violence, there has been an absence of demands for radical restructuring of society in a more egalitarian way. While Nigeria has experienced a civil war and recently there has been the growth of ethnic militias and religious fundamentalists, the motivations of these groups are more often ethnic or religious (Kalu 2005; Guichaoua 2007). Where violent protests had occurred they had been spontaneous and uncoordinated, directed against specific irksome conditions and quickly faded away upon achieving demands. While it may be argued that long years of military rule had repressed political freedom of Nigerians, return to civil rule has neither changed the mismanagement of the economy (Agbese 2005) nor the nature of the demands (Ukiwo 2003; Abdullahi and Saka 2007).

This leads to the debate of the possible development of class consciousness among the urban poor in African societies. While the use of class to designate social categories in Africa has remained problematic (Ake 1996), the development of class consciousness must be preceded by a perception of membership, and of what the advancement of class interests require (Idowu 1999). While the poor in Nigeria can be said to be conscious of certain economic interests and differences in wealth and status, many concerns are expressed in terms of primordial, individual, religious or ethnic interests and similar vague ideological categories that diminish possibilities of the emergence of organizations that can provoke social change (Idowu 1999). Rather than an attitude of concern for the collective progress for the lower classes therefore, there is a preponderance of an individual desire to escape poverty through personal efforts (Portes and Walton 1976). Hence the blame for poverty is placed on circumstances or the individual rather than the social structure, thereby deflecting the revolutionary potential of frustration (Mangin 1970).

The Present Study

Contrary to speculation, the urban poor have been found to be conservative, patriotic and

system supportive (Perlman 2004), preferring incremental changes to fundamental change. While urban movements have had some successes in influencing governments, successive governments have had successes in suppressing demands and excluding these movements from political participation despite worsened conditions, playing groups against each other, using what is now referred to as the 'patron-client' tactics (Perlman 2004). Scholars have therefore been interested in those social values that allow the poor in the Third World to come to terms with inequality, or how status beliefs emerge that legitimizes the status order (Hegtvedt 2004), given the fact that social orders are maintained in part through the attitudes and beliefs that support them (Jost et al. 2004) and are stable to the extent of their de-facto recognition (Habermas 1975).

While scholars have attributed legitimization of inequality to a number of factors, this study attempts to unravel Nigerians' perceptions of causes of poverty as possible explanations for their legitimization of inequality. Although there have been studies of income inequality and living conditions in Nigeria (Aboyade 1983; Adesina 2000; Aina 1990; Oyekanmi 1989; Olanrewaju 2002; Aigbokhan 2000), there has been no scientific study of how Nigerians perceive inequality and how their perception of causes of poverty is related to their reaction to inequality. Theorists have proposed that slum conditions would lead to the radicalization of the poor (Davis 2006). However, in Nigeria, scholarly explanations of the rise of violence and conflict have been within the paradigm of 'ethnicity' (Ake 1996; Osaghae 1995; Isumonah and Gaskia 2001; Idowu 1999). Nevertheless, as Ukiwo (2005) noted, these explanations are hinged on the 'clever elite-dumb masses' thesis that supposes that ethnic entrepreneurs mobilize ethnicity for resource grabs and political purposes. Little attention has been devoted to unraveling the processes whereby the interests of the elite and those of the masses coincide (or seem to do so). Mobilization on the basis of religious and ethnic rather than class identities has been the precursor for needless violence and wars in Nigeria and the rest of Africa (Ukiwo 2005), leading scholars to wonder about the conditions under which the poor in Third World urban slums will embark on collective action. On this issue, Davis (2006: 29) asked rhetorically;

'What then are the factors responsible for the seeming legitimization of inequality that have made Marx's 'historical agency' impotent? Or are the slums volcanoes waiting to erupt as Victorian bourgeoisies once imagined? Is there a point at which congestion, violence and poverty in the slums will overwhelm the 'clientistic' politics and ad hoc survival networks and lead to combustion?'

The present study therefore attempts to contribute to the understanding of the legitimization of inequality in Nigeria by showing how explanations that the underprivileged hold for their condition may become relevant for their individual or collective responses. While elites may have mobilized forces to foment violence, responses of the poor may have been mediated by their own justifications and rationalizations of their condition (Giddens 1976), a situation which diminishes the motivation for collective responses in the face of glaring injustice.

Attitudes towards Inequality

Seekings (2005: 1) noted that a plethora of studies interested in attitudes toward distributive justice, poverty and inequality have been conducted in 'societies of North America and Western Europe' which have lower levels of poverty and inequality. Studies of poverty attribution have been limited to samples from middle classes and university students from these countries with very few exceptions (Wollie 2009; Nasser et al. 2005). Often, where they have been done in the developing world, they were cross cultural studies comparing attribution between the global north and south (Hine and Montiel 1999; Bolitho et al. 2007). Even where this was the case, samples have included middle class citizens of the developing countries concerned or students. Most studies conducted have therefore been on people who were not experiencing poverty directly. As Shek (2003) noted, to date, there has been no study of how poor people view poverty. In his previous study, Harper (2003: 188) argued that social scientists continue covert 'victim blaming' by conducting studies on the poor, while neglecting studies on the rich, linking this to Ross' (1977) 'attribution error'. While Harper (2003) made this assertion in respect to over 30 years of attribution research, it is clear that most attribution studies conducted so far have been on middle class persons,

mostly from advantaged social groups (Shek 2003). Contrary to Harper's (2003) argument therefore, it is clear that attribution studies have rather made an attribution error by neglecting the view of the poor about poverty and how such attributions shape legitimization and action. As Bolitho et al. (2007) argued, focusing on a limited range of western countries runs the risk of generalizing to different national contexts such as developing countries. Many studies in the United States of America have revealed the salience of 'individualism' (Kluegel and Smith 1986; Smith and Stone 1989). Hunt (1996) however showed that individualistic philosophies are not all encompassing because Americans differ in attitudes according to race and geographical locations. Robinson (2009) demonstrated how American beliefs could be understood on the basis of an individual-structural continuum on which attributions and legitimization could be located. As most studies were conducted in more secular western societies, the salience of fatalistic explanations has been obliterated. As Lepianka et al. (2009: 426) noted, in most studies, fatalistic attributions generated low adherence (Smith and Stone 1989; Feagin 1975; Cozzarelli et al. 2001). Many studies therefore focused on individual and structural explanations thus downplaying the importance of fatalism. This underlines the need for research that acknowledges the historical, social and political contexts of different countries (Shirazi and Biel 2005; Bolitho et al. 2007). The importance of fatalism in the world view of the poor in developing countries has been emphasized. Davis (2006: 28) noted that in the cities of developing nations, '*Marx had yielded to Mohammed and the Holy Ghost*' and that while urbanization and urban poverty in developed nations had secularized the masses as predicted by Marx, by contrast, in the developing world, the reverse had been the case. This reinforces the underlying importance of religious beliefs in shaping people's perceptions and reactions to social issues. Perlman (1976), in her seminal study of Brazilian *favelados*, found that a preponderant majority of her sample reported that they believed that success in life is attributable to some 'unseen spirits'. Religion and fatalism may therefore be factors shaping respondents' beliefs and attributions. This is at variance with conclusions reached by a plethora of studies that have reported that respondents layered individual and

structural attributions. The salience of fatalistic attribution is discernable from its possible influence on possible action. When structural factors are layered with fatalistic factors, people perceive structure as causing poverty but at the same time that fate plays a role. Robinson (2009) argued that there is not much action possible (or policy implication) for belief in 'bad luck' or 'God's will'. While fatalism is neither individual nor structural, studies in western societies where 'traditionalism' and religion is on decline underplay its value as an explanatory factor. Robinson (2009: 497) summarized the presumption of western scholars when he proposed that '*research on mechanisms legitimating structured inequality may be most fruitful on how strongly people hold individualistic or structural attributions*'. As most studies of attribution have been in the developed world, scholars have therefore reported the influence of attribution on the views of the middle classes regarding assistance to the poor. Perhaps in the developing world, perceptions by the poor may have different consequences for the poor's responses to their situation.

Attribution of Causes of Poverty

Attribution research based on Heider (1958) has categorized explanations into four dimensions; individualist, structural, fatalist and cultural attribution (Nasser 2007: 197). However, in general, scholars classify attributions in an external-internal distinction, based on perceived locus of causality. While internal attributions explain phenomena as caused by factors within the individual, external attributions locate causality within the environment (Fisk and Taylor 1991). Modes of casual attribution, it has therefore been argued, have emerged as products of the socialization process (Stephenson 2000). Studies have shown that while perception of causes of poverty begins in childhood, this changes over time and is often moderated through learning and interventions (Lopez et al. 1998). Kluegel and Smith (1986) showed how people initially adopt individual attributions but at a second level of reasoning, non-personal attributions are adduced. This process described as 'motivated correction' (Skitka et al. 2002) is often influenced by the extent to which people are exposed to countervailing narratives, political socialization and media imaging (Inyenger

1990). Therefore, attributions are based on individual, social, political and ideological factors (Harper 2003: 188).

Feagin (1972: 101-129) advanced three categories of attributions of poverty which are as follows:

1. Individualistic: Attributing responsibility for poverty to the poor themselves, for example, lack of thrift and effort and loose morals.
2. Structural: Encompassing the external and economic forces, including wages, access to good education, lack of jobs and discrimination.
3. Fatalistic: Entailing forces beyond the individuals' control, including bad luck and illness.

Feagin's (1972) work has formed the basis for current studies regarding attributions of poverty, albeit with claims that the structural explanation is in-exhaustive, requiring that it be '*broken down into finer units*' (Payne and Furnham 1985: 224) or sub-dimensions. Lepaianka et al. (2009: 426) argued that this was necessary given cultural differences in the settings to which the instrument was applied or indeed time difference. Scholars have therefore advocated for the need for sub-dimensions related to community or family, ecology, culture or institutional discrimination (Cozzarelli et al. 2001), prodigality, injustice or ascribed deprivation (Golding 1982), nature/climate and bad governments (Harper and Manasse 1992), conflicts and social iniquities (Hine and Montiel 1999) and ascribed deprivation (Shek 2003). However, in virtually all studies, poverty attributions have been correlated with respondents' social and economic characteristics as well as ideological and political orientations. Studies showed that attribution of poverty is correlated with economic self interests; respondents who ascribe poverty to individual characteristics are more likely to be of higher incomes and ideologically conservative (Cozzarelli et al. 2001). Conversely however, respondents who attribute poverty to structural inequality are more politically liberal (Hunt 2004). Economically advantaged groups (whites, men) attribute poverty to individualistic factors while disadvantaged groups (minorities, women) attribute poverty to external or structural factors, thus indicating a correlation between attributions, sex and race (Feagin 1972; Nasser et al. 2002). Individual attribution has also been cor-

related with age (Feagin 1975), type of academic training (Guimond and Dube 1989), race (Hunt 1996), gender- related social roles and social power (Shirazi and Biel 2005) and class (Nasser 2007). However, contrary to expectations, education has been found to be positively correlated with structural attribution; education, it is argued, has an enlightening effect, as higher education enhances awareness of inequality and consequently evokes compassion towards the disadvantaged (Hunt 1996).

The Neglect of Fatalistic Explanation

Current studies, being predominantly based on samples from developed countries have begun to neglect the value of the fatalistic sub-dimension as a valid explanatory construct. Fatalism has therefore been the least studied of Feagin's (1972) three attribution types. Fatalism has been conceptualized via items such as; 'it is God's will that some people are poor' (Hunt 2004). There is a decline in the study of fatalistic beliefs compared to the individual and structural beliefs as studies increasingly fail to include adequate numbers of survey items relating to fatalism (Hunt 2004: 830). Lepianka et al. (2009: 426) recently noted that while fatalistic items have been included in many studies, results have been inconsistent. Among others, they identified the following concerns noted by past studies:

1. Low adherence to fatalism (Smith and Stone 1989).
2. Uneven support for fatalistic items (Feagin 1975).
3. Mixed character of fatalistic items (Payne and Furham 1985).
4. Inability to exact fatalism as a distinct category (Cozzareli et al. 2001).

As a consequence of the above, Lepianka et al. (2009:426) noted further that scholars have loaded fatalistic items on other sub-dimensions (for example, Morçöl 1997) and therefore neglecting the need to study a distinct social fatalistic type. Recently however, Brimeyer (2008: 226) argued for the inclusion of a category 'divine intervention' signifying the 'will of God' or a 'lack of faith' as an additional explanation of poverty, separate from fatalism. The significance of religious explanations has been examined in other studies (Hunt 2004). Faith in 'divine intervention' is pervasive as many believe in miracles (Brimeyer 2008: 226). As Brimeyer (2008)

showed, attribution of success or failure to God continues even in present days, with a huge boost from 'prosperity theology' (Jackson 1987) or the 'health and wealth gospel' (Hollinger 1991) and new forms of Pentecostal Christianity which link financial prosperity to God's blessing upon the faithful and poverty and ill-health to 'sinners' (Kopelman 2002: 234). Studies showed that African American Protestants were more likely to believe in 'divine intervention' in the general course of life (Greeley and Hout 2006: 22). The consistent decline in the report of fatalistic attribution in recent studies is therefore not because the explanation is not used but because studies increasingly failed to elicit it but instead concentrate on individual and structural attribution in the measurement of poverty attribution.

This has been confirmed by the vast growth of Pentecostal Christianity in many African countries (Marshall-Fratani 1995; Smith 2001). Brimeyer (2008) recently showed that the belief in 'divine intervention' is a valid construct in the causal map of the poor with evidence from an African American and Hispanic sample in the USA. Hunt (2004) also argued that the diminishing role of fatalistic attribution has been due to the failure of many researchers to include enough items eliciting fatalistic beliefs. Many past studies included very insignificant numbers of fatalistic items in their research instruments. Thus respondents may not have chosen fatalistic options because they were simply not made available. Consequently the fatalistic construct is rendered statistically insignificant even at the factor analysis stage. While the absence of fatalistic constructs in studies of middle class adults in developed countries can be understood given increased secularization, more significant is the fact that many studies including Third World samples showed limited acceptance of fatalistic beliefs.

Objectives of the Study

Many studies of poverty attribution have been on people who were not experiencing poverty directly (Shek 2003). There is therefore a neglect of the need to understand the attributions of the poor for poverty. A study of the attribution of the poor in Badia, a low income community (otherwise called a slum) therefore enhances the understanding of the perception of the poor of the causes of poverty. Attribution

of causes of poverty has been linked to respondents' Social Economic Status (SES) (Kluegel and Smith 1986). Studies in western societies reported that disadvantaged people are likely to combine structural and individual attributions in compromise explanations (Hunt 1996; Bobo 1991). There is therefore a need for data from the Third World to show if these conclusions have cross cultural validity. The main objective of the study was therefore to determine if the Social Economic Status (SES) hypothesis is valid for a sample of respondents in the developing world who are actually experiencing poverty. The study also attempts to determine if there are any possible variations in combinations of explanations from the widely held individual – structural continuum (Robinson 2009) which has been reported in many studies in the global north. In addition, the study aimed to determine if the fatalistic attribution type which has been downplayed in western studies truly exist as an explanatory construct for poverty in the developing world.

In order to attain the objectives of the study the following hypothesis was tested:

- H0: There is no correlation between SES variables and poverty attribution dimensions.
- H1: There is a correlation between SES variables and poverty attribution dimensions.

METHODOLOGY

The sample size was calculated using the *Raosoftware* sample size calculator online. Based on a standard error margin of 5%, a 95% confidence interval and a 50% response distribution and an estimated population of Badia of 120,000 (NPC 1997), a sample size of 383 was derived. The factor analytical approach was used to elicit poverty attributions from the sample despite recent criticisms (Harper 2003; Lepianka et al. 2009), as alternative instrumentations where applied have not shown a greater ability to decipher respondents' causal maps. Lepianka et al. (2009: 433) concluded that the 'forced choice question' approach which they recommended were unable to determine the 'actual' poverty attributions from the sample. Similarly, Harper's (2003) proposed 'discursive analysis' has only received a mention in the literature (Lepianka et al. 2009: 435) but hardly any following. In addition, to

date, Hine et al.'s (2005) 'causal mapping' has not been replicated by any known poverty attribution study. Recent studies preponderantly continued to use the factor analytical approach (see Bolitho et al. 2007; Nasser 2007; Brimeyer 2008; Wollie 2009). Robinson (2009) used a combined index that entailed a factor analytical strategy. Data was therefore collected using a questionnaire that required respondents to rate 38 items on causes of poverty on a Likert scale of 1 to 5, (where 1= strongly disagree and 5= strongly agree). The highest possible score was 190, while the lowest was 38. Higher scores meant higher agreements with item. The items were adapted from the poverty attribution literature and Feagin's (1972) original Causes of Poverty Scale (CPS). Variables were however adapted to fit an African setting, as variables have been noted to have different meanings in different cultures (Shek 2003). Furthermore, scale dimensionality was determined using Principal Components Analysis (PCA) otherwise known as factor analysis. In addition, bivariate correlations, the mean, the standard deviation, the Cronbach's alpha and the t- tests were used. In the first stage of the analysis, PCA extracted three factors named individual, structural and fatalistic attributions for poverty. The three factors were saved electronically in the SPSS programme and used as dependent variables in bivariate correlations.

RESULTS

Results of the Principal Components Analysis show that factor analysis was an appropriate extraction method for the data obtained given a Kaiser Meyer- Olkin (KMO) measure of sample adequacy of 0.802 and Bartlett Test of Sphericity (BTS) $\chi^2=6612.03$ (df = 300), $p \leq .001$. This indicates a relationship between rotated variables and sample size adequacy. Field (2005) proposed a benchmark of 0.00001 for correlation matrix produced by PCA below which multi-collinearity exists between variables. The correlation matrix for this output was 0.0016, which is above the benchmark. Hence the assumption of the absence of multi-collinearity is maintained. Two stages of factor analyses were run. In the first stage, factor analysis produced Eigen values for the 38 items. In the next stage, PCA was repeated excluding thirteen items whose Eigen values were lower than 0.05, and thus contribut-

ing insignificantly to factor loading. Varimax rotation was applied on the remaining 25 items extracting three factors; individual, fatalistic and structural attributions of poverty.

As Table 1 indicates, factor loading for individual attribution ranged from 0.832 for the item 'poor people don't plan' to 0.530 for the item 'people have the same chances to succeed'. However, with the highest mean rating of 2.27 the item 'poor people lack talent/skills' is the most important item in explaining individual attribution. Factor loading for fatalistic attribution ranged from 0.798 for the item 'people's occupations are a calling from God' to 0.609 for the item 'there is a heaven where things will be better than on earth'. The latter item, with a mean rating of 4.19 is thus the most important fatalistic item. Results for the structural sub-dimension shows that factor loading ranged from 0.828 for the item 'the government is inefficiently run' to 0.548 for the item 'government is not providing enough access to education'. With a mean rating of 4.08, the item 'employers are not paying enough' is the most important item in this category. However, with the highest overall mean rating for all items, the item 'there is a heaven

where things will be better than on earth' (mean = 4.19), a fatalistic item, is the most important single explanation that Badia respondents have for why poverty exists.

The three factors extracted cumulatively accounted for 57.18% of variance in poverty attribution. The three factors were saved in SPSS for use as distinct variables in the bivariate correlations to test the hypotheses of the study. The reported variance is relatively high (see Table 2) compared for example with that of Wollie (2009: 256) whose three factors accounted for 30.31%. Similarly, Bolitho et al. (2007: 16) reported 55% variance and Nasser et al. (2005: 6) reported 55.96% variance after extracting six factors while Nasser et al. (2002: 106) reported 40.2%, 41.7% and 44.4% for Lebanese, Portuguese and South African sub-samples respectively. Hine and Montiel (1999: 950), who extracted five factors, reported 45% variance. Hence in comparison with other studies, the results from the present study show a better factor output. The percentage of variance diminishes significantly after the three factors were extracted thus diminishing the need to extract other factors. The three factors extracted are consistent with Feagin's (1972) orig-

Table 1: Rotated component matrix, mean and standard deviation of attribution factors

	Components			Mean	SD
	1	2	3		
Poor people don't plan	.832			2.08	1.14
Poor people waste resources/do not save	.811			1.89	1.08
Poor people lack motivation/efforts to improve themselves	.782			2.04	1.04
Poor people lack sexual control	.766			1.96	0.98
People are poor because they are lazy	.764			1.95	1.06
The poor lack talents or skills	.755			2.27	1.12
Poor people have low intelligence	.732			1.82	0.95
The poor lack ambition	.696			2.19	1.16
The world is just: People get what they deserve	.602			2.05	1.00
People have the same chances to succeed	.530			2.09	1.10
People's occupations are a calling from God		.798		3.54	1.18
Successful ones are the chosen ones of God		.756		3.41	1.34
The poor have bad destiny		.728		3.12	1.43
Poverty is the result of evil works of enemies		.685		3.13	1.17
Some people will be rewarded on earth; others in heaven		.651		3.86	0.95
Success depends on luck		.649		2.91	1.14
Life chances are spiritually determined		.636		3.78	1.08
There is heaven where things will be better than on earth		.609		4.19	0.85
The Government is inefficiently run			.828	3.81	1.25
The government is corrupt/ dishonest			.818	3.87	1.36
Employers are not paying enough			.744	4.08	0.94
Government does not provide enough good Jobs			.740	3.53	1.47
Western capitalists are the cause of poverty and underdevelopment in Nigeria			.649	3.29	1.30
Government is not providing enough access to education			.548	3.99	0.97

Source: Computer printout of a table derived from the data and findings of this study.

inal typology. Factor 1, individual attribution, with ten (10) items accounts for 23.66% of variance while factor 2, fatalistic attribution, with eight items and factor 3, structural attribution, with seven items accounted for 17.85% and 15.69% respectively. Cronbach's alpha test (see Table 2) for the 25 items used for the second PCA showed a reliability of 0.68 which is 'acceptable'. The individualistic sub-scale was 'excellent' with Cronbach's alpha = 0.91, mean = 20.35, SD = 7.86, the fatalistic sub-scale was 'very good' and reliable with Cronbach's alpha = 0.86, mean = 27.93, SD = 6.60 and the structural sub-scale was also 'very good' given a Cronbach's alpha = 0.85, mean = 22.57 and SD = 5.56.

Table 2: Total variance explained for poverty attribution

Components	Rotation sums of squared loadings		
	Total	% Variance	Cumulative %
1	5.9	23.66	23.66
2	4.46	17.85	41.49
3	3.92	15.69	57.18

Source: Computer printout of a table derived from the data and findings of this study.

Mean Differences in Poverty Explanations

The three poverty attribution scales were constructed using an unequal number of items. Many past studies have constructed attribution scales using an unequal number of items. For example, Hine and Montiel (1999) used a scale that consisted of 40 items describing a broad range of causes of poverty. Similarly, Harper et al. (1990) created an 18-item 'Causes of Third-World Poverty Scale'. Scholars have therefore used varied sets of possible causes of poverty (for example, Lepianka et al. 2009; Nasser 2007; Harper et al. 1990; Heaven 1994; Zucker and Weiner 1993). In the present study, in order to determine the relative perceived importance of each factor for the sample, scale scores for each cause of poverty dimension were computed by summing the item scores for each scale and dividing by the total number of items in the scale. This procedure has been used extensively in past studies (see Hine and Montiel 1999; Nasser et al. 2002). Subsequently, the mean scores for each dimension were compared using the *t*-test. The scale means were 4.34 (SD = 1.88) for structural attribution, 3.69 (SD = 1.75) for individual attribution and 3.72 (SD = 1.72) for fatalis-

tic attribution. As Table 4 shows, post-hoc, Bonferroni-corrected, paired-group *t*-tests indicated that all means were significantly different from each other ($p < 0.01$, 2-tailed). Comparative overall rating of all attributions shows that the structural attribution with the highest mean rating of 4.34 is the most prevalent attribution among the people of Badia (see Table 3).

Table 3: Cronbach's alpha, means and SD for attribution sub scales

	Cronbach's alpha	Mean	SD	No. of items
Individual	0.91	3.69	1.75	10
Structural	0.86	4.34	1.88	7
Fatalistic	0.85	3.72	1.72	8

Source: Computer printout of a table derived from the data and findings of this study.

Furthermore, bivariate zero-order correlations were obtained for sub-dimensions of attribution and socio-demographics. Results shown in Table 5 indicate that individual attribution is negatively correlated with gender, $r = -0.186$, $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed) and religion, $r = -0.111$, $P < 0.05$ (1-tailed) but positively correlated with age, $r = 0.170$, $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed) and income, $r = 0.302$, $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed). Fatalistic attribution however showed significant correlations with age, $r = 0.416$, $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed), education, $r = -0.421$, $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed), income, $r = -0.485$, $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed), work type, $r = 0.445$, $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed), position at work, $r = 0.362$, $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed), ethnicity, $r = 0.282$, $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed) and religion, $r = .282$, $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed). Similarly, structural attribution is correlated with gender, $r = 0.279$, $p < 0.01$; 2-tailed), age, $r = 0.121$, $p < 0.05$ (1-tailed), education, $r = .215$, $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed), work type, $r = -0.439$, $P < 0.01$ (2-tailed), ethnicity, $r = 0.181$, $p < 0.01$ (2-tailed) and religion, $r = -0.353$, $P < 0.01$ (2-tailed).

Correlation coefficients showed divergences and convergences with the literature. Hunt (1996: 314) concluded that the effects of independent variables on poverty attributions varied across groups. Hence the idea that these processes operate in a similar pattern for different groups and locations is not sustainable. As in many other studies, this study found effects of gender, age and income on attributions (Hunt 1996; Nasser et al. 2005; Wollie 2009; Hine and Montiel 1999). While women are more structural than men in attributions, the younger and the

Table 4: *t*-test for poverty attribution dimensions

	<i>Test Value = 0</i>				
	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (2-tailed)	<i>Mean</i> <i>difference</i>	<i>95% Confidence inter-</i> <i>val of the difference</i>
					<i>Lower</i> <i>Upper</i>
Individual attribution	49.305	382	.000	18.470	17.73 19.21
Fatalistic attribution	77.783	382	.000	24.558	23.94 25.18
Structural attribution	73.368	382	.000	19.240	18.72 19.76

Source: Computer printout of a table derived from the data and findings of this study.

Table 5: Zero-order correlations for poverty attributions and demographics

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
(1) Gender	-										
(2) Age	-.064	-									
(3) Education	.027	-.140**	-								
(4) Income	.062	-.295**	.551**	-							
(5) Work	-.197**	.232**	-.398**	-.147**	-						
(6) Position	-.235**	.122*	.048	-.055	-.028	-					
(7) Ethnicity	-.061	-.158**	-.255**	-.044	.268**	.225**	-				
(8) Religion	-.030	-.086	-.212**	-.018	.442**	.101*	.225**	-			
(9) Individual	-.186**	.170**	.041	.302**	.029	-.111*	-.070	-.111*	-		
(10) Fatalistic	-.89	.416**	-.421**	-.485**	.445**	.358**	.282**	.358**	0	-	
(11) Structural	.279**	.121*	.215**	.095	-.439**	-.353**	.181**	-.353**	0	0	-

***p* < 0.01 (2-tailed), **p* < 0.05 (2-tailed)

Source: Computer printout of a table derived from the data and findings of this study.

less educated are also found to be more structural (Shirazi and Biel 2005). The current study however does not find a significant relationship between education and individual attribution, even though education has been known to predict structural attribution. Hunt (1996), for instance, has argued that education has an enlightening effect. Nasser et al. (2002: 112), on the other hand, averred that education is a 'double-edged sword' owing to the fact that while education as a signpost to upward mobility may be expected to enhance individualism, studies have found that liberal and humanistic education enhances the appeal to structural explanations (Guimond et al. 1989). While the Badia sample was in no way composed of highly educated people, the results of the study still showed no correlation between education and individual attribution. Other studies have reported a similar finding (Huber and Form 1973). Given that the educational gap among Badia respondents is not wide, statistical significance may have been unlikely. However it is possible that a comparative study with a more educationally diverse sample may provide different results. According to Bobo (1991), education has an enlightening effect as

more educated people are more able to empathize with the conditions of the disadvantaged. The role of education has therefore been subject to debates. While some studies have found a positive correlation between education and structural attribution, some have reported a negative relationship. Thus, theoretically, the effect of education has been confusing (Nasser et al. 2002).

DISCUSSION

The results of this study are consistent with the 'actor and observer' thesis (Robinson and Bell 1978) and the fundamental 'attribution error' (Ross 1977), both of which propose that lower economic status respondents attribute poverty to factors external to themselves. This has been the consistent finding of most studies of poverty attribution (Hine and Montiel 1999; Nasser et al. 2002; Nasser et al. 2005; Wollie 2009; Bolitho et al. 2007). Wichowsky (2007: 1) argued that in areas with higher income inequality, people often blame the society for poverty. The explanation of poverty is therefore a function of the respondents in question and the kind of ine-

quality that exists in one's environment (Wilson 1986; Wichowsky 2007). Studies finding predominant structural attribution than individual attribution reported that their findings support the system 'blame hypothesis' (Wollie 2009; Nasser et al. 2005), as against the 'culture of poverty' thesis where individual attributions predominate (Bullock 2006).

However it is notable that while in past studies, structural attributions have been found to be predominant among the under-privileged, almost in all cases, structural attributions have been combined with individual attributions with diminished report of fatalism (Wollie 2009; Nasser et al. 2005) leading scholars to conclude that fatalistic attributions were less significant (Lepianka et al. 2009). In the light of the above therefore, the results from the Badia sample diverge from the main flow of the literature given that 37.1% of the respondents reported fatalist beliefs. While one may be tempted to conclude that fatalism is diminished when studies are conducted in western countries, it is notable that studies in Africa and other developing countries also reported higher individual than fatalistic explanations. Wollie (2009: 264-265) for example, while acknowledging that Ethiopians believe that causes of poverty are controlled by supernatural powers, reported that the fatalistic factor scored a lower percentage of variance in his data than the individualistic explanation. Similarly, Nasser et al. (2005) reported higher individual attribution than fatalism among an Indian sample. However, while reporting significantly higher structural and individual attributions among a combined South African, Lebanese and Portuguese sample, Nasser et al. (2002: 110) reported higher fatalistic beliefs among South Africans than the Portuguese and Lebanese. Surprisingly however, they reported (Nasser et al. 2002: 112) that White and Colored South Africans showed the highest level of fatalistic beliefs in their cross national study.

Furthermore, the results from the present study support the value inconsistency and compromise explanations reported by other scholars (Kluegel and Smith 1986) which are linked to Mann's (1970) argument that value inconsistency is the basis for social order. While Bobo (1991: 87) linked value inconsistency to the existence of an egalitarian structuralist outlook layered upon individualism among oppressed groups in America, results from Badia show that the struc-

turalist outlook is layered upon fatalistic beliefs. Many studies reported that participants used more than one attribution concurrently (Harper 2003: 186). Verkutyan (1988) estimated that typically only about 7% of respondents use single explanations in attribution research. This indicates that split consciousness is part of the cognitive processes of the underprivileged. The present study produced evidence of split/dual consciousness. While acknowledging that structural barriers cause poverty (59%), 37% of the sample preferred fatalistic attributions. Thus while Bobo (1991) described split consciousness as the layering of individual and structural attributions, in the present study, the results show that split consciousness entailed layering structural with fatalistic attributions. These results therefore contradicts the widely held belief that people's attributions fits neatly into two 'camps' (Wichowsky 2007: 18) when thinking about causes of personal economic failure or success (Kluegel and Smith 1986; Hunt 1996; Smith and Stone 1989).

The findings of this study support but significantly contradict previous studies on poverty attribution. Studies in the United States of America and European countries have reported predominant individual attribution (Feagin 1972; Kluegel and Smith 1986). Others have uncovered ambivalence where race, region and contexts are introduced (Hunt 1996; Robinson 2009). Robinson (2009) proposed that American attributions for poverty could be situated within an individual-structural continuum. There is evidence that attribution beliefs vary between cultures (Morçöl 1997; Nasser et al. 2006). However, cross cultural studies have found that while respondents in Western countries preponderantly attributed poverty to individual factors, their counterparts in less developed countries were more structural in explanation, with individual explanations coming second (Bolitho et al. 2007). Hine and Montiel (1999) reported in contradistinction with the actor-observer thesis (Robinson and Bell 1978) that Filipinos blamed the poor and their government more for poverty than Canadians. They (Hine and Montiel 1999: 954) however observed that *'had individuals from the lower classes been surveyed, their responses may have been more in line with ... initial prediction'*. This indicated that the Filipinos sampled were not the actual poor and thus not really actors but observers in spite of being

from a poor country. Perhaps more significantly, studies in other developing countries repeatedly reported predominantly structural explanations layered with individual attributions among their samples (Nasser et al. 2002, 2005; Nasser 2007; Wollie 2009).

The difference in the results of the present study may be attributable to two factors. In the first instance, most of the studies conducted on respondents in developing countries did not sample the 'really poor'. Like western studies, they concentrated on studying (university) students (Wollie 2009; Nasser et al. 2002, 2005) or middle class anti-poverty activists (Hunt 1996; Hine and Montiel 1999; Bolitho et al. 2007), who were upwardly mobile, western educated and more likely to exhibit western values. Secondly, past studies had been reluctant to include a statistically significant number of items eliciting fatalistic responses in their research instruments. Hunt (2004: 837) used only two items related to 'God's will' to construct a fatalistic sub-scale that yielded a moderate Cronbach's alpha of 0.64. Hunt (2004) therefore argued that the statistical insignificance of fatalistic explanations in past studies was due to the paucity of items eliciting fatalistic response. He concluded that *'The "God's will" measure of fatalistic beliefs for wealth and poverty is considerably less popular than the other two types of belief... However, significant across-race differences do exist, with African Americans and Latinos both being more likely than whites to make attributions to God's will for the economic outcomes... Given the paucity of research on fatalistic stratification beliefs, future work—ideally including additional items tapping this dimension—should seek to produce separate, statistically reliable "fatalistic beliefs" scales for the issues of wealth and poverty'* (Hunt 2004: 842). Similarly, Bolitho et al. (2007: 19) argued that 'fate' has been an under-represented factor as spiritual beliefs are absent from current instruments *'despite their central significance in many belief systems'* (emphasis is ours). They suggested that this shortfall may be redressed by including items in the point of view of the poor themselves, given that current items are mostly derived from western sources beginning from the work of Feagin (1972).

The present study therefore confirms Bolitho et al.'s (2007: 19) fears that these constructs are not fully relevant across cultural contexts. This

of course does not diminish the fact that they may be similar when applied to similar socioeconomic categories. Brimeyer (2008) recently confirmed that the belief in 'divine intervention' is a relevant construct in the attribution maps of the disadvantaged when sufficiently elicited. The present study, following the suggestions of Hunt (2004), Bolitho et al. (2007) and Brimeyer (2008) confirmed that indeed the fatalistic construct is real when elicited with sufficient items especially in studies involving the underprivileged and the poor.

The salience of fatalistic beliefs brings into question the possibility of the creation of a 'viable public realm' or Habermas' ideal of communicative rationality and Mouffes's (2000, 2002) post-Habermasian 'agnostic public sphere' presupposing that disagreements could be accepted in political discourse. Gandy (2006: 387) argued that in Lagos, the combination of religiosity and politicized ethnicity hampers the possibility of the development of a 'viable public sphere'. This is further exacerbated by hopelessness and disenfranchisement consequent upon years of military misrule that render demands by the poor in urban Nigeria lower than obtained for example in Latin America where alternative urban visions have been better articulated (Swilling et al. 2003; Simone 2005). In the aftermath of years of cruel military (mis)rule, Nigerian politics is however undergoing a semblance of transition with the involvement of NGOs which could not function under the military. These groups, which include inter alia the Shelter Rights Initiative (SRI) and Women activist groups, are beginning to make demands for improvements in the condition of life for the populace thereby attempting to introduce civic mobilization. However, the most extensive expansion in civil society has been in the realm of religious activity occasioned by the spread of charismatic and Pentecostal Christianity (Smith 2001; Adichie 2005; Marshall-Fratani 1998), bringing forth a combination of fatalism, religiosity and growing powerlessness (Gandy 2006). Thus rather than an urban citizenship emerging, what has developed is a citizenship that remains passive and disconnected with any political agenda with the potential to challenge the state or influence politics to demand basic services, a kind of citizenship that recognizes 'the right to the city' (Lefebvre 1996: 158).

CONCLUSION

The present study set out to determine if the Social Economic Status (SES) hypothesis which has been widely reported in many past studies in developed countries is valid for respondents in the developing world. In addition, the study proposed to determine possible variations in the combinations of poverty attributions from the dominant individual – structural continuum often reported in many studies in the global north. This necessitated a determination of the validity of the fatalistic attribution type as a true construct in the developing world, albeit often downplayed in western studies. The study therefore tested the hypothesis that SES variables correlated with poverty attribution dimensions.

Contrary to what many past studies reported, this study has shown that fatalism is a real explanation for poverty among the disadvantaged in developing countries. This may be explained in terms of anthropological evidence showing the importance of beliefs in unseen spirits as determinants of social and economic fortunes in many African societies. As many past studies did not include the poor and underprivileged in their sample, generalizations to the whole populations must be taken with caution. To date there has been little scholarly attention to the study of how the poor perceive poverty. Whilst the study on the Badia sample was on how the poor explain causes of poverty, many of the findings still found salience in the literature. Poverty attributions showed significant zero order correlations with relevant socio-demographic factors that other studies have uncovered. Gender, age, income and education were found to correlate with poverty attribution dimensions as the literature portrays. However, while the different poverty attribution sub-dimensions fit into the literature, the overall ratings of the different sub-dimensions showed a novel divergence with the literature. While structural attributions were predominant among the less privileged in past studies, followed by individual attributions, against popular expectations, fatalistic attributions showed a higher level of acceptance in the Badia sample than individual attributions.

Fatalism is important because when blame for inequality and poverty is placed on 'fate' rather than structure, the revolutionary potential of frustration is deflected. As the results of

this study indicated, where structural attributions of poverty was shown, they were heavily layered with fatalistic explanations signifying what scholars have termed split/dual consciousness, thus the motivation for collective responses in the face of glaring injustice is diminished. As the economic condition worsened, the level of religious performance increased. As the results of the present study show, while a preponderant 59% reportedly preferred structural attribution as against 37.1% preferring fatalistic attributions based on mean ratings, a closer look at the results reveals that when the rating of specific items was considered, the fatalistic item 'there is a heaven where things will be better than on earth' received the highest mean rating (Mean = 4.19, SD = 0.85) of all the 38 items on causes of poverty and is therefore statistically the most important factor in the attribution construct of the respondents in Badia. A mean rating of 4.19 accompanied with a very low standard deviation of 0.18 from a scale with a maximum score of 5 shows that this particular belief is strongly held among the members of the sample. In comparison, the 'structural' item 'employers are not paying enough' yielded the next high mean rating of 4.08 and SD = 0.94. This strong showing of fatalism confirms scholars' conclusions that the belief in 'unseen forces' is a strong element in the conceptualization of causes of inequality in Africa. Such attitudinal orientation is definitely defeatist of any attempts to challenge the status quo.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Attribution research has failed to generate effective conclusions that might aid in the fight against poverty. No doubt, with attribution studies focusing on attributions of the rich for poverty, the prospects of generating ground for mobilization to fight poverty are impaired. The results from the study showed that fatalism is a valid construct in the attribution maps of the disadvantaged. It is noteworthy that the inclusion of more fatalistic items in the research instrument elicited more statistically valid responses. It is therefore recommended that future studies include sufficient fatalistic items in their research instruments in order to obtain statistically significant results. However, as the study was conducted using a sample of predominantly poor and less educated people, it will be necessary

for future studies to replicate this study to confirm the validity of the findings and to ascertain if the inclusion of more fatalistic items in research instruments applied to middle class samples will provide similar results.

The present study has constructed attribution scales using varied numbers of items. Significantly, the fatalistic dimension had lesser number of items compared to the others. This was a huge limitation for the present study. Future studies may be geared toward creating and strengthening the fatalistic sub-dimension by uncovering new items that relate to its conceptualization. Factor analysis studies devoted to developing the fatalistic scale will be useful in consolidating the construct as a valid explanatory tool for the views of the truly disadvantaged about poverty.

There are not many actions or policy options possible where people adduce poverty to fate. The implication of the above is that in order to achieve greater actions against poverty and inequality, concerted efforts need to be made to diminish fatalistic beliefs among the disadvantaged. This implies the need for educational and conscientization programmes by Social Movement Organizations that wish to foment change.

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