Poverty Attribution in the Developing World: A Critical Discussion on Aspects of Split Consciousness among Low Income Urban Slum Dwellers in Lagos

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ABSTRACT Studies of poverty attribution, using the Causes of Poverty Scale, preponderantly reported that respondents often used more than one attribution concurrently when explaining poverty. Studies further reported that this phenomenon called 'split consciousness' is more prevalent among disadvantaged groups and ethnic minorities. While scholars have shown how attributions explain willingness to assist the poor and sundry pro-poor attitudes among the middle classes, there has been less attention to the effects of split consciousness on the predisposition of the disadvantaged to take action to ameliorate their situation. This study applied a modified index on a sample (n=383) from Badia, a low income community in Lagos, Nigeria. The results from the study showed that respondents heavily layered structural attributions upon fatalistic attributions. These results therefore significantly contradict findings from studies in the global north that reported a preponderant combination of individual and structural attributions among disadvantaged groups. The results also indicate that the fatalistic explanations are a valid explanation of failure of the disadvantaged to adopt non normative responses to injustice and inequality. Furthermore the findings of this study revealed that attribution could be linked to 'perception of powerlessness' (opposite of efficacy/empowerment) which has been widely accepted in Social Identity Theory (SIT)-inspired research as an impediment to collective action