

The moral implications of Odera Oruka's 'Human Minimum' for Africa's fight against extreme poverty

by

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I consider a hitherto underexplored concept of ‘human minimum’ as proposed by H. Odera Oruka to obligate responsibility as an approach to tackling extreme poverty in Africa and beyond. I aim to establish, among other things, why it is morally problematic and economically counterproductive to demand equal moral responsibility from all moral agents irrespective of their economic differences to ensure the implementation of the *human minimum* or the elimination of extreme poverty. To achieve the aforementioned, I attempt to answer two significant questions, to wit: What are some of the moral implications of ensuring that a society attains *the human minimum* as an approach to fighting extreme poverty? Who has a greater moral responsibility for ensuring the attainment of *the human minimum* between the government, non-governmental/nonprofit organisations, and individual members of society? In Oruka’s philosophy, enforcement of a global *human minimum* is the equal moral obligation of all moral agents—all those situated above the poverty line. I will demonstrate why ignoring the economic differences – and inequalities – of those who qualify as moral agents in Oruka’s conceptualisation of extreme poverty, particularly in continental Africa, risks plunging more of those who live a little above the *human minimum* threshold into poverty. I then argue that a disproportionate distribution of responsibility that is sensitive to the economic disparities that exist among the non-poor population holds a better promise for success in the fight against extreme poverty in Africa.

Key Terms: Africa, Poverty, Foreign Aid, Human Minimum, Odera Oruka, Dimensions of Poverty, Morality, Extreme Poverty, Development, Responsibility.

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Chapter 1.

1.1. Introduction

The problem of extreme poverty has been widely considered from sociopolitical and socioeconomic perspectives, with little attempt made to tackle the same from a moral standpoint, especially in Africa. In this dissertation, I consider a hitherto underexplored concept of the ‘human minimum’ proposed by Odera Oruka to obligate responsibility as an approach to tackling extreme poverty in Africa and beyond. I aim to establish among other things, why it is morally problematic and economically counterproductive to place equal moral responsibility to ensure the enforcement of the *human minimum* or the elimination of extreme poverty on all moral agents irrespective of their economic differences as proposed by Oruka.

Although poverty is a global phenomenon, Africa is at the forefront of the multidimensional deprivations that characterise poverty.¹ According to the World Poverty Clock (2022), 460 million people are living in extreme poverty in Africa as of May 2022. This accounts for 33% of the continent’s estimated 1.4 billion population.² Despite a decline in the number of people living on less than US\$1.25 a day in Sub-Saharan Africa from an estimated 57% to 48% between 1990 and 2010 according to estimates from the World Bank (2014: 24) due to unprecedented economic growth in Africa, the challenges of poverty persist in Africa. With a total population of 83 million people living in extreme poverty in Nigeria as of May 2022 (World Poverty Clock 2022), the country currently houses the highest number of people living in extreme poverty in Africa. Recently, two factors are reported to primarily contribute to the leading cause of poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa; Africa’s population expansion (Beegle et al. 2016: xi; Kharas and Dooley 2022: 5) and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (World Bank 2022; UNDP and OPHI 2021: 7-10).³

Globally, the challenges of poverty reduction are one of the issues that have continued to plague the human community. According to the World Poverty Clock (2022), 715 million people in the world still live in extreme poverty as of May 2022. The situation is projected to get worse. The World Bank (2022) has projected that due to a reversal in global poverty reduction caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and its lingering effects on economic outputs, rising inflation, and the effects of the war in

¹ Sabina Alkire in her paper, *Multidimensional Poverty Measures as Policy Tools* (2020: 213) describes poverty as “one of the gravest problems facing the world today.” This underscores the timeliness of this research.

² This estimate can be found on the World Poverty Clock’s website. <https://worldpoverty.io/map>. [Accessed 25 May 2022].

³ Although these causes are fairly recent and draw attention to the new dimensions of the problem, there are other causes of extreme poverty in Africa like bad leadership, ethnicity, unequal distribution of natural and national resources, climate change, political instability, etc.

Ukraine, between 75 to 95 million people will fall back into extreme poverty in 2022. The problem of poverty is so important to humanity that major governmental and non-governmental organisations have been set up with the sole responsibility of finding the best ways to eliminate its menace both within and without national borders. Michael M. O. Seipel (2003: 201) argues, “Poverty, like the economy, is no longer only a national concern, but is also now a global issue.” Before the rise of globalisation, this challenge was majorly restricted to territorial borders despite its global nature and inter-territorial implications due to the moral sentiments that characterised the pre-industrial age (see Sidgwick 1907: 246; see also Wasserstrom 1975; Asouzu 2004; Bilchitz 2007: 71; Scheffler 2001: 49; Collins and Lawford-Smith 2016: 49; cf. Goodin 1988).⁴ Thus, one can assume that solutions were locally driven and implemented. The question of moral responsibility to the poor people outside a nation’s borders was of little concern to those within it, due to limited economic trade and cross-border interaction.⁵ Where those outside a nation’s borders addressed such concerns, it was often regarded as a matter of charity, for example, aid donations from developed countries to developing ones, except in cases of rectification or reparation for historical injustices. This raises the question: Do we have a moral responsibility to fight extreme poverty both within and outside our borders beyond the lens of charity and rectification?⁶ Also, who should be responsible for ensuring the elimination of extreme poverty?

Oruka, who can be regarded as a radical egalitarian thinks that we do have a moral responsibility to fight an extreme form of poverty. In his masterpiece, *Practical Philosophy: In Search of an Ethical Minimum*, Oruka (1997: 84) set out to establish what he calls “a principle that would form a base for an ethics that can help *ensure the practice of global justice* among the inhabitants of the globe regardless of the question of racial or geographical origins and political affiliations.” Oruka having pondered the degrading effects of poverty on the human population in his native Kenya and beyond, embarked on an intellectual journey of searching for an ‘ethical minimum’ that can guarantee the ‘right to a human minimum’ for the world’s poor. While the ‘ethical minimum’ is a principle that makes it “*ethically obligatory* for affluent nations to aid poor ones as an unqualified moral duty for

⁴ This sentiment is still rife today, although to a lesser degree. Individuals still think that their primary moral obligations or duties lie first with those within their immediate community before extending to those outside their societal boundaries. For example, see David Bilchitz, *Poverty and Fundamental Rights: The Justification and Enforcement of Socio-Economic Rights* (2007: 58, 69). See also Richard Wasserstrom, *Lawyers as Professionals: Some Moral Issues* (1975: 1-24); Innocent I. Asouzu, *The Method and Principles of Complementary Reflection in and Beyond African Philosophy* (Calabar: University of Calabar Press: 2004).

⁵ Cf. Garrett Cullity, *International Aid and the Scope of Kindness* (1994: 123).

⁶ ‘Extreme poverty’ as used in this dissertation denotes a state of abject poverty characterized by the absence of economic, social, material, and psychological well-being. Odera Oruka (1997: 87) describes a person living under this condition as lacking “the very minimum necessary for a decent definition of human being.”

humanity, and for the latter to receive such aid without feeling a sense of *self-pity*,” (ibid.) the *human minimum* is a morally acceptable standard of life that should be guaranteed to all persons irrespective of their nationality; it is the foundation of human dignity, rationality, and self-awareness. For Oruka (ibid.: 87), “For all human beings to function with a significant degree of rationality and self-awareness, they need a certain minimum amount of physical security, health care and subsistence,” and he refers to this minimum amount as the ‘*human minimum*’. The *human minimum* in Oruka’s conceptualisation of poverty is the threshold necessary for one to qualify as a human being. Anyone whose economic condition and social existence fall below the *human minimum* threshold of existence cannot qualify to be called a – moral – person. This is because such persons are incapable of acting rationally as self-conscious beings. The latter is due to the negative psychological effects of extreme poverty on both the physical and mental well-being of the poor.

In the absence of a *human minimum*,⁷ what we have is no longer a rational – and moral – human being with the capacity for moral responsibility, but what Oruka (ibid.: 87) calls “a brute or a human vegetable.”. Perhaps this is why David Bilchitz (2007: 208) is also of the position that “there is none so vulnerable as those who lack basic shelter, food, water, and health care.” Oruka’s view of what it means to be a moral person is shared by James Rachels’ conception of a ‘conscientious moral agent’. Rachels’ (2003: 14-15) minimum conception of morality as “at the very least, the effort to guide one’s conduct by reason...while giving equal weight to the interests of each individual who will be affected by what one does,” and a ‘conscientious moral agent’ as “someone who is concerned *impartially* [emphasis mine] with the interests of everyone affected by what he or she does” shows that in the absence of the capacity to act rationally due to socio-economic impediments, like poverty, such individuals cannot be said to be responsible moral agents. Such persons lack the rational capacity to think in moral terms because they are driven by the basic instincts of self-preservation. Hence, in seeking to preserve themselves, they care less about morality both on matters of personal conduct and fair negotiation in matters of social, political, and economic cooperation.

Furthermore, Oruka (ibid.: 86) argues that *the right to a human minimum* is an ‘inherent right of persons’. For Oruka (ibid.), “They are ‘inherent’ because, for any individual to be able to exercise the function of a person (the function of being a capable moral agent), he needs at least the fulfilment of these rights as a necessary condition.” Thus, he conceptualises *the right to a human minimum* as a fundamental moral right that other rights cannot override. This categorisation of those who lack the

⁷ Martha Nussbaum’s ten Central Capabilities aimed at securing for the individual, a life worthy of human dignity, is a similar example of what can best be described as *the human minimum*. See Martha C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (2011: 32-34).

‘human minimum’ or who live in extreme poverty as ‘non-moral agents’ by Oruka raises some moral questions. One such question borders on the possibility of holding those who lack ‘the minimum necessary for a decent definition of a human being’ morally responsible for their – immoral – actions. It further raises concern about the possibility of those who fall within the aforementioned category deliberately exploiting their moral category to engage in immoral acts. However, that is beyond the scope of this research.

The problem of this research is as follows: Although the question of morality is as old as philosophical investigation, its implications for individuals and society in the context of burden-bearing for the eradication of extreme poverty are yet to receive adequate attention and in-depth analysis. In the extant body of literature with extreme poverty or poverty generally, as the subject matter of discussion, research has mostly centred on its political and social impacts – or negative consequences of poverty – on society.⁸ Despite its importance in the global poverty debate, the moral obligation that extreme poverty imposes on different members of society has received little attention. The few discussions found in the works of scholars like Oruka (1997), Amartya Sen (1979, 1983, 1985, 1992, 1999), Peter Singer (1972, 2002, 2009), Bilchitz (2007), Nicholas M. Odhiambo (2009), Moses Kwadzo (2015), Hennie Lötter (2011), M. T. Magombeyi and N. M. Odhiambo (2018), and Jonathan Chimakonam (2020a, 2020b, 2021), focus mostly on the negative impact poverty has on individual lives, the causes of poverty, different approaches to fighting poverty, and the general question of obligation to the poor by individuals and the state or society, without addressing the degree of such obligations by the different segments of society. The latter aspect which yearns for attention will constitute the primary focus of this research.

Chimakonam is one of the few African philosophers who have attempted to address the problem of extreme poverty from a moral perspective. Chimakonam begins by calling out the politicisation of the problem by politicians and international organisations. This is evident in the failed moral obligation by different segments of society – governments, global institutions, politicians, etc. – to live up to their responsibility to the poor. According to Chimakonam (2021: 203), “It is immoral for those saddled with the responsibility of developing public resources into programmes that can reduce or eradicate poverty in their countries or in a foreign country not to do so creditably for selfish reasons.” Chimakonam’s analysis highlights how politicisation often leads to failure to achieve concrete solutions in the fight against extreme poverty. This failure leads to an assault on the human

⁸ Adesiyun Olusegun Israel (2014: 35) describes a similar situation where poverty research is primarily focused on economic growth at the expense of its contribution to other areas of society. See A. O. Olusegun, *Impact of Foreign Direct Investment on Poverty Reduction in Nigeria, (1980-2009)*, *Journal of Economics and Sustainable Development*, vol. 5, no. 20 (2014: 34-45).

dignity of the poor. For this reason, “the actions or inactions of those who failed in their commitment to take concrete steps to address the problem are morally condemnable” (ibid.: 204). Building on Oruka’s *human minimum* principle, Chimakonam (2020b: 5160-519) develops the Human Minimum Measure (HMM) which takes into consideration both the physical and psychological aspects of deprivation as a comprehensive way of understanding/fighting the problem of poverty. However, while Chimakonam’s contributions are remarkable, his approach fails due to its distribution of equal moral responsibility to the non-poor. I will establish why the equal responsibility model is problematic in the fight against extreme poverty in Chapter 5 of this research.

Despite being the region affected the most by the poverty pandemic, Africa has had fewer researchers who are committed to eliminating the problem of extreme poverty in the continent. This paucity of poverty research on Africa by Africans is further affirmed by Chimakonam (2021: 205; cf. Israel 2014: 35), who describes the situation as “worrisome.” The closest systematic moral articulation of a society’s moral obligation to eradicate extreme poverty as an existential fact in Africa and beyond received its attention in the works of Oruka and Chimakonam discussed above. Thus, an investigation into the moral obligation that extreme poverty imposes on members of the human community goes beyond looking at an area in the poverty research that has received little attention, to constitute a significant philosophical contribution to extant research in the fight against extreme poverty in Africa and beyond from a moral perspective.

Extreme poverty may be considered an existential threat, hence the centrality of mobilising all theoretical and practical philosophical tools to address its negative impacts on society. Oruka (1997: 100) understands the severity of the challenges posed by extreme poverty in the human community and the need for philosophy – and philosophers – to intervene and rightly aver that:

Philosophers cannot afford the luxury of restricting themselves only to those functions in which they search for truth and communicate with themselves as philosophers. If they are to contribute to the future of the human race, then they need to place the moral mission of their profession above the other missions.

The moral mission Oruka refers to in the above paragraph is the moral obligation to eradicate extreme poverty. By investigating the moral implications of Oruka’s *human minimum* as an approach to tackling the challenges of extreme poverty in Africa, this research becomes a direct response to Oruka’s call; the call to make philosophy more practical and responsive to the immediate needs of human beings. This is done to achieve what Oruka (ibid.: 101) calls “The *elimination of world poverty*” as a “practical necessity” for humankind. For Oruka (ibid.: 102-103), the elimination of world poverty is not just a practical necessity but a moral duty for all philosophers. Furthermore, an investigation into

the moral implications of working for the attainment of an ethical minimum for humanity also entails deciding who should bear the – greater – burden – if any – of the responsibility to eliminate extreme poverty both locally and globally.

Before addressing some of the problems with Oruka’s approach to fighting extreme poverty in Africa, I think we should first establish that, as philosophers, we do indeed have a legitimate business with the existential problem of poverty. The latter necessitates the question: What justifies philosophy’s concern for the problem of poverty? Shouldn’t the problem of poverty be left to economists, politicians, and policymakers? Or, is there a moral dimension to poverty whose violations evokes a sense of philosophical concern? To these questions, Daniel Putnam provides an insightful basis for philosophy’s concern with the problem of poverty. According to Putnam (2020: 43), “[I]n asking what poverty is, we are also asking what it is to be disadvantaged in a sense that generates moral reasons.” What this means is that poverty when subjected to philosophical scrutiny generates moralised notions of harm, socio-economic and socio-political exclusion, disadvantage, injustice, human rights violations, and other negative sentiments. This makes the deprivations of poverty relevant to any society in a moralised sense; it is this relevance that gives rise to the moral sentiments of obligation to fight poverty, especially its extreme form as it currently exists in Africa. The fact that poverty robs the poor of their human dignity and self-respect makes it an ethical problem that philosophers cannot ignore.

Expanding the analysis further on what makes poverty a philosophical problem and why we have a moral obligation to fight it, I share Chimakonam’s (2019: 146) justification which argues that “[i]t is a problem primarily because poverty devalues humanity in an individual. It is difficult to be poor and still be fully human with dignity.” In other words, “poverty robs victims of their human dignity” (Chimakonam 2021: 202). This further provides the basis for a moral obligation to fight extreme poverty in Africa and globally. If poverty devalues a person’s humanity, and as Oruka (1997: 88) argues, strips them of the conditions necessary for a decent definition of a person, or denies the poor the status of their personhood within the human community, then our common humanity imposes a moral obligation on us as philosophers to be concerned with the fight against extreme poverty to restore the dignity of other members of the human collective.

To successfully investigate the moral implications of answering Oruka’s call to enforce the *human minimum*, we must address some relevant questions that motivate this research. What are some of the moral implications of ensuring that a society attains the ‘human minimum’ as an approach to fighting extreme poverty? Furthermore, who has the moral responsibility for ensuring the attainment

of the ‘human minimum’ between the government and individual members of society? These questions constitute the main motivation for my philosophical investigation into the moral implications of Oruka’s *human minimum* poverty threshold on Africa’s fight against extreme poverty. I hope that the findings of this research will not only motivate collective action to tackle extreme poverty in its various dimensions by rightfully obligating moral responsibility but will also broaden our understanding of the different contexts of poverty. The goal is to address the problem of extreme poverty in an African context using Oruka’s *human minimum* as a philosophical principle.

Oruka (ibid.: 87) argues that the right to ensure the attainment of the *human minimum* rests on the shoulders of every moral agent—particularly those who live above the extreme poverty line. This is expressed in the following statement: “This obligation requires that every moral agent has it as a duty to ensure the enforcement of the right to human minimum” (ibid.). Oruka (ibid.: 88) describes the right to the *human minimum* as an ‘absolute right’ whose enforcement, no other right of persons can justifiably compromise. There is thus the sense in which the right to be provided for as a poor person by one’s society is justified and viewed as a legitimate demand (see Bilchitz 2007: 236). Oruka’s position that every moral person has the right to ensure – through enforcement – *the right to the human minimum* for the extremely poor has two moral implications. Firstly, it places equal moral responsibility to ensure the attainment of the *human minimum* on every individual above the *human minimum* threshold, ignoring their economic differences and inequalities. Secondly, it fails to establish how much moral responsibility those who are situated a little above the *human minimum* threshold should bear in ensuring that those below the threshold get above the line, taking into cognisance the possibility of them slipping below the threshold by fulfilling such responsibilities.

Oruka failed to adequately address who should bear the greater moral burden of ensuring the enforcement of the *human minimum*. He failed to take into consideration the economic differences of those who qualify as moral persons capable of fruitfully contributing to the elimination of extreme poverty. Against this backdrop, this research aims to establish why it is morally problematic and economically counterproductive to place equal moral responsibility to ensure the implementation of the *human minimum* or the elimination of extreme poverty on all moral agents above the *human minimum* threshold. I will demonstrate why ignoring the economic differences – and inequalities – of those who qualify as moral agents in Oruka’s conceptualisation of extreme poverty, particularly in continental Africa, risks plunging more of those who live a little above the *human minimum* threshold into poverty due to their economic insufficiency.

After distinguishing the economic inequalities of those who qualify as moral agents in Oruka's moral framework, I will argue that based on the existent disparities, those with more economic resources – for example, governments, non-governmental/nonprofit organisations, rich individuals, and those adequately situated above the human minimum threshold – should bear a greater moral responsibility in ensuring the attainment of the right to *the human minimum*. I further argue that obligating greater responsibility on the government, rich private individuals, etc., matters more in the context of the fight against extreme poverty in Africa because equal moral responsibility on all moral agents is disadvantageous to the poor in light of the economic disparities that exist among the non-poor population. This approach is based on the view that the current failures in the fight against extreme poverty are due to the blanket responsibility models. The latter, due to its demand for equal responsibility from those categorised as non-poor, plunge those marginally situated above the poverty line into extreme poverty. This makes Oruka's approach problematic and economically counterproductive. My argument is informed by the thinking that if helping another human being get to the *human minimum* threshold will render the helper morally and economically worse off, then such an act fails both as a duty and as an end. It fails because its end is not achieved and its duty to the self is ignored.⁹ Demanding greater responsibility from the rich, I argue, is a prerequisite for success in attaining the *human minimum*. Attaining the *human minimum* is not just necessary for restoring the human dignity of the poor and ending their sufferings, but is also the surest pathway to attaining a fair and peaceful society.

This research will be grounded in the ethical framework of complementarity as articulated by Innocent I. Asouzu. In the complementary ethical framework, “ethics and morality do not concern themselves solely with right and wrong actions or with good and bad conducts but primarily also with the joy and sadness of human action” (Asouzu 2004: 354, 2022a: 121). Under the complementary ethical framework, the morality of an action is not just tied to the notion of rightness, but also to the joy or positive animation that comes with carrying out a right action.¹⁰ If an act leaves an agent morally worse off, even if the act is morally right, then such an act fails to promote the joy of being¹¹ and is

⁹ Anne Schwenkenbecher has presented a similar analysis of moral responsibility to perform certain duties in collective action cases. For Schwenkenbecher (2014: 64-65), individuals cannot be held morally responsible for failing to act on things that are outside their control. This is especially justified – for some – if such actions are not likely to achieve the desired outcome. See Anne Schwenkenbecher, *Joint Moral Duties*, *Midwest Studies In Philosophy*, vol. 38, no. 1 (2014: 58-74). See also Robert E. Goodin, *Demandingness as a Virtue*, *Journal of Ethics*, vol. 13, no. 1 (2009: 1–13).

¹⁰ Complementary ethics sharply contrast with ethical theories like utilitarianism. For example, while utilitarians are concerned with promoting the greatest happiness for the greatest number of people, complementary ethics prioritizes happiness for each individual as a moral subject.

¹¹ Jonathan O. Chimakonam and L. Uchenna Ogbonnaya (2022: 61) posits that the concept of the joy of being ought to be, arguably, “the permanent foundation for moral actions and goodness” in Innocent Asouzu's complementary ethics.

thus, morally inauthentic. Moral inauthenticity here entails the insensitivity of a morally right act to the joy – or moral conviction – of the acting agent. Patrick Effiong Ben (2022: 91) offers a succinct definition of complementary ethics as “an ethical system that emphasizes upholding the imperatives establishing human actions to promote the joy of being and the common good.” When this definition is applied to the context of the poverty debate, it becomes pellucid that while it may be morally right for people who live marginally above the extreme poverty threshold to contribute to the fight against extreme poverty, such contributions fail to promote the joy of being due to its potential of leaving the contributors economically worse off. Hence why the relevance of a complementary ethical framework in grounding my arguments in this dissertation.

This dissertation is made up of five chapters. The first chapter offers a detailed background to this research, the methodology that will guide its investigation of the subject matter it raises, and finally, the original contribution that this research makes to the extant body of literature on ethics and poverty.

In Chapter Two of this research, I will consider the notion of poverty and its various dimensions. Employing the method of critical analysis, I will first expose the various conceptions of poverty and what they mean to individuals and society. After considering the various notions of poverty, I will proceed to discuss the various dimensions of poverty as presented by experts, think tanks, governments, and philosophers. I then show the question that is raised by the various dimensions of poverty’s existence in understanding the problem of poverty.

In Chapter Three, I critically discuss Oruka’s conceptualisation of poverty and foreign aid. I expose how this conceptualisation lays the foundation for his principle of a ‘human minimum’ threshold in the fight against extreme poverty. I also consider what is meant by a ‘human minimum’ as a moral principle in the philosophy of poverty. I then expose some historical conceptions of poverty across different times and its attendant implications for the attainment of the *human minimum* in Africa. Lastly, I critique the analysis of poverty from a socio-economic perspective as a fundamental right, and its eradication as being the duty of every established government.

In Chapter Four, I will expose what qualifies a stage of poverty as ‘extreme’ and what it means for society. I will also consider the notion of extreme poverty in an African context by contextualising the challenges of poverty as they affect different societies and groups. Lastly, I will argue that such contextualisations provide a better understanding of the poverty challenges in different societies, creating a fertile ground for targeted and effective solutions. The above chapters are primarily focused on the articulation of the problem.

Chapter Five will be focused on the implications of the challenges of extreme poverty discussed in the previous chapters. In Chapter Five, I will apply critical analysis and the conversational method¹² to consider what are some of the moral implications of ensuring that a society attains a ‘human minimum’ as an approach to fighting extreme poverty. I will further consider the question of who should bear a greater moral responsibility for ensuring the attainment of a ‘human minimum’ between the government and individual members of society, particularly, those who are just a little above the *human minimum* threshold. I will establish why this research, beyond clarifying the moral implications of Oruka’s principle for fighting extreme poverty, offers a novel approach to motivating responsibility to tackle the debilitating effects of extreme poverty not just in Africa, but globally. Finally, I will conclude by anticipating what could constitute some common concerns for my position in the form of objections and responses.

1.2. Research Methodology

The first methodology that will guide this research is that of textual analysis and interpretation, which is a common approach adopted by researchers in the humanities. Thus, extant relevant literature in the form of textbooks, journal articles, policy papers from professional think tanks and government sources, official reports, etc., that are related to ethics and poverty that constitute the primary focus of this research will be consulted and adequately engaged. Accordingly, relevant sources both within and outside academia, from African literature in the areas of ethics, poverty, human and international development, etc., will be employed to investigate the moral implications of the *human minimum* approach as a principle of fighting extreme poverty in Africa.

Two other methods that will be employed are critical analysis and the conversational method. The method of critical analysis will be used to explicate and critically analyse Oruka’s idea of the ‘human minimum’ for analytical clarity and possible criticisms. It will also help in exposing the foundational motivations for Oruka’s thinking about a global moral obligation to eradicate extreme poverty. The method of critical analysis is relevant to primarily text-based research as it helps in the deconstruction – or unpacking – and reconstruction – or repacking – of an author’s ideas for easy understanding. Critical analysis is also known as critical discourse analysis (CDA). Norman Fairclough (1995: 87) defines critical discourse analysis (CDA) as seeking to “establish connections

¹² The conversational method or conversationalism involves a formal procedure for assessing the relationships of opposed variables, in which thoughts are shuffled through disjunctive and conjunctive modes to constantly recreate fresh thesis and anti-thesis each time at a higher level of discourse, without the expectation of a synthesis. For a detailed discussion, see J. Chimakonam (2017a, 11-33; 2017b, 114-130).

between properties of texts, features of discourse practice (text production, consumption and distribution), and wider sociocultural practice.” For Tebogo Mogashoa (2014: 106), “Critical discourse analysis can be seen as aiming to critically investigate issues of related texts...analysis is something we do when we make judgements about the value and truthfulness of texts or conversations as well as relevant documents.” Thus, for a better understanding of the issues surrounding extreme poverty and its various dimensions vis-à-vis Oruka’s motivation to eliminate it, critical analysis will be a useful philosophical tool in the course of this research.

The third method that will guide this research is the conversational method. The conversational method will primarily be employed to address moral implications raised by Oruka’s categorisation of moral persons and the global moral obligation to enforce the *human minimum*. According to Chimakonam (2017a: 17), “the conversational method represents a higher sophistication of portions of the Socratic Method.” As a philosophical method, “[C]onversationalism is a formal procedure for assessing the relationships of opposed variables, in which thoughts are shuffled through disjunctive and conjunctive modes to constantly recreate fresh thesis and anti-thesis each time at a higher level of discourse, without the expectation of the synthesis” (Chimakonam 2017b: 121). The conversational method will be applied to the question of who should be responsible for ensuring the enforcement of *the right to a human minimum* in a society and what implications arise thereto for the idea of moral obligation. This will take the form of a conversation between different moral positions and thinkers on the subject of moral responsibility to the extreme poor.

1.3. Original Contribution to Knowledge

This research is expected to make the following contributions to knowledge in the areas of ethics and poverty studies: Firstly, an original contribution to the debate on how to tackle extreme poverty both within Africa and in a global context through the appropriate distribution of the burden of moral obligation. Secondly, the idea of the ‘human minimum’ is an underexplored approach in the context of the global poverty debate. My employment of this approach will make two significant contributions: (1) Providing clarity on the inclusivity of the ‘human minimum’ as an approach to poverty eradication, and (2) Responding to the question of whom – and what amount – should bear the moral responsibility of ensuring that society attains the *human minimum* through the contextualisation of the challenges of poverty amongst those who qualify as moral persons in Oruka’s moral conception.

Furthermore, to the best of my knowledge, this research will present the first systematic articulation of the moral implications of obligating responsibility for the elimination of extreme poverty from Oruka's *human minimum* framework. In offering a detailed articulation and moral critique of Oruka's principle of *the right to a human minimum*, this research will not just contribute to existing debates and approaches to fighting extreme poverty, but will also contribute by opening up new vistas for discourses on moral thinking about poverty.

Chapter 2.

2.1. The Notion of Poverty and its Dimensions

Poverty is a popular term in today's globalised world. The challenges posed by poverty on the human collective are so pervasive that since the dawn of history, no society has been able to escape its presence in one dimension or the other. Its negative effects on its victims, some of which Seipel (2003: 191), Oruka (1997: 87), Lötter (2011: 9), and Thomas Pogge (2005a: 182-183) identifies as indignities, hunger, family disintegration, violence, disease, and ultimately death in some cases, lend credence to the havoc that poverty brings to the life of its victims. Against this backdrop, critically analysing what it means to be poor, the various dimensions of poverty's existence, the problems with current approaches to defining/conceptualising poverty, especially in its extreme form, and pondering new ways of looking at the problem with these conceptualisations from an African perspective becomes imperative and shall constitute the subject matter of this chapter. To achieve this, I shall attempt to provide an accurate account of the various conceptualisations of poverty and the associated problems. I shall expose the commonalities in these conceptions and show where they diverge.

In the paragraphs that follow, I will consider the notion of poverty and its various conceptualisations across the board. Employing the method of critical analysis, I will expose the various conceptions of poverty and what they mean to individuals and societies. The challenges of conceptualising poverty in itself as an existential threat to the human community will be dutifully discussed in this section. After considering the various conceptualisations of poverty, I will proceed to discuss the various dimensions of poverty as presented by experts, governments, think tanks, and philosophers. Lastly, I will show the question that is raised by the various dimensions of poverty's existence in understanding the problem of poverty.

Let us first consider what is meant by poverty across the board. The notion of poverty may be defined in various ways. To Valentin Beck et al. (2020: 3), "Poverty may be defined broadly as an economic deficiency that causes deprivations in well-being." For Oruka (1997: 87), it is the absence of the *human minimum*; for Chimakonam (2020a: 105; 2020b: 516), it goes beyond monetary income and social exclusion to encapsulate a state of physical and psychological deprivation; for Jonathan Wolff (2020: 23) and Peter Saunders (2004: 1), it is the lack of the financial resources to meet one's defined set of needs; for Gerald Nyasulu (2010: 155), "poverty is conditions that make it impossible to exercise an inherent trait to better oneself" and thus constitutes a violation of human rights; for Homi Kharas and Meagan Dooley (2022: 4), "poverty is measured as the number of people living below

\$1.90 per person per day (headcount poverty).”¹³ From these definitions, I am inclined to adopt Chimakonam’s definition due to its comprehensive conceptualisation of the nature of deprivation. Most importantly, Chimakonam’s definition reflects the multidimensional nature of poverty as it currently exists in Africa today. As varied as these definitions are, so also is what is taken into account when defining the varying deprivations that characterise poverty. However, the most common definition of poverty captures it as “the state of human deprivation.”¹⁴ What these deprivations are is not explicitly captured. Philosophers, economists, and development experts are then left with the task of figuring out what should feature as a common ingredient in these deprivations.

Given the complexity of the nature of poverty-related deprivations, it would be pertinent to consider some of the factors that go into the conceptualisation and definition of poverty. What is the first thing that comes to mind when we talk about poverty? How do economists, development experts, think tanks, philosophers, and governments think about poverty? What factors influence their idea of poverty and who is considered to be poor? Are people intrinsically poor or as compared to others? These and other questions are important to the poverty debate. Understanding the social, economic, political, and environmental conditions that qualify an individual or a group to be characterised as poor – or deprived – will provide useful insights into tackling the problem of poverty itself. In the next section, I delve into these factors that influence the various conceptualisations and definitions of poverty.

2.2. Conceptualising Poverty

Conceptualising poverty is as difficult as eliminating the problem itself. There are various ways of conceptualising poverty depending on who is conceptualising it, or on what poverty means to the individual or group. The way poverty is defined also influences the kind of interventions that are directed toward tackling the problem. It is in this sense that Nyasulu (2010: 147) avers that when a political definition is assigned to poverty, it “necessitates political interventions to dealing with poverty. Similarly, economic definitions inevitably lead to economic interventions.” Thus, the meaning that is attached to the phenomenon of poverty is as important as the will to solve the problem

¹³ These definitions are not exhaustive. Gerald Nyasulu (2010: 149-154), for example, has identified other forms of definitions which are: Statistical definitions, expert-derived definitions, and ordinary people-derived definitions.

¹⁴ Seipel has pointed out that although poverty is commonly agreed to involve human deprivation, there is little agreement on what count as deprivation in different countries. See M. M. O. Seipel (2003: 191-192).

itself as it indirectly determines the kind of outcomes that poverty reduction/elimination policies will take.

When we ask the question ‘what is poverty?’, for Robert Chambers (2006: 4), we are asking the wrong question as it – the question – reflects more of the reality of the development professionals than that of the poor people. In other words, it carries the views of the non-poor as opposed to that of the poor. This has led to what Saunders (2004: 1) calls “a severe credibility crisis” in statistical estimates of poverty. Issues with conceptualisation, beyond reflecting vested socioeconomic and socio-political interests, are sometimes a reflection of the lack of an epistemic – and methodological – consensus among stakeholders in the poverty debate. This problem of conceptualising poverty is highlighted by Seipel (2003: 192) who avers: “A wide range of indicators have been developed and used by different countries to measure poverty. To no surprise, use of different indicators has produced different results.” And, “these indicators,” Seipel (ibid.) adds, “usually reflect the ideologies of the prevailing powers of that society; thus the effort to define poverty is largely a political rather than an empirical activity.” Consequently, for Nyasulu (2010: 148):

It follows then that the definitions of poverty and the subsequent poverty alleviation strategies that flow from them have not always been in the interest of the poor themselves but rather have operated in the interests of the regimes and organisations purporting to be involved in poverty alleviation.

The above lack of consensus and the potential influences of personal political and economic biases in defining poverty reflects the fact that when it comes to conceptualising – or measuring – poverty, what we search for is most likely what will determine our outcome. That is, the particular aspect of deprivation targeted and included by the conceptualisation is what will be reflected in the result.

Chambers makes a similar point. For Chambers (2006: 3), when we talk about poverty, “What it is taken to mean depends on who asks the question, how it is understood, and who responds.” Chambers identifies five different clusters of what is meant when we talk about poverty. There are; (1) income-poverty or consumption-poverty, (2) material lack or want,¹⁵ (3) capability deprivation,¹⁶ (4) multi-dimensional deprivation, and (5) development as good change or wellbeing¹⁷ (ibid.). Similar to Seipel’s point, Chambers (ibid.) argues that the different conceptualisations of the meanings of poverty are “expressions of ‘our’ [development professionals] education, training, mindsets, experiences and

¹⁵ *Material lack or want*, for Chambers (2006: 3), includes a lack of wealth and a lack of other tangible assets such as shelter, clothing, furniture, personal means of transport, radios or television, etc.

¹⁶ This is derived from Amartya Sen’s notion of capability deprivation which encapsulates what an individual can or cannot do, or what an individual can or cannot be.

¹⁷ This focuses on the quality of individual lives and the movement from a state of illbeing to wellbeing.

reflections. They reflect our power, as non-poor people, to make definitions according to our perceptions” (see also Narayan et al. 2000: 2). Chambers’ point, here, is that the way poverty is conceptualised is majorly influenced by the perceptions of the non-poor. And these different conceptualisations stem from the place of abstraction that tends to overlook the views of the object of these conceptualisations—the poor.¹⁸ This view of poverty from the perspective of the non-poor – or the outsider – raises questions about whose reality counts in the conceptualisation of poverty. Is it the reality of the development professionals, governments, think tanks, and non-governmental organisations, or that of the poor people who directly experience poverty as their lived experiences?

Highlighting the political turn of the debate, Chimakonam (2021: 202) raises an important question regarding the aims of poverty reduction policies themselves thus: “[A]re the various national and international efforts at fighting poverty in Africa politicised?” Chimakonam’s question underscores the skeptical attitude of some individuals regarding the genuine intentions of governments and international aid organisations when it comes to the elimination of extreme poverty in the poorest regions of the world.¹⁹ The preceding skeptical attitude towards the genuine intentions of actors in the poverty reduction debate is spurred by the fact that when it comes to what is said and what is done by the various institutions, “Discussions on the topic seem to take different directions in policy and action” (ibid.: 201). This sentiment is also shared by Nyasulu (2010: 154) who posits that “Many poverty alleviation program evaluation reports are awash with praises and statistics claiming unparalleled success” while “[t]he reality on the ground is that when a poverty alleviation program comes to an end, so do the benefits of the program.” There is also the conspiratorial aspect that blames political actors and institutions for weaponising poverty as a means of political control (Chimakonam 2021: 205). If anything, these problems that arise in conceptualising poverty expose the picture of a lack of agreement, on what poverty entails, what conditions are responsible for its existence, and what are the most effective ways of fighting it.

Also, there is the conceptualisation of poverty as the lack of ‘substantive freedoms’ and ‘capability deprivation’ advanced by thinkers like Sen (1979, 1983, 1985, 1992, 1999), Martha Nussbaum (1997, 2011), and Rod Hick (2014). For Sen (1999: 10), substantive freedoms are not just essential and constitutive of “the primary ends of development, they are also among its principal

¹⁸ Chambers (2006: 4) describes the poor as people who live in bad conditions that are marginalised, vulnerable, excluded or deprived.

¹⁹ The politicization of poverty is a serious issue in conceptualizing both actions and inactions regarding the elimination of extreme poverty in Africa. Chimakonam (2021: 207-213) identifies three hypothesis that undergird views on the politicization of poverty—neo-colonialism, dictatorship, and ineptitude.

means.” That is, they are indispensable to development in whatever form—be it social, economic, or political. Sen (ibid.: 4), explaining how unfreedom leads to poverty argues:

Sometimes the lack of substantive freedoms relates directly to economic poverty, which robs people of the freedom to satisfy hunger, or to achieve sufficient nutrition, or to obtain remedies for treatable illnesses, or the opportunity to be adequately clothed or sheltered, or to enjoy clean water or sanitary facilities.

Poverty and the lack of access to adequate economic opportunities for social mobility are here seen as being the major sources of unfreedom; they constitute impediments to substantive participation in the social, political, and economic life of one’s society. This lack of freedoms extends to other areas like the lack of access to adequate public facilities and proper health care for the sick, effective institutions for the resolution of conflict to maintain law and order necessary for leading a life of value, repression of civil liberties, political exclusion, basic education, etc. In Sen’s conceptualisation of deprivation, the absence of these socio-political resources in one’s life contributes to poverty and impedes the overall development of society. Freedom is thus central to Sen’s notion of development. The free agency of individuals is important to achieving economic development which is capable of pulling people out of extreme poverty because as Sen (ibid.) argues, “Not only is free agency itself a ‘constitutive’ part of development, it also contributes to the strengthening of free agencies of other kinds.” For example, social and political agency. However, the problem with this conceptualisation is that among other limitations, it fails to specify the roles – if any – of private and non-governmental institutions in the attainment of the said freedom to achieve development.

Furthermore, there is the ‘relativist’ or ‘dynamic’ conception of poverty advanced by thinkers like Peter Townsend. According to the relativist conceptualisation of poverty, “both ‘poverty’ and ‘subsistence’ are relative concepts and...can only be defined in relation to the material and emotional resources available at a particular time to the members either of a particular society or different societies” (Townsend 2010: 85-86). That is, “poverty must be understood as a case of deprivation relative to wider society” (Hick 2014: 297) or the inability to fully participate in the social life of the society one belongs. Although this inability to fully participate, in Townsend’s conceptualisation, ultimately stem from the lack of monetary income (Godinot and Walker 2020: 265). Townsend’s relative conceptualisation views poverty as being dynamic and being better understood in the context of the web of relationships that surrounds the individual. From her family, community, environment, and social conditions, to resources available to society. Thus, “poverty should be understood as occurring when people’s resources fell below levels necessary to enable to (sic) them to participate in widely-accepted living standards and customs within society” (Hick 2014: 297). Sen (1983: 155)

further adds that the relativist conceptualisation of poverty views deprivation as “a person or a household being able to achieve less than what others in that society do.” Wolff (2020: 29) describes this as “essentially the idea of not having enough to ‘fit in’ by doing what is normally expected or encouraged.” Here, poverty is presented from the perspective of what an individual lacks when compared to the others within the group they find themselves in. The problem with this relativist conception is that it fails to capture the deprivations of poverty intrinsically as a negative socio-economic condition.²⁰ What this means is that such individuals or households, who characteristically lack the basic means of leading a decent life can be classified as being better off should they move into a society where the socio-economic conditions of people there are worse than that of people in their current society. This is problematic because even within a particular society, absolute poverty may exist in a way that defies comparison with other members of the same society.

Another dimension to the relativist conceptualisation of poverty is that Putnam articulates as ‘Poverty as a Social Relation’ (PASR). According to Putnam’s (2020: 45) conceptualisation of poverty, an individual can be said to be in poverty if they are “systematically susceptible to losing access to valuable interpersonal relationships or being made party to negative interpersonal relationships in virtue of lacking income or wealth.” This, in Putnam’s conception, best captures the state or sufficient condition of living in poverty. Putnam (ibid.) goes further to clarify:

To genuinely occupy the social position of being in poverty, the relational disadvantages one suffers due to lack of resources must track the subject through different areas of social life over an extended period of time: employment, commerce, public space, and so on.

The point Putnam is trying to make in the above passage is that one cannot be said to be poor simply because one happens to find themselves in a situation defined by negative social relationships that are caused by a temporal lack of access to one’s resources, for example, being a victim of theft, suspension, etc. Thus, PASR simply entails suffering relational disadvantages often caused by the lack of resources—particularly, actual income or wealth. Individuals, in this sense, occupy the position of poverty, either in absolute or relative terms to some comparison group, by lacking the resources necessary to create and sustain positive social relationships.

The last conceptualization that I will consider in this research is the ‘opportunities-based conceptualisation’ of poverty articulated by Chimakonam (2020b). Under this model, poverty is conceptualised as encapsulating both the physical and psychological aspects of deprivation, where

²⁰ Sen has criticized Townsend’s relativist conceptualization as being ‘ad hoc’ and favours an absolutist conceptualization of poverty. See Amartya Sen, *Poor, Relatively Speaking* (1983: 153).

deprivation of the former has negative effects on the mind that leads to the latter. The deprivations of individuals, here, are studied and understood from a comprehensive perspective. Analysing the opportunities-based conceptualisation of poverty, Chimakonam (2020b: 516) states that:

It is possible that different people would conceive it [poverty] differently depending on how it affects them. The views of a poor woman in the Congo regarding what poverty entails may not be the same as the views of a poor woman in Germany. A poor woman in the Congo might include lack of security and access to quality health care in her definition of poverty; her counterpart in Germany might not. But one thing that may be common between the two is that poverty affects not just their physical wellbeing but their psychological wellbeing as well.

In the paragraph above, Chimakonam draws our attention to the diversity of deprivations that exist in different societies and regions of the world and where they coalesce—their negative effects on the physical and psychological aspects of well-being. In the presence of diversities, opportunities for decent income and self-development to escape extreme poverty in its different dimensions become important. Most poverty conceptualizations by Western scholars discussed above do not take this into account. They focus mostly on the physical/monetary aspects of deprivation. This emphasis on the need to take into account the psychological effects of physical deprivation on the well-being of the poor by Chimakonam brings a distinctive approach to the poverty debate. This diversity/unequal distribution of opportunities further demonstrates why an equal model of moral responsibility in the fight against extreme poverty is insensitive to economic disparities between individuals, states, and regions.

The above socio-economic and socio-political influences on the conceptualisation of poverty mean that an effective conceptualisation of poverty must reflect the diversity of not just interested actors in the poverty debate, but possible outcomes for the victims of poverty, and the diversity of socio-economic and political realities in different regions of the world. This also means that there is an implication for any approach adopted in conceptualising and fighting poverty. Furthermore, although the different conceptualisations considered above provide useful frameworks for understanding the state of deprivations that characterise poverty, they still fail to provide a reasonably objective standard of determining what it means to be poor as an individual, or group. They also fail to consider the different facets of deprivation. In other words, they fail to provide a foundational comprehensive understanding – and exposure – of the different dimensions of deprivation. For example, poverty and extreme poverty. This directly leads me to the next section of this chapter which aims to expose the different dimensions of poverty.

2.3. Dimensions of Poverty

Poverty may mean different things to different people; the word itself when translated into different languages and applied to different societies has divergent connotations. As Chambers (2006: 4) rightly argues, “The question of those who are poor, marginalised and vulnerable is more likely to be, in varied forms and many languages with different nuances.” The same is true of the contexts and dimensions of poverty’s existence. Thus, when we talk about poverty, the need to understand its various dimensions and characteristics becomes imperative. In this section, I will expose some of these dimensions and the various factors that characterise them as distinctively identified by development practitioners, researchers, governments, think tanks, and NGOs.

The UN’s 2018-2027 system-wide action plan, *Accelerating Global Actions for a World Without Poverty* (2018: 3) captures the importance of understanding the various dimensions of poverty thus: “While income poverty is of critical importance, and is more susceptible to measurement, increasing our knowledge of the multidimensional nature of poverty and thus the actions needed to tackle all forms of deprivation is an important part of system-wide action.” The aforementioned assertion by the UN action plan affirms that while poverty may be a global problem, a proper understanding of the problem must be focused on the dimensions in which the problem exists. This calls into question the World Bank’s (2022) generalised international poverty line (IPL) definition of extreme poverty as living “below the international poverty line of \$1.90 a day—a threshold based on the average of the national poverty lines of 15 of the poorest countries.”

There are different dimensions of poverty; these dimensions are defined by the material or immaterial, social, economic, and political deprivations that an individual or group lacks vis-à-vis some commonly accepted standard of leading a life of value within the human community. The first dimension of these deprivations may take the form of material economic deficiency or lack of adequate income for subsistence leading to deprivations in well-being and may be grouped under income or consumption poverty (Beck et al. 2020; World Bank 2022; Kharas and Dooley 2022; Nichols et al. 2013; Addae-Korankye 2014; Haughton and Khandker 2009). Income poverty measures “the ability to consume a minimum threshold level of goods and services” (Kharas and Dooley 2022: 3). The second dimension takes the form of both physical and psychological deprivation—but the character of this dimension of poverty is primarily psychologically defined and may be rightly grouped under psychological poverty (Oruka 1997; Chimakonam 2020b, 2020c; Chilton et al. 2007; Yoshikawa et al. 2012; Claro et al. 2016). Chimakonam (2020b) offers a distinctive analysis of this dimension of poverty. Under this dimension, one form of deprivation – of the minimum threshold of goods and

services like food, shelter, healthcare, security, and other necessities that is part of physical poverty – can lead to psychological deprivation where one’s self-concept, rationality, and dignity are affected. There is also another dimension that focuses on the lack of social and political resources or substantive freedoms and capability deprivations (Sen 1979, 1983, 1985, 1992, 1999; Nussbaum 1997, 2011; Hick 2014; Putnam 2020; Townsend 2010; Department for International Development 2005). The latter may be rightly grouped under capabilities deprivation. Lastly, there is multidimensional poverty (Alkire and Santos 2010, 2014; Alkire and Robles 2017; Alkire et al 2015; Narayan et al. 2000; UNDP and OPHI 2021; World Bank 2000) which is more or less a combination of all the dimensions of poverty’s existence; whether physical resulting from the lack of income, psychological resulting from the lack of mental well-being, social resulting from the inability to establish and secure meaningful relationships due to the lack of resources, political resulting from the lack of substantive freedoms imposed by repressive governments, or a combination of some or all of these deprivations. There are other dimensions beyond the four mentioned here. However, for want of space and the context of this research, the aforementioned dimensions will suffice. I now move to consider the contents of these dimensions in the sections below.

2.3.1. *Income or Consumption Poverty*

Income poverty identifies poverty by measuring a shortfall in income or consumption from some standard poverty line (Caterina Ruggeri Laderchi, et al. 2006: 10). The World Bank (2022) defines income poverty as a state of living below the International Poverty Line (IPL) of \$1.90 a day.²¹ This threshold represents the average national poverty line of 15 of the poorest countries in the world.²² As expounded by Jonathan Haughton and Shahidur R. Khandker (2009: 40), “the poverty line is obtained by specifying a consumption bundle considered adequate for basic consumption needs, then estimating the cost of these basic needs.” Haughton and Khandker (ibid.: 41) further add, “The poverty line defines the level of consumption (or income) needed for a household to escape poverty.” This line is based on the purchasing power parity (PPP) exchange rates of different countries aimed at ensuring that price levels for the purchase and consumption of minimum threshold levels of goods and services

²¹ Income poverty is also commonly referred to as primary poverty.

²² There are some disagreements over what should constitute the appropriate poverty lines across countries and regions. For example, see Jonathan Haughton and Shahidur R. Khandker, *Handbook on Poverty and Inequality* (2009: 40-65); and Francisco H. G. Ferreira, et al., *A Global Count of the Extreme Poor in 2012: Data Issues, Methodology and Initial Results* (2015: 2-4). There is also the problem of the lack of adequate data over time with which to measure extreme poverty lines and poverty trends across countries and regions. For example, see Kathleen Beegle, et al., *Poverty in a Rising Africa* (2016: 26-56).

compare across countries and regions (Ferreira et al. 2015: 2-3). However, the different social and economic dynamics of what constitutes extreme poverty across regions raise some questions regarding the adequacy of the IPL to capture poverty in its different contexts.

Under income poverty, the first and one of the earliest dimensions of poverty I will consider in this section is that presented by B. Seebohm Rowntree which he developed towards the end of the nineteenth century and which became popular in the first half of the twentieth century.²³ Rowntree divides poverty into two dimensions—primary and secondary poverty. The first division – primary poverty – captures those “[f]amilies whose total earnings are insufficient to obtain the minimum necessities for the maintenance of merely physical efficiency” (Rowntree 1902: 86). The second division – secondary poverty – captures those “[f]amilies whose total earnings would be sufficient for the maintenance of merely physical efficiency were it not that some portion of it is absorbed by other expenditure, either useful or wasteful” (ibid.: 86-87). The first dimension, primary poverty, is measured by evaluating the amount of income that each family requires to secure the necessities of life; for example, food, clothing, and shelter. This is similar to the conceptualisation of poverty adopted by Nyasulu (2010: 155) who views poverty as the condition that makes it impossible for individuals/families to meet these needs—food, clothing, and shelter. Worthy of note is the fact that these necessities are for the maintenance of purely physical health. Things associated with the psychological well-being of the individual are not taken into account; the goal, here, is primarily physical survival.

The second dimension of Rowntree’s poverty division, secondary poverty, focuses on those psychological needs – either useful or wasteful – that contribute to deprivation. According to Rowntree (1902: 115), “To ascertain this [secondary poverty] by direct inquiry it would have been necessary to know, in every case, the average sum spent weekly on drink, gambling, and other wasteful expenditure.” Thus, secondary poverty would otherwise have been averted “were it not that some portion of a family or an individual’s income is absorbed by other expenditure, either useful or wasteful” (ibid.). Rowntree’s dimensions fall under income poverty. That is, it is primarily focused on the financial earnings of individuals and uses their income and ability to meet basic needs to categorize individuals as either poor or non-poor. His approach has been criticised as being ‘crude’ and relying on a simplistic and uniform standard that depends on “an over-assiduous application of the law of

²³ Benjamin Seebohm Rowntree is regarded as a pioneer in the study of poverty.

averages” (Townsend 2010: 93).²⁴ Consequently, it neglects other dimensions of poverty that go beyond the lack of income.

Another dimension of income poverty is that presented by Kharas and Dooley. Their approach focuses on the basic needs of individuals and uses the same to measure the number of resources – particularly monetary income – that one needs to achieve long-term physical survival. For Kharas and Dooley (2022: 2), basic needs, here, “are a means to an end” as their fulfilment offers individuals “the freedom to act in a way that leads to well-being.” In line with their views that “poverty lines measure whether individuals can afford the basket of basic goods—not whether they actually choose to spend their money in this way,” Kharas and Dooley (ibid.) subscribe to the commonly accepted income measurement of extreme poverty – headcount poverty – which is pegged at \$1.90 per day in 2011 purchasing power parity (PPP). Given that income poverty measures “the ability to consume a minimum threshold level of goods and services” as articulated by Kharas and Dooley (ibid.: 3), suffice to posit that their account of the income dimension of poverty is not different from that of Rowntree and Nyasulu who view poverty primarily from the lens of having certain financial resources to meet physical needs necessary for physical survival. Conceptualising poverty mainly from the perspective of the lack of income, for instance, ignores the multidimensional nature of deprivation across societies. For example, Wolff (2020: 25) acknowledges this problem by arguing that “a concentration on poverty defined in terms of inadequate income encourages a focus on income-based social policies, whereas in some cases the provision of public goods, or forms of social change, could be alternative solutions, often with significant advantages.” There are other accounts of income poverty. However, the ones considered above serve as a representative schema of what they all entail.

2.3.2. *Psychological Poverty*

This dimension of poverty takes the form of both physical and psychological deprivations. However, the character of this dimension of poverty is primarily psychologically defined. That is, it focuses on the psychological effects of physical poverty on the poor. At the forefront of the discussions on this dimension of poverty are thinkers like Oruka, Chimakonam, Susana Claro, and Hirokazu Yoshikawa, to mention but four. Oruka articulates an account of poverty that highlights the fact that poverty can

²⁴ Despite the ‘crudity’ of Rowntree’s method of measuring the dimensions of poverty, thinkers like Sen still find his ‘old-fashioned criteria’ as useful for capturing ‘an essential characteristic of poverty’ which is the ‘absolutist core’ of starvation and hunger. See Amartya Sen, *Poor, Relatively Speaking* (1983: 156). Oruka’s (1997: 100) definition of *world poverty* as “the condition of those people all over the world who live in what others termed as *absolute* or *abject* poverty” also captures this absolutist conceptualization.

take a psychological dimension, and consideration of this dimension is as important as the physical lack of monetary income. That is, poverty goes beyond the absence or deprivation of monetary income to encapsulate psychological deprivations.

As Oruka (1997: 87) put it, “For all human beings to function with a significant degree of rationality and self-awareness, they need a certain minimum amount of physical security, health care and subsistence.” Without this minimum, one ceases to be rational and self-conscious and becomes a brute or a human vegetable; “he loses the very minimum necessary for a decent definition of human being” (ibid.). Oruka draws our attention to the psychological effects of poverty on the human person and exposes how poverty affects the rationality or the moral senses of those who live under extreme deprivation. For Oruka (ibid.: 86), the poor, having lost their standard guarantees for physical security, subsistence, and a decent definition of a human being, are driven by a desperate attempt at survival. Oruka (ibid.) affirms this thus: “Those starving to death or who are molested by painful mortal diseases are also likely to lose their capacity for a rational and self-conscious life.” This desperation for self-preservation – caused by extreme poverty – in turn, affects their ability to engage in fair negotiation on existential issues and thus, deprives them of the full status of moral agents in Oruka’s conceptualisation.

Similarly, and drawing insights from Oruka, Chimakonam amplifies the need for adequate attention to be paid to the psychological dimension of poverty as well as the physical dimension. For Chimakonam (2020b: 516), poverty is not one-sided; but “amounts to both physical and psychological deprivations.” Thus, when we discuss poverty as physical-economic deprivation, we must also pay attention to the effects of such physical deprivations on the psychological well-being of the poor individual. Chimakonam goes further to blame the inadequacy of some poverty measurement frameworks as resulting from their failure to consider this psychological dimension of poverty. As a possible solution, Chimakonam (2020a: 99; 2020b: 516-519) proposes an inclusive epistemological and developmental approach that synthesizes approaches from both the Global North and Global South in the fight against extreme poverty. This integrative approach is also shared by Kwadzo (2015) and Xavier Godinot and Robert Walker (2020). This takes the form of “creating an intercultural framework for poverty researchers in different parts of the world to share ideas and experiences, argue, disagree, and agree in the attempt to find a collective solution to the menace of extreme poverty” (Chimakonam 2020a: 100). To achieve this, he offers conversational thinking as a viable approach to addressing the problem of mass poverty (see Chimakonam 2019: 152-157).

Furthermore, elaborating on the effects of physical deprivations on psychological well-being, and how this can affect academic achievement, for instance, Susana Claro et al. (2016: 8664) argue, “Two largely separate bodies of empirical research have shown that academic achievement is influenced by structural factors, such as socioeconomic background, and psychological factors, such as students’ beliefs about their abilities.” Socioeconomic background, here, has to do with those from lower-income households and those living in poverty. Poverty is here shown to negatively impact how individuals think about themselves vis-à-vis their peers. This, in turn, often affects the academic achievements of students from poor households as it affects their confidence in their abilities. This is also bearing in mind that education, according to UNDP and OPHI (2021: 8), “is integral to human development and instrumental to breaking intergenerational cycles of poverty.” As Claro et al. (2016: 8664) put it:

It is well-known that economic disadvantage can depress students’ academic achievement through multiple mechanisms, including reduced access to educational resources, higher levels of stress, poorer nutrition, and reduced access to healthcare... students from lower-income families...[are]...less likely to hold a growth mindset than their wealthier peers.

From the above, there is no gainsaying that the psychological impact of poverty is as important as the physical. This is especially true when one considers the fact that “structural inequalities can give rise to psychological inequalities” and in turn, “those psychological inequalities can reinforce the impact of structural inequalities on achievement and future opportunity” (ibid.: 8667). There is thus the sense in which the psychological effects of poverty beyond affecting intellectual development also affect physical health. For instance, Mariana Chilton et al. (2007: 262) argue that childhood poverty can cause irreversible damage to mental development – especially in the first three years of a child’s life – which inevitably leads to poor academic performances in school; this has the potential to perpetuate a never-ending cycle of poverty and human development. This position is also shared by Hirokazu Yoshikawa et al. (2012) and Wayne and Fran Busby (1996).²⁵ Consequently, Chimakonam (2020b: 516) declares that the “psychological fallouts of the experience of poverty...are far more devastating than the immediately obvious physical effects.” Some of the devastating effects of this fallout negatively affect an individual’s “physical wellbeing, self-concept and dignity” (ibid.: 517). This is particularly true when one considers the fact that a healthy mind is indispensable to a healthy body or the proper functioning of the body. However, like those in the income poverty camp, Oruka

²⁵ Yoshikawa et al. fruitfully discussed the effects of family poverty on children’s mental, emotional, and behavioral health. Their research offers critical insights on the psychological effects of poverty on mental health. For a detailed discussion, see Yoshikawa et al., *The Effects of Poverty on the Mental, Emotional, and Behavioral Health of Children and Youth: Implications for Prevention* (2012: 272-284).

and Chimakonam failed to state who should bear the greater burden of eliminating these psychological deprivations.

2.3.3. *Capabilities Deprivation*

The capabilities approach to measuring poverty provides the most significant alternative to conceptualising deprivation, away from the early income model of Rowntree and the relative model of Townsend.²⁶ Here, the focus is on social and political deprivations and the effect they have on an individual's ability to establish or engage in meaningful social and political relationships. Capability deprivation is a dimension of poverty espoused primarily by Sen and Nussbaum.²⁷ According to Beegle et al. (2016: 84), the capability approach prioritises “what people effectively do and are (their functionings) and on the capacity of people to freely choose and achieve these functionings (that is, their capability) rather than on the commodities bought or consumed.”²⁸ Functionings,²⁹ like “being adequately nourished, being in good health, avoiding escapable morbidity and premature mortality, etc., to more complex achievements such as being happy, having self-respect,” and so on, in Sen’s (1992: 39) conception, are “*constitutive* of a person's being, and an evaluation of well-being has to take the form of an assessment of these constituent elements.” There is thus the sense in which the capability³⁰ approach can be viewed as a direct alternative to the monetary measures of poverty. Articulating poverty through the lens of capability deprivation and the lack of substantive freedoms, Sen (1999: 10) argues that ‘substantive freedoms’ are not just essential constituents of “the primary ends of development, they are also among its principal means.” And capability, here, refers to “a set of vectors of functionings, reflecting the person's freedom to lead one type of life or another” (Sen 1992: 40). Thus, fulfilling the capability needs of each member of society is indispensable to the attainment of social, political, and economic development.

²⁶ Under capability deprivation, the loss/lack of social relationships and the ability to participate in the life of one’s society is considered to constitute an important dimension of poverty that is often overlooked by conventional poverty measures that focuses mostly on monetary incomes. For in-depth discussion, see A. Sen, *Development as Freedom* (1999) and *Inequality Reexamined* (1992), D. Putnam, *Poverty as a Social Relation* (2020), M. C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (2011), and K. Beegle et al., *Poverty in a Rising Africa* (2016).

²⁷ The Capability Approach is primarily focused on each person and the opportunities open to them, not in economic or political theory. It prioritizes enhancing an individual’s self-respect, dignity, and capacity for choice.

²⁸ Wolff (2020: 30) offers a succinct distinction between ‘capability’ and ‘functioning’ thus: “A functioning is a type of achievement—a being or doing—whereas a capability is, at its most basic, the opportunity to achieve that functioning.”

²⁹ Nussbaum (2011: 24-25) defines ‘functioning’ as “an active realization of one or more capabilities.” In other words, they are the outgrowths of capabilities. This is made possible by having the capability to do so; the capability here, must be provided in Sen and Nussbaum’s conception by the society that an individual finds herself.

³⁰ Capability can also be viewed as a kind of freedom to achieve a set of functionings. Nussbaum (2011: 25) refers to capabilities as “opportunity to select.”

Furthermore, Sen (1999: 4) argues that unfreedom – or the lack of substantive freedoms – often leads “directly to economic poverty.” In many instances, the lack of substantive freedoms and the economic poverty it births, “robs people of the freedom to satisfy hunger, or to achieve sufficient nutrition, or to obtain remedies for treatable illnesses, or the opportunity to be adequately clothed or sheltered, or to enjoy clean water or sanitary facilities” (ibid.). This in turn limits people’s ability to participate in the social, cultural, political, religious, and economic life of their society which impinges on their overall quality of life. The idea of freedom, is thus, central to Sen’s notion of development as the fulfilment of individual capabilities and functionings.

Similar to Sen and drawing heavily on Sen’s insights, Nussbaum offers the capabilities approach to poverty measurement as a counter-theory to dominant approaches to poverty measurement, for example, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita and purchasing power parity (PPP). Nussbaum prefers the plural ‘capabilities’ over ‘capability’. Her preference for the plural serves to emphasize the plurality and qualitatively distinct nature of the most important elements of people’s quality of life considered individually. Nussbaum (2011: 18) defines the capabilities approach as “an approach to comparative quality-of-life assessment and to theorizing about basic social justice.” The capabilities approach, when comparing societies to determine their level of basic social justice asks: “What is each person able to do and to be?” (ibid.). Under this approach to measuring deprivations, each person is taken as an end; priority is given to the opportunities that are available to each individual as opposed to the average individual considered as a group. “It thus focuses on ends – people’s capabilities – rather than means – their resources” (Hick 2014: 296) and “ascribes an urgent task to *government and public policy*...to improve the quality of life for all people, as defined by their capabilities” (Nussbaum 2011: 19). Like Sen, Nussbaum’s framing of the capabilities is focused on individual substantive freedoms or choice, and the discretion to exercise these functionings. Nussbaum provides a list of what she calls ‘Central Capabilities’ that are essential for measuring deprivations. According to Nussbaum (ibid.: 33-34), the ten Central Capabilities that every decent government must secure for its citizens are: (1) Life, (2), Bodily health, (3) Bodily integrity, (4) Senses, imagination and thought, (5) Emotions, (6) Practical reason, (7) Affiliation, (8), Other species, (9) Play, and (10) Control over one’s environment; (a) Political and (b) Material. These Central Capabilities, at a bare minimum, are what is required for an individual to lead a life that is worthy of human dignity. Anyone who lacks any of these Central Capabilities, in line with Nussbaum’s conceptualisation, can be rightly said to be deprived – or living in poverty – and thereby robbed of their human dignity, choices, and substantial freedoms. Conceived in this sense, the capabilities approach prioritises individual persons

and places them at the centre as ends in and of themselves, before derivatively extending to the group or wider society.

The capabilities approach makes a significant contribution to the poverty debate. Most importantly, it exposes the inadequacy of monetary income as a tool for measuring poverty. For example, if an individual has the basic income to afford the relevant basket of goods necessary for physical well-being, but lives in a repressive state where she is deprived of her social, religious, and political rights, under the income poverty measure, such an individual can be said to be non-deprived or non-poor. However, the capabilities approach argues otherwise. Under Sen's and Nussbaum's capabilities approach, such an individual still lacks substantive freedoms, which is a form of deprivation in and of itself. In this instance, such an individual can be said to be deprived of the capabilities to achieve their *functionings* of participating in the life of their society. Nussbaum's capabilities approach is not without its challenges. For example, describing the challenges with the capabilities approach of Nussbaum, Wolff (2020: 34) argues that "relatively few people achieve the threshold level of every capability" that Nussbaum advocates for. Therefore, "it seems a stretch to say that any life that fails to achieve all of the capabilities listed by Nussbaum at an acceptable level is one that falls below a poverty line" (ibid.). This, Wolff (ibid.) argues, would drain the capabilities approach of useful application if it is the case that strictly considered, very few people get to meet all the capabilities listed by Nussbaum.

Furthermore, Bilchitz (2007: 17) has criticized Nussbaum's Central Capabilities – employed as an evaluative criterion for measuring a valuable human life – for its inability to achieve a consensus on "a determinate, detailed conception of value" due to the diversity that characterizes human beings. This idea of evaluating what types of lives are worth living, based on a shared notion of what it means to lead a dignified human life, or for attaining *the human minimum*, rests on the idea of an overlapping consensus which Bilchitz dismisses as being impossible to achieve due to the substantially diverse conceptions of what constitutes a meaningful life for different individuals.

Similarly, Sen's capability approach with its focus on individual capabilities and functionings is arguably the first attempt at providing an alternative way of understanding and measuring poverty from a multidimensional perspective. However, it is not without its challenges. Some of these challenges have been identified by Beegle et al. (2016: 84) as involving the difficulties in measuring capabilities and functionings, and the complexity of determining the adequate threshold of well-being an individual must meet below which they can be classified as poor (cf. Long n.d.)³¹ This difficulty in

³¹ Egalitarianism faces similar challenges of determining the appropriate measure of welfare and individual preferences.

measuring the threshold of needs arises from differences in the choices and preferences of individuals. Worthy of note is the fact that both Sen and Nussbaum believe that the responsibility to fund these capabilities is more or less, strictly the duty of the state. The role of non-state actors in achieving these capabilities is not adequately engaged. I will show why this is problematic in subsequent chapters of this research.

2.3.4. Multidimensional Poverty

There is another dimension of measuring poverty commonly referred to as the Multidimensional Poverty Index (MPI). According to the 2000/2001 World Development Report (2001: 15), the MPI approach stems from the view that poverty goes beyond material deprivation to encompass low achievements in education and health, vulnerability and exposure to risks, voicelessness, and powerlessness, amongst other forms of overlapping deprivations. Sakiko Fukuda-Parr (2006: 7) aptly captures the complexities of human deprivations that necessitate an alternative MPI thus: “Studies of the problems of poor people and communities, and of the obstacles and opportunities to improving their situation, have led to an understanding of poverty as a complex set of deprivations.” This understanding of poverty as encapsulating a complex set of deprivation has refocused the concept of poverty as reflecting a wide range of failures that assault human dignity beyond monetary income. Furthermore, Sabina Alkire (2020: 200) adds that the interest in a multidimensional approach to measuring poverty arose from “a concern that monetary poverty measures were not sufficiently capturing the multiple and overlapping deprivations experienced by the poor.” This often leads to policy failure vis-à-vis addressing the overlapping economic disadvantages affecting poor people in different societies. Multidimensional measurement of poverty as a more comprehensive alternative, goes beyond income and consumption, and psychological and capabilities deprivations, to incorporate every aspect of deprivation that an individual or group suffers. It posits that an effective approach to understanding and fighting extreme poverty must take into consideration, as a matter of priority, every dimension of poverty’s existence or deprivation that an individual or group suffers. Sabina Alkire and Maria Emma Santos (2010: 1) capture the MPI thus:

The MPI assesses the nature and intensity of poverty at the individual level, with poor people being those who are multiply deprived and the extent of their poverty being measured by the extent of their deprivations. The MPI creates a vivid picture of people living in poverty within and across countries, regions and the world.

Sabina Alkire and Gisela Robles (2017) further add, “the Global MPI complements monetary poverty indices and directly measures 10 indicators reflecting poor health, a lack of education and low living standards.” Here, access to education and the standard of living is added to Oruka’s three basic requirements for living above the *human minimum* threshold of poverty.³² Describing the Global MPI, Alkire and Robles (ibid.) state that:

The Global MPI was developed in 2010 by OPHI and the United Nations Development Programme for its flagship Human Development Reports, and has been published in the reports since then. The Global MPI has 3 dimensions and 10 indicators... A person is identified as multidimensionally poor (or ‘MPI poor’) if they are deprived in at least one third of the dimensions. The MPI is calculated by multiplying the incidence of poverty (the percentage of people identified as MPI poor) by the average intensity of poverty across the poor. So it reflects both the share of people in poverty and the degree to which they are deprived. The Global MPI shows not just which people are poor and where, but how they are poor – in which indicators they are deprived simultaneously. It shows different intensities of poverty, as some people are disadvantaged in more indicators than others.

One important thing to note in the Global MPI approach is that it exposes us to the fact that deprivations are interrelated and reinforce one another. In other words, the MPI acknowledges the fact that “poverty involves much more than just low income” (Ferreira and Lugo 2013: 231; see also World Development Report 2000/2001 2001: 15). This gives the multidimensional approach to measuring poverty two distinctive characteristics as identified by Alkire (2020: 200): Firstly, the MPI recognises that non-monetary deprivations constitute parts of poverty; secondly, it recognises the overlapping nature of deprivations. Multidimensional poverty is rife in developing countries. Data from the UNDP and OPHI (2021: 4) on global MPI reveals that across the 109 developing countries covered by the 2021 global MPI which comprises 5.9 billion people in total population, “1.3 billion or more than one in five” are multidimensionally poor. That is 21.7 percent of the total population. Of this figure, about 85 percent of them – 556 million – live in Sub-Saharan Africa (ibid.). The situation is made worse by the devastating effects of the COVID-19 pandemic whose impact was felt more by poorer countries which Africa is at the forefront. This further demonstrates the seriousness of the challenges of poverty in Africa and justifies the relevance and timeliness of this research in answering the question of who should bear the greater burden of eliminating poverty in all its forms in Africa.

One advantage of the MPI approach to poverty measurement is that it can be broken down by dimension from national to subnational levels making it policy-salient. Nonetheless, while it is the

³² For Oruka, physical security, health care and subsistence constitute the basic minimum of living a decent life above the poverty line. The Global MPI developed in 2010 by the Oxford Poverty & Human Development Initiative (OPHI) and the United Nations Development Programme goes a step further to include education and standard of living. Both – Oruka and the Global MPI – share in the area of health.

case that the Global MPI reflects the share of poor people and the degree to which they are deprived, it fails to reflect one essential ingredient that could change our understanding of poverty: The context of poverty's existence. In the fourth chapter of this dissertation, I will provide a detailed articulation of how this could be catalytic for success in the fight against extreme poverty, especially in Africa. There is also the problem of the specification of appropriate dimensions of what is to be measured as identified by Godinot and Walker (2020) as well as its overreliance on data availability more than on theoretical requirements in measuring deprivation (Ravallion 2011; Ferreira and Lugo 2013). There is also the view of poverty as social exclusion and social injustice, amongst others. Although every one of the other dimensions would not be individually discussed here for want of space, they will be integrated into the research in sections where their considerations are necessary. The question that runs through these various dimensions of poverty's existence is: Given the overlapping nature of poverty, who should bear the greater burden of fighting it? The answer to this question will be addressed in the final chapter of this research.

In the next chapter, I will consider what qualifies a stage of poverty as 'extreme' and what this means for society. I will further analyse Oruka's conceptualization of extreme poverty, his position on the issue of foreign aid in Africa, and his conceptualisation of poverty and *the right to the human minimum*.

Chapter 3.

3.1. Odera Oruka on Extreme Poverty and the Right to ‘Human Minimum’

In the previous chapter, I presented a detailed articulation of the notion of poverty, the factors that influence its conceptualisations, and the various dimensions of its existence. This chapter, building on the foundations of our understanding of what poverty entails, will expose what qualifies a stage of poverty as ‘extreme’ and what this means for society. I shall critically analyse Oruka’s conceptualisation of extreme poverty and expose his position on the issue of foreign aid in Africa. Oruka’s conceptualisation of poverty and *the right to the human minimum* will also be critically analysed. Historical conceptions of poverty across different times and its attendant implications for the attainment of the *human minimum* in Africa today will be carefully discussed. Furthermore, this chapter will critique the analysis of poverty from a socio-economic perspective as a fundamental right, and its eradication as being the duty of every established government as articulated by Bilchitz.

To start with, poverty generally connotes the – enforced – inability to meet the *minimum* set of needs requisite for leading a life of value under the standards of a given society (Ravallion 1992; Goulden and D’Arcy 2014). ‘Extreme’ or ‘severe’ poverty, on the other hand, denotes a state of ‘absolute’ poverty or deprivation.³³ A good case in point is that of a person who is deprived of food or who suffers from persistent hunger as a result of their inability to afford these necessities. Food can be rightly regarded as the most basic necessity for self-preservation and survival. Thus, a person who lacks the basic necessity of food for survival – and is a slave to the torment of hunger – is living in extreme poverty. The notion of extreme poverty, in Sen’s (1983: 156) conception, captures “an essential characteristic of poverty” which is the “absolutist core” of starvation and hunger (see also Oruka 1997: 100). Similarly, the former president of the World Bank Robert McNamara, in a foreword to the first World Development Report in 1978, defines extreme poverty as “a condition of life so characterized by malnutrition, illiteracy, disease, squalid surroundings, high infant mortality, and low life expectancy as to be beneath any reasonable definition of human decency” (cited in World Bank 2017: 6). McNamara’s definition agrees in every aspect with Oruka’s conceptualisation of what it means to live below *the human minimum* threshold. This makes the phenomenon of extreme poverty an issue of great concern not just for the victims of extreme poverty, but also for the wider society who share the same humanity with the victims of absolute deprivation.

The 1987 Wresinski Report adopted by the French Economic and Social Council, arguably, marked the turning point in the definition of extreme poverty. Extreme poverty, here, is regarded as

³³ Peter Singer (1993: 218) defines absolute poverty as “poverty by any standard.”

constituting a violation of human rights.³⁴ Defining the state of extreme poverty as constituting a human rights violation, *ipso facto* makes it a matter of concern for all members of the human community. According to the 1987 Wresinski Report, extreme poverty arises from the lack of basic security which “simultaneously affects several aspects of people’s lives, when it is prolonged, and when it severely compromises people’s chances of regaining their rights and of reassuming their responsibilities in the foreseeable future” (cited by Godinot and Walker 2020: 268). The Wresinski Report exposes how the conditions of extreme poverty materialise in societies and the process that sustains it over time.

In Africa, for example, extreme poverty is sustained by some factors like political corruption, protracted wars, communal conflicts, climate change, etc. The extreme state of poverty in Africa is also a cause for serious concern. According to Chimakonam (2021: 202), “what makes poverty a problem for sub-Saharan Africa is precisely ‘number’. The number of people who live in poverty in sub-Saharan Africa is more than the number of those who do not.”³⁵ This makes Africa, literally, the headquarters of global poverty. The phenomenon of extreme poverty in Africa may likely increase due to the fact that the various factors that contribute to the problem are not receiving the needed attention.

Beyond Africa, other factors that may lead to an increase in global poverty in the 21st century identified by Seipel (2003: 195-199) include economic stagnation – or possible economic decline – in some developing countries, persistent income inequality occasioned by the absence of equitable wealth distribution, the rapid growth of borrowing and external debt in developing countries, and lack of commitment to education. For Oruka, extreme poverty means more than income deprivation of the World Bank’s (2000; 2017; 2022) standard measurement of living on less than \$1 a day IPL. Extreme poverty encapsulates a state of absolute deprivation of both physical and psychological necessities for leading a life of value worthy of dignity. Bilchitz (2007: 64) agrees with this characterisation of extreme poverty and posits that, “It is quite clear that all sentient beings require certain resources to be free from threats to their survival. Without the resources to be free from starvation or malnourishment, for instance, no being can live a valuable life.” What this means is that extreme poverty can deprive

³⁴ As Bilchitz (2007: 79) rightly argues, “[T]here is no separation between the rights that a society recognizes and the practical obligations it has to realize such rights.” Thusly, if society acknowledges the fact that extreme poverty is bad and prevents individuals from leading a life of value and realizing their full potentials, then society has practical obligations to help individuals lead a life of value through the elimination of extreme poverty.

³⁵ Although Chimakonam did not clearly account for the source of this claim, I think he was referring to a combination of the number of people living in both extreme and multidimensional poverty. According to UNDP and OPHI’s *Global Multidimensional Poverty Index 2021: Unmasking disparities by ethnicity, caste and gender* (2021: 4), of the 1.3 billion multidimensionally poor people in the world, nearly 85% of them live in Sub-Saharan Africa (556 million) and South Asia (532 million).

the poor of a life that is worthy of human dignity, which in turn makes their life valueless. Before Oruka, poverty has been mostly viewed from the perspective of economic deprivation. In Oruka's philosophy, the notion of poverty takes a reflective dimension; it moves beyond physical economic deprivation to expose both the psychological and moral status of the poor as moral subjects. The condition of extreme poverty beyond inflicting physical and psychological torture on the poor, questions their rationality and humanity as decent human beings. According to Oruka (1997: 86), fulfilling the function of a person as a member of the human community and qualifying as a moral agent is predicated on having access to the necessities of physical security, health, and subsistence. Without the necessities stated above, the capacity of an individual to act as a rational and self-conscious agent in the quest for survival becomes impaired. What this means is that extreme poverty affects the capacity of the poor to lead a reflective and self-conscious life. This multidimensional threat makes extreme poverty a matter of serious concern in Oruka's philosophy. This necessitates an obligation by other members of the human community through the enforcement of the right to a minimum necessary for sustenance.

3.1.1. Oruka's Conceptualisation of the Right to the Human Minimum

Africa is one of the continents most affected by the challenges of extreme poverty. As part of the solutions to the challenges of extreme poverty in Africa and beyond, Oruka offers *the human minimum* as an approach to eliminating extreme poverty and centres its implementation on a global moral obligation. In *Practical Philosophy: In Search of an Ethical Minimum*, Oruka, advances an argument for global justice that seeks to eliminate extreme poverty via the enforcement of what he calls 'the right to a human minimum'. Oruka frowns at the degrading impact of extreme poverty on the lives of the poor, and the consequent negative psychological effects of poverty on the rational capacity of the extreme poor to act morally, in the face of the struggle for self-preservation. Poverty, in a sense, through the exposure of its victims to the most vulnerable and inhumane conditions of existence, is capable of making the poor question their humanity. This often leads to living conditions that are so miserable to the point of reducing the poor to what Oruka (1997: 87) refers to as "a brute or a human vegetable" without the capacity to exercise the functions of a person. Against this backdrop, Oruka saw the need to articulate a principle of global moral obligation to fight extreme poverty to restore the human rights and dignity of the extreme poor as a matter of global justice. This necessity gave rise to the principle of *the human minimum*.

Oruka proposes *the human minimum*, grounded on “the non-defeasible right to self-preservation” (Graness 2012: 15), away from the dominant principles of international charity and rectification for historical injustices, as a principle that provides the base for foreign aid and the global moral obligation to eliminate extreme poverty. Oruka believes that *the right to the human minimum* is a universal moral right of every individual that any other right cannot override. It is the basis of all other rights (see also Kiros 2001).³⁶ Thus, in enforcing a global human minimum as a society, we will not just be eliminating extreme poverty, but also restoring the dignity of the world’s poor as moral persons. Similarly, and drawing insights from Oruka, Chimakonam (2020a: 99; 2020b: 516-519; 2019: 149) proposes an inclusive epistemological and developmental approach that synthesizes approaches from both the Global North and Global South in the fight against extreme poverty. Chimakonam (2020b) calls his approach the “Human Minimum Measure (HMM).” The HMM conceives poverty as constituting a combination of both physical and psychological factors. According to Chimakonam (ibid.: 517), under this model, poverty is “the condition of life lacking in opportunities of decent income and self-development as well as basic amenities and social services which negatively affects one’s physical wellbeing, self-concept and dignity.” This definition presents a conception of poverty that is inclusive and comprehensive. Its implementation would take the form of an intercultural approach that draws on different policies and research traditions to provide an integrated solution to the challenges of extreme poverty in Africa.

Furthermore, Anke Graness (2015: 128) explains that in Oruka’s conceptualisation, “[t]he denial of the human minimum renders the affected individual incapable of exercising the essential functions of a person.” In other words, the prerequisite for personhood in Oruka’s conceptualisation of a moral person hinges on the realisation of the *human minimum* of physical security, health, and subsistence. What this means is that extreme poverty, and the lack of enforcement of policies aimed at keeping people above the extreme poverty threshold, have the potential to make the poor act in irrational ways. These irrational actions – or the absence of mental balance – are presumably caused by extreme starvation and the struggle to escape the same to preserve the self. Self-preservation, after all, is the first law of existence. Or, as Asouzu (2004: 52) aptly captures: “The need to (sic) self-preservation is the primordial human interest around which human beings articulate their meaning.” In the struggle for survival, the extreme poor may sometimes act in ways that are unconventional to

³⁶ The Ethiopian philosopher Teodros Kiros shares a similar moral position. For Teodros, “The first principle of justice commands categorically that food, shelter and clothing must be available to all beings in Africa.” See Teodros Kiros, *Explorations in African Political Thought: Identity, Community, Ethics* (2001: 5).

the norms of the societies in which they find themselves. And this is often linked to the damaging psychological effects of extreme poverty on the human mind.

The *human minimum* is so fundamental to the proper functioning of a human being that Oruka had to call for its global enforcement. In the absence of the realisation of physical security, health care, and subsistence, “all other rights lose their meaning because moral agency is lost” (Graness 2015: 129; 2012: 16). Under this circumstance, anyone living below the *human minimum* threshold can justifiably demand from every other person above the threshold to ensure his fundamental rights to lead a life of value. For this reason, the enforcement of a *human minimum* traverses national borders to become a global moral duty of both rich individuals and countries. Thus, whoever contributes to the enforcement of *the human minimum* does so not as a matter of charity or rectification for historical wrongs, but as a moral duty that every individual, countries, and organisations above the poverty line of *the human minimum* owe the poor. Put differently, the poor have a moral right to demand a healthy life from the non-poor.³⁷ This demand is based on the recognition of the fundamental right of every individual to self-preservation. Bilchitz (2007: 79) captures this right succinctly thus: “[T]here is no separation between the rights that a society recognizes and the practical obligations it has to realize such rights.” If society recognises the right of the poor to self-preservation, then, as Bilchitz argues, the poor can legitimately demand that the non-poor fulfil their practical obligations by helping them to realise such rights.

Oruka’s approach to extreme poverty, which treats deprivation and its elimination as the basis of all other rights offers a unique conception of what constitutes a moral person. What is remarkable about this conception of rights as highlighted by Graness (2015: 129) is that while extant approaches to ethics conceive of a person firstly as a moral subject without consideration for the basic requirements for leading a life of value, like physical security, health, and subsistence; Oruka, on the contrary, conceives of a person as requiring these necessities – physical security, health, and subsistence – before qualifying to be regarded as a moral person. For Oruka, meeting the necessities of physical and psychological well-being is a prerequisite for qualifying to be regarded as a moral person with rights and responsibilities.

The satisfaction of existential necessities is thus a prerequisite for moral personhood. The corollary is the question of who should ensure that the poor are insured against extreme poverty and its degrading conditions. In other words, who should be responsible for enforcing the right to a decent standard of living for the poor within a given society? The answer to this question is provided in the

³⁷ See D. Bilchitz (2007).

next section which captures Oruka's conceptualisation of foreign aid as a global ethical obligation in the fight for global justice.

3.1.2. *Foreign Aid as a Global Ethical Obligation*

On the question of foreign aid, building on his idea of *the human minimum* as constituting an absolute positive right³⁸ of every individual, Oruka makes a case for a moral obligation to the global poor beyond national borders in the form of foreign aid.³⁹ Foreign aid – which has its basis primarily in economics – becomes relevant to the poverty discourse when analysed from the perspective of normative economics. Normative economics aims to utilise the findings of positive economics – economics as pure science – to advance equitable redistribution of resources for the benefit of all members of society (Oruka 1997: 81). Understood in the latter sense, the problems of economics becomes the problem of ethics and philosophers. Furthering on this, Oruka (ibid.: 83) presents the conventional arguments for foreign aid centred on three principles of international justice: (1) the law of international trade, (2) the principle of historical rectification for past injustices, and (3) the principle of charity. According to Lars Ericsson (1981: 20-21), “International justice...is basically a relation that holds between two or more independent nations, states or societies. Global justice, in contrast, is basically a relation that holds between human or sentient beings within something called the global society” (cited in Oruka 1997: 84). This distinction is important in understanding the basis of Oruka's rejection of the three principles of international justice in favor of the *human minimum* principle founded on global justice.

As a starting point for his arguments, Oruka (ibid.: 82) acknowledges that states, like individuals, have a right to self-preservation—territorial and economic. These rights claims are based on the principles of international justice. Based on the claims of such rights, they can decide how to dispose of their resources without external criticism and interference. Any external interference would violate the principle of territorial sovereignty and the principle of national supererogation.⁴⁰ The

³⁸ Positive right here implies the right of the poor to be provided with the resources or means to live above *the human minimum* threshold by the state and the non-poor.

³⁹ Foreign aid aimed at reducing international inequality and global poverty can also take the form of a Global Resources Tax (GRT). See Thomas W. Pogge, *An Egalitarian Law of Peoples. Philosophy and Public Affairs*, vol. 23, no. 3 (1994: 195-224).

⁴⁰ The principle of territorial sovereignty and the principle of national supererogation are principles of international justice that impose on every state and their citizens a duty to respect the territorial independence of other states by not forcing its demands on others. In the context of foreign aid, any assistance offered by one – independent – state to another stem from charity/goodwill and not any legal or moral obligation. Oruka finds this principles to be problematic due to their tendency to ignore the sufferings of the poor.

former principle “gives power and legitimacy to every state to expel, if necessary by force, any external interference with her borders, resources and internal affairs;” while the latter principle “protects a state from blame if it remains indifferent to the needs of those outside its borders, however needy and starving such people may be” (ibid.). Consequently, the violation of these principles in pursuit of any good cause – like helping the extreme poor outside a state’s territory – cannot be justified. One state’s decision to offer foreign aid to another in need is purely supererogatory, not obligatory. Aid, against this backdrop, becomes a matter of ‘international charity’ arising from the donor nation’s ‘kindness’ as opposed to any sense of duty to global justice. This makes foreign aid an expression of an international charity.

The above raises a question about foreign aid’s motivations beyond the charity lens. For example, does the rich nations helping the poor pass as an act of international charity, moral obligation, or rather an investment in there – the rich nation’s – economic and political interests? An analysis of the principle of international trade presented by Oruka concerning the position of the recipients of foreign aid exposes the nature of foreign aid and why viewing it as an act of charity may not be entirely correct. It is argued that aid donors gain more than the recipients of foreign aid in the context of such international exchange.⁴¹ Some of the gains of a donor country might take the form of securing favourable trade deals, ideological alliances with the recipient countries, or other expected economic and political gains.⁴² Thus, foreign aid can constitute an economic bribe from the donor country to secure a certain advantage for the donor nation. The corollary argument is that “In actual fact, aid donors gain far more than they give, so the truth is that international trade between rich and poor nations is characterised by the reality of *unequal exchange*” (ibid.: 83). This invalidates the character of charity or generosity attributed to foreign aid by donor nations as most of these nations are dependent on the receiving nations for many things. For example, markets and raw materials for goods. The unequal exchange that characterises the nature of the relationship between the rich donor nations

⁴¹ Explicating the nature of the argument offered for the principle of international trade as a basis for foreign aid, Oruka (ibid. 83) highlights how the modern trade environment creates the condition for necessary economic and socio-cultural interactions between different countries—both rich and poor. However, rich countries exploit these trade relationships by offering aid to their poor counterparts as a means of securing their self-interests. From favourable trade deals, raw materials for industries, ideological alliances, and military alliances, to expected future benefits. But because these exchanges are characterised by unequal exchanges and the rich nations gain more while the poor nations end up getting exploited by their rich counterparts, the idea of international aid becomes defeated. Consequently, acts of international charity in this context become a means for rich nations to invest in their different economic, social, and political interests in the poor nations.

⁴² See, for example, Thomas W. Pogge, Human Rights and Global Health: A Research Program. *Metaphilosophy*, vol. 36, no. 1/2, (2005a).

and the poor ones also exposes the exploitative nature of such unequal exchanges due to the conditions that are sometimes attached to these ‘charitable’ donations.

The same is also true of the second principle of historical rectification for past injustices. Here, it is argued that the reason why rich countries – especially the Global North – give aid to poor countries is to rectify historical injustices of the past/present caused by factors such as slavery and colonialism (ibid.). Due to the oppressive and unfair economic and military policies of today’s rich countries in the past, there is a massive wealth gap that divides them from present poor countries. Thus, today’s rich countries offer aid to poor countries as a means of rectification for these historical injustices. Consequently, the aid given by rich countries is construed as being conditional and subject to unfair principles of international justice. As poor countries cannot directly obligate assistance from their rich counterparts without the condition of international justice, the charitable nature of foreign aid becomes questionable.

Similarly, Singer strongly disagrees with the characterisation of foreign aid as international charity and as an act of ‘helping’. Contra the non-obligatory position of ‘international charity’, Singer (1993: 230) defends the view that, “Helping is not, as conventionally thought, a charitable act that it is praiseworthy to do, but not wrong to omit; it is something that everyone ought to do.” The affluent owe it to the absolute poor by finding themselves in better economic positions that afford them the resources to do so. Singer’s position suggests that we have a moral obligation to help those living in poverty and not doing so would be wrong, irrespective of territorial boundaries. Singer’s defense of the affluent’s moral obligation to eliminate extreme poverty stems from his argument that absolute poverty is bad and should not be allowed to exist if we can eliminate it. Absolute poverty is bad because it threatens the lives of the absolute poor.

Consequently, if poverty threatens the lives of the poor, then failing to contribute to the elimination of that threat may be rightly argued to constitute both unkindness and injustice, especially in the absence of any countervailing considerations not to do so (Cullity 1994; Singer 1972). To Singer (1993: 230), “If we can prevent something bad without sacrificing anything of comparable significance, we ought to do it.” Explaining what makes absolute poverty a bad thing and why we ought to contribute to its elimination, Singer (ibid.) argues thus: “I assume that absolute poverty, with its hunger and malnutrition, lack of shelter, illiteracy, disease, high infant mortality, and low life expectancy, is a bad thing. And I assume that it is within the power of the affluent to reduce absolute poverty, without sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance.” As a justification for acting, Singer (ibid.) states that “If these two assumptions and the principle we have been discussing are

correct, we have an obligation to help those in absolute poverty.” Here, Singer makes a case for contributing to the elimination of extreme poverty as something that every affluent person can and ought to do. This sense of moral duty is based on the conception of the conditions of poverty as something bad that inflicts both physical and psychological injuries on its victims. Thus, failing to contribute to international aid projects that aim to eliminate extreme poverty, in a sense, is ignoring the suffering of those who live in extreme poverty. And this is something that Singer thinks is bad and constitutes an act of unkindness. In Singer’s (ibid.) conception, absolute poverty is something the affluent can prevent without “sacrificing anything of comparable moral significance.” The latter makes a case for why affluent countries are obliged to contribute to the elimination of absolute poverty to end the suffering of the poor.

Furthermore, the charitable nature of foreign aid – based on the third principle of international justice – is also countered by the argument that such acts are simply rectifications for past injustices. In the context of the Global North and the Global South, colonialism is presented as a clear example of centuries of historical injustices, which invalidates the charitable nature of any foreign assistance from the Global North to the Global South (Oruka 1997). The principle of historical rectification for past injustices as a basis for foreign aid is different from the principle of charity in the sense that while the former sees foreign aid as reparation for past wrongs, the latter sees it as a supererogatory act. Beyond these arguments and counter-arguments that are primarily centred on economic and political grounds, Oruka argues for a fourth moralising principle that goes beyond charity to obligate moral responsibility for the poor/poorer nations as a matter of a positive right of the recipients. Oruka (ibid.: 87) calls the fourth principle “*the human minimum.*”

The need for *the human minimum* principle is necessitated by the inadequacy of the three global justice principles discussed earlier, which Oruka (ibid.: 84) argues are nothing close to global justice but only representative of international justice. Exposing the failures of the three principles of international justice and why a fourth one is necessary, Oruka (ibid.) argues:

We need a principle which would make it ethically obligatory for affluent nations to aid poor ones as an unqualified moral duty for humanity, and for the latter to receive such aid without feeling a sense of self-pity. Such a principle should also help to invalidate the use of “national supererogation” in the relations between nations without thereby discrediting the principle of national sovereignty and the equality of nations. It should also be a principle from which any nation (however independent) that treats its citizens as “subhumans” would legitimately call for humane external interference in her internal affairs.

One of the goals of the *human minimum* principle captured in the above paragraph is to liberate poor nations from the humiliation that comes with receiving aid packages from richer nations. The above justification is also based on the argument that foreign aid is characteristically offered with humiliating conditionalities. Consequent to these inadequacies, the *human minimum* principle which is characteristically ethical in content calls for a universal moral obligation to ensure the attainment of decent living conditions for the world's poor population as a matter of global ethical obligation to humanity (ibid.: 85). The nature of this obligation seeks to enforce the preservation of the rights of all humans as a universal moral right on the part of the poor, and a universal moral duty on the part of the rich. What is remarkable about the content of the obligation Oruka calls for is that under certain circumstances, violating the territorial sovereignty of a state can be justified if such violations are aimed at restoring the 'humanity' or *the human minimum* of the inhabitants of a sovereign territory whose citizens are observed to be deliberately subjected to inhumane existence.

Still, on foreign aid, Chimakonam considers one of the hypotheses on the politics that come to play when richer nations engage in the practice of international charity. On the politics that accompany the offer of foreign aid from rich nations to poor nations in Africa, Chimakonam (2021: 212) argues that:

Some western governments and global institutions are more concerned with showcasing dirty linens and ineptitudes of African politicians and governments and playing the politics of foreign aid which, they use to achieve multiple selfish goals. First, by providing aids, they present themselves as charitable nations to whom the ordinary person in sub-Sahara should genuflect in gratitude. Second, it proves incorrect, the claim of the neo-colonialism group that western powers are exploiters that do not want the progress and development of the sub-Sahara region. Third, they use aids to arm-twist politicians in the countries in sub-Sahara. Fourth, they dictate to the governments in the sub-Sahara how and where to channel the aids, thus ensuring that such aids go back to the west through western contractors and serve only palliative measures against poverty while subverting the goals of poverty reduction and eradication. Fifth, through regular aids that serve palliative measures, they perfect a structure that allows them to withdraw the aids and cause a crisis or use it to influence the beneficiary masses to rise against a government that has become recalcitrant.

The above points raised by Chimakonam further substantiate the arguments highlighted by Oruka about the self-serving nature of most foreign aid donations. In recent decades, most economic and military aid offered by Western governments to African and Asian governments is directly tied to fulfilling one or many sets of reciprocal economic, political, and military demands (see Riddell 1987; Killick 1998; Selbervik 1997, 1999). In other words, they are conditional. This calls into question the characterisation of such international 'gifts' as acts of charity. This also opens up the question of the

reliability of foreign aid as an effective approach to poverty eradication given its many political and ideological baggage. However, I will not engage the nitty-gritty of that debate as that is beyond the scope of this research.

From the above exposition on Oruka's conceptualisation of foreign aid, there's a lack of clarity on how the weight of the responsibility for insuring the *human minimum* of the poor is to be distributed both at the individual, local, and global levels. Graness (2015: 130), for instance, shares this position when she avers thus:

Odera Oruka's ideas of political action or consequences for the global politico-economic structure are rather vague and target mainly the redistribution of national wealth, leaving questions of practical realisation (political and administrative matters, etc.) unsolved.

This is especially visible when we consider the economic suitability of those who can only afford the necessities of the poverty line contributing to the attainment of *the human minimum* of others at the risk of falling below the poverty threshold. Such a general moral mandate becomes economically counterproductive if it has to send those above the poverty line below to raise some above the line. Despite the remarkability of Oruka's idea of global justice in the form of a 'global ethical obligation for the human minimum', he misses the mark in the area of deciding the appropriate individual or institution that should be responsible for funding it. He also fails to consider the economic implications of a universal moral obligation that ignores the economic differences of the non-poor as enforcers of global justice in the context of the fight against extreme poverty. These concerns will be adequately addressed in the final chapter of this research.

3.2. Historical Conceptions of Poverty and its Implications for the Human Minimum

Historically, poverty has been primarily conceptualised from the perspective of income deprivation (Townsend 2006: 5). Despite its dimensional inadequacy and narrow conception of deprivations, this view of poverty persists today and remains at the centre of the poverty discourse. However, the question that arises from an income-centred conception of poverty would be: Is monetary income a sufficient criterion for determining who is poor in any given society given the complex nature of human needs and societal contexts? Worthy of cognisance is the fact that income poverty is primarily defined from the perspective of physical lack. What happens to non-physical deprivations, for example, psychological deprivations? Also, what happens to social deprivations? These are some of the questions that an income-centred history of poverty has largely ignored.

According to Townsend (ibid.), three distinct alternative conceptions of poverty – or deprivation – has evolved as a basis for international and comparative work in the field of poverty research since the 1880s. These are subsistence, basic needs, and relative deprivation. According to the ‘subsistence’ concept of poverty, an individual or family can be classified as living in poverty when a family’s “total earnings are insufficient to obtain the minimum necessities for the maintenance of merely physical efficiency” (Rowntree 1902: 86). This also falls under primary poverty in Rowntree’s division of poverty. The subsistence model derives from the work of nutritionists in Victorian England. Worthy of note is that under the ‘subsistence’ conception of the Victorian era, food accounted for the greatest share of what a family needs to subsist. The ‘subsistence’ conception of poverty has influenced poverty policies for over 100 years due to its popularity among poverty researchers and policymakers. According to Townsend (2006), besides its adoption to describe and measure the conditions of deprivation both within and without national borders, it was also exported around the world by the British to their former colonial territories like the United States of America, South Africa, Malaysia, to mention but three. Despite its global influence, especially in the first half of the twentieth century, the ‘subsistence’ conception has been widely criticised for assuming that human needs are merely physical (see Sen 1979, 1983, 1985, 1992, 1999; Nussbaum 1997; Oruka 1997; Chimakonam 2020b).

Furthermore, demand patterns and shifts in societal and cultural activities mean that the physical needs of individuals are subject to change as human needs are not static (Townsend 2006; cf. Saunders 2004). This would naturally give birth to a new conception necessitated by changes in times. As Beck et al. (2020: 3) put it, “Poverty occurs in historically changing social contexts, which necessitates continuous reinterpretation of what it means to be poor in these contexts;” thus, “What will be regarded as poverty is at least in part dependent on what is customary in a given society.” The views of Beck et al, here, echo the relative conception of poverty and poverty as a social relation discussed earlier in this research under which individuals are said to be poor in comparison to other members of society; and societies are poor in comparison to other societies. This leads to the next historical conception of poverty.

In the 1970s, the conception of poverty shifted from a primarily physical needs/subsistence understanding to its formulation as the lack of ‘basic needs’. This formulation was strongly supported by the International Labour Organization (ILO) (Townsend 2006: 6). Under the ‘basic needs’ formulation, two new elements were introduced. According to Townsend (ibid.), the first element captured a family's minimum consumption needs, including “adequate food, shelter and clothing, as well as certain household furniture and equipment.” While the second element captured the “essential services provided by and for the community at large, such as safe water, sanitation, public transport

and health care, education and cultural facilities” (ibid.). For Townsend (ibid.), this new concept represents an extension of the early subsistence conception of poverty that took root before the 1970s. While the ‘subsistence’ conception of poverty is particularly attractive because of its limited scope and focused implications for public policy and political action, the ‘basic needs’ concept is attractive for aiming for some preconditions for community development (ibid.).

The third social conception of poverty – poverty as relative deprivation – was developed in the late twentieth century. The concept of ‘relativity’, here, for Townsend (ibid.), applies to both monetary income and other resources as well as material and social conditions. Relative deprivation highlights the rapid changes that societies undergo over time due to changes in social, economic, and political conditions, and seeks to establish the inadequacy of using poverty standards that were devised at some historical date in the past to measure what counts as poverty/deprivation in the present. This is especially true when we ponder the fact that as societies evolve, laws, customs, and obligations also evolve. Thus, making the concept of poverty relative to the social and economic conditions that define necessities for leading a life of value at a particular point in time in the lives of individuals and societies (see Smith 1981/1776; Townsend 1979).⁴³ However, the formulation of poverty as relative deprivation is not without its challenges. As Townsend (2006: 6) argues, the formulation of poverty as the lack of disposable income relative to that of others in one’s society fails to “distinguish conceptually between inequality and poverty.” This is because poverty goes beyond the maldistribution of resources to encapsulate the lack of necessary resources to fulfil social demands and to observe the customs of one’s society. In the section that follows, I explicate the conception of socio-economic rights as fundamental rights that poor people can justifiably claim from their government.

3.3. Socio-economic Rights as Fundamental Rights

Here, I will discuss the idea of socio-economic rights as fundamental Rights. To do this, I will engage with the thoughts of some scholars, beginning with David Bilchitz. Fundamental rights, sometimes construed as human rights, are rights that all persons are entitled to by being members of the human community. According to Thomas Pogge (2007: 23), “human rights are...widely understood as giving persons a moral claim to protective action by their government.” Bilchitz approaches the problem of tackling extreme poverty from the perspective of fundamental rights. The goal is to establish a

⁴³ Adam Smith’s famous example of the “necessaries” to wear a linen shirt or leather shoes in 18th century England before one can appear in public without shame is a typical example of the relative nature of poverty as it relates to historical contexts. See Adam Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1981/1776: V.ii.k.3).

connection between a society's duty to the poor as stemming from a place of obligation that the state owes to the individual citizens, just like other rights – for example, civil and political rights – and providing a philosophical justification for socio-economic rights – subsistence rights – that appeals to a wide range of individuals, irrespective of their philosophical and legal standpoint. Whilst it is the case that Bilchitz, unlike Oruka, tried to justify the states' duties for guaranteeing subsistence rights to the poor based on a claim of fundamental socio-economic rights, he failed to consider the issue of the degree of such duties and obligations and their implications for the poor. In the following paragraphs, I will consider Bilchitz's arguments and expose how they stand in the context of enforcement of the *human minimum* as a fundamental socio-economic right.

According to Bilchitz (2007: 98), the theory of socio-economic rights rests on two central components: Firstly, “a theory of value which recognizes that ultimate value inheres in the experiential and purposive dimensions of individual lives;” and secondly, “an idea that a society should treat the lives of beings as having equal importance.”⁴⁴ The central feature of fundamental rights, in Bilchitz's conception, is that it guarantees protection for the urgent needs of every individual based on a society's concern for the equal value of every life (ibid.: 79).⁴⁵ He further distinguishes between two contents of rights: ‘Conditional rights’ and ‘unconditional rights’. ‘Conditional rights’, for Bilchitz (ibid.: 217), “protect fundamental interests that people have and arise in societies that seek to treat individuals with equal importance.” As a means to an end for securing a life of value for a society's worse off, it “focuses on the perspective of recipience” and recognises the fact that “each individual has certain fundamental interests that are the necessary prerequisites for leading lives of value” (ibid.: 80). Thus, in Bilchitz's (ibid.: 217) framing of the theory, conditional rights are not external to individuals, but are borne of the virtue of people being specific types of creatures with specific types of interests.

‘Unconditional rights’, on the other hand, “focuses on the perspective of agency: it concerns the fact that respecting and upholding conditional rights may take place in circumstances of scarcity, and involves action by agents who have their own interests” (ibid.). There is thus the sense in which conditional rights tells us that “we have a conditional obligation to each to ensure that certain fundamental interests are realized, such as being provided with adequate food” (ibid.: 89). Conditional rights, in a sense, gives rise to unconditional rights through their implicit appeal to effectiveness

⁴⁴ Rights in this context arise from the demand that a society based upon law, has a duty to treat the lives of each individual being within its jurisdiction with equal importance without any exception.

⁴⁵ Bilchitz (2007: 70) grounds his justification for basic entitlements on two things: “having positive experiences and the fulfilment of purposes.”

(ibid.).⁴⁶ The law should thus, impose fundamental socio-economic rights, and the government has to enforce them through the courts of law. This is done by setting “the general standard that constitutes the minimum core obligation of the state” (ibid.: 198) to ensure that everyone is provided with access to the necessities necessary to fulfil their minimal interests in leading a life of value. What is important to note about the two contents of rights presented by Bilchitz is that under certain circumstances, failure to fully realise conditional rights may be justified. This may happen in circumstances where the unconditional obligation to fulfil conditional rights imposes further considerations that modify the practical requirements to fulfil conditional rights. According to Bilchitz (ibid.: 82), “The point of recognizing conditional rights is partially concerned with the fact that such rights retain a moral force even where one is not required to act upon them.” There is thus the circumstantial feature of conditional rights which demonstrates that they are not generally absolute rights.

The same cannot be said of unconditional rights. The latter, which is also referred to as ‘unconditional obligations’ demands that the urgency – and importance – of circumstances decide what particular course of action must be taken. However, certain conditions may hinder a state’s ability to fulfil its unconditional obligations to its citizens. Conditions like scarcity,⁴⁷ urgency,⁴⁸ sacrifice,⁴⁹ effectiveness,⁵⁰ etc. Overcoming these limitations is necessary for translating ‘conditional rights’ into ‘unconditional rights’.

As a solution, Bilchitz presents what he calls a ‘thin theory of value’ that seeks to establish a principle of equal importance that makes each being entitled to the level of provision necessary for basic subsistence. The ‘thin theory’, for Bilchitz (ibid.: 70), “provides us with a principled basis upon which a society with diverse perspectives can justifiably seek to outline the scope of the principle of equal importance.” The ‘thin theory’ of value thus aims to ensure that the minimum core obligations of the state to each citizen are met without the prioritisation of some individuals or groups over others. “Minimum core obligations,” for Bilchitz (ibid.: 189), “are those obligations to meet the ‘minimum essential levels of a right’.” And since “there is no separation between the rights that a society

⁴⁶ Another interesting feature of conditional rights in Bilchitz’s (2007: 217) conception is that whether the state is capable of fulfilling them or not, recognition of their existence is of paramount importance.

⁴⁷ The scarcity of certain resources may hinder a state’s ability to fulfil certain conditional rights it owes to its citizens. Thus, Bilchitz (2007: 86) is of the view that distinguishing the types of scarcity that a society faces is important in determining what obligations a state is required to fulfil its conditional duties.

⁴⁸ This has to do with the urgency of the interest that is involved. Here, a society is required to prioritize meeting the most urgent interests of individuals.

⁴⁹ Here, Bilchitz (2007: 87) argues that as the level of sacrifice required of each individual regarding the fulfilment of conditional rights increases, so does the permissibility of failing to fulfil the conditional rights of individuals that one owes such sacrifices.

⁵⁰ This provides additional conditions for the realization of unconditional rights through combined efforts and institutional structures.

recognizes and the practical obligations it has to realize such rights” (ibid.: 79), the recognition by the state of the existence of fundamental socio-economic rights of citizens imposes responsibility on the state to not just protect the principle of the equal importance of each life but also to provide individuals with the resources necessary to lead valuable lives.⁵¹

Worthy of note is the fact that while socio-economic rights⁵² are mostly regarded as being aspirational⁵³ with little practical implications within a polity, as Bilchitz (ibid.: 1) points out, the reality and negative impacts of poverty on human society concretises this aspiration and make it a challenge that must be tackled for the preservation of human dignity. On fulfilling a society’s unconditional obligations to the poor through the recognition of conditional rights, Bilchitz (ibid.: 98) argues that “decisions will have to be taken in particular contexts with particular facts and circumstances playing a part in determining exactly which obligations a society must fulfil.” Thus, fulfilling our moral obligations to the poor is left to the moral sense.

Bilchitz’s arguments thus far attempt to establish that the primary obligation for the protection of the socio-economic rights of the poor rests upon society. Society, here, is construed by Bilchitz (ibid.: 92) as “the primary collective political grouping that designs, forms, and enforces rules which govern the distribution of benefits and burdens to individuals and thus largely determines the ability of individuals to lead lives of value.” It is important to note that the problem with Bilchitz’s socio-economic rights approaches to justifying a society’s obligations to the poor is that, like Oruka’s *human minimum* theory, it focuses more on the negative impacts of poverty on society – and on the lives of the poor – and uses the same to argue for an obligation to fight poverty.⁵⁴ Although Bilchitz in some way tries to specify who should bear the burden of enforcing the fundamental conditional rights of the poor, his approach does not go far enough and suffers a set of failures. Firstly, Bilchitz’s solution, which focuses primarily on the institution of the state, fails to recognise the vital role that wealthy private individuals and organisations can play in the fight against extreme poverty. Secondly, like Oruka, he fails to acknowledge the degrees of economic inequalities – and social stratification – which

⁵¹ It is important to note that there are those who contest this claim of the existence of a right to basic necessities. According to Thomas Pogge (2007: 14), those who contest this claim of a right to basic necessities often argue that “It is not plausible to hold everyone responsible for supplying basic necessities to all other human beings who need them.” Pogge, however, rejected this claim as mistaken and based on a false inference. For a detailed discussion, see Thomas Pogge, *Severe Poverty as a Human Rights Violation*. In *Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right: Who Owes What to the Very Poor?* Edited by Thomas Pogge. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007: 11-53).

⁵² Socio-economic rights may also be referred to as the right to the most basic needs of individuals or subsistence rights. They include the right to physical security, food, shelter, and health care. Odera Oruka (1997: 87) refers to these rights as *the human minimum*.

⁵³ Bilchitz (2007: 190-191) rejects the conceptualization of socio-economic rights as being a set of aspirational goals and blames it for being responsible for their non-prioritization and little consideration in public policy.

⁵⁴ Cf. S. K. Vaughan (2008: 128-129).

should be a crucial determining factor for the degree of responsibility private individuals and states should bear in enforcing socio-economic rights. Thirdly, Bilchitz placing the burden of proof for the violation of socio-economic rights and the primary responsibility for claiming fundamental socio-economic rights on the claimants of such rights is problematic.⁵⁵ He fails to take into cognisance the cost of litigation which might be above the financial reach of the extremely poor people that are the victims of such rights violations. Also, considering the long process it takes to prosecute a case in court, most poor people, if they had such money would rather want to invest it in other activities that might solve their immediate poverty-related challenges than invest it in a court case whose outcome may not be in their favour. Lastly, there is also the question of whether poor people have a moral obligation to contribute to the fight against extreme poverty. If they do, what is the nature of such obligations?

To the question: Do the poor have some obligation to fight poverty? Marianne S. Ulriksen and Sophie Plageron who recognise all citizens as rights-holders and duty-bearers think that they do in varying degrees to the non-poor.⁵⁶ Ulriksen and Plageron do this by establishing the fluidity of moral duties and arguing for the obligation of both the poor and the non-poor in the fight against poverty (cf. Young 2011). According to Ulriksen and Plageron (2014: 760), the poor are not just passive claimants of rights to social protection from the state, but are active agents that have certain duties to the state and the non-poor at some point when they are capable to contribute to the elimination of poverty in the “context of citizenship as generalized exchange where all citizens perform duties and benefit from rights.”⁵⁷ For Ulriksen and Plageron (ibid.: 761), “in many instances poor and non-poor are in similar positions as both rights-holders and duty-bearers.” In this context, the poor are not only seen as rights-holders but also as duty-bearers whose inability to contribute to society at present is not static. Rather, it is defined by the scale of their vulnerability to the capability to do so.⁵⁸ The point here is that if the poor are unable to contribute to the elimination of poverty today as duty-bearers due to their lower degree of agency and capabilities, they will do so tomorrow when their situations are improved through the help of those with a higher degree of agency and capabilities. This is a fine argument. However,

⁵⁵ Bilchitz (2007: 206) argues that those claiming a rights violation from the state should bear the primary responsibility of proving that their rights has indeed been violated.

⁵⁶ The term ‘non-poor’ is used by Ulriksen and Plageron (2014: 763) to refer to those generally regarded as not being in need of assistance or social protection. There is, however, the lack of a distinction between who qualifies as poor and non-poor, given the multidimensional nature of poverty.

⁵⁷ See also Amartya Sen, *Development As Freedom* (1999: 11).

⁵⁸ Bilchitz (2007: 92) also shares the position that the poor under certain conditions, where capable, should be responsible for meeting their own needs by contributing to the fight against extreme poverty as doing so is conducive to their self-respect. However, Bilchitz fails to specify if this obligation should apply to all those the society identifies as poor. Also, Bilchitz fails to identify what form such a contribution would take.

there is no distinct identification of the degrees of moral duties between the poor and the non-poor from Ulriksen and Plagerson. For example, how should duties be distributed? Who qualifies as a non-poor? Between the non-poor class, should the level of responsibility to fight poverty be equally distributed between private non-poor and state actors? These questions demand urgent answers as they are critical to effective poverty reduction/eradication policies in Africa and beyond. In the next chapter, I will discuss the notion of extreme poverty as it relates to African society and consider the notion of extreme poverty in an African context by contextualizing the challenges of poverty as they affect different societies and groups.

Chapter 4.

4.1. The Major Challenges of Poverty Reduction in Africa

In the previous chapter, I considered what is meant by the notion of extreme poverty, Oruka's conception of poverty and foreign aid, *the right to the human minimum*, the historical conceptions of poverty, and the relevant views of some philosophers concerning the enforcement of the obligation to fight extreme poverty as a socio-economic right. I now turn to the heart of the notion of extreme poverty as it relates to African society. This chapter will consider the notion of extreme poverty in an African context by contextualising the challenges of poverty as they affect different societies and groups.

Reducing, alleviating, or eliminating extreme poverty is considered to be the ultimate goal and measure of a society's development (Chambers 2006: 3; see also World Bank 2000). That the existence of extreme poverty in human society anywhere in the world undermines not just human progress, but overall social, economic, and political development cannot be overstated. Poverty, in Africa, is not just an existential problem; as Chimakonam (2021: 205) rightly argues, it is the most important problem facing the continent. The centrality of this challenge is underscored by the high number of people living in extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa (ibid.: 202). Thus, one major task that requires urgent attention from governments, think tanks, philosophers, international development experts, etc., is the need to proffer practical and inclusive solutions to the problem of extreme poverty in Africa. This must begin with a systematic attempt at understanding some of the major challenges that militate against the reduction – or elimination – of extreme poverty in regions like Africa, where extreme poverty is prevalent today.

James D. Wolfensohn, the former president of the World Bank in his foreword to *World Development Report 2000/2001: Attacking Poverty* (2001: VI) rightly averred that there is no simple and universal blueprint for fighting poverty. Wolfensohn's statement implies that although the challenges of poverty are universal, the dimensions of its existence are not. This means that different approaches and solutions are needed in the fight against poverty if we are to make significant progress towards the attainment of Goal No. 1 of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals come 2030. In the course of this research, I have been thinking about the major challenges of poverty reduction and what can be done to overcome these challenges to get the poor in Africa, and beyond, the necessary support they need to escape the shackles of poverty. One thing that stood out for me was the fact that current approaches to poverty reduction focus mostly on the generalised conceptualisation

of poverty and solutions provided follow from this blanket understanding. Little attention is given to the nuances of the dimensions of poverty as it relates to individuals, groups, communities, and regions.

The concept of poverty in Africa can be better understood when factors such as social exclusion, gender exclusion, gender inequalities, age-related deprivations, ecological disasters, political instability, geopolitical uncertainties, technological deprivation, ethnicity, informal work, youth unemployment/underemployment, and rural impoverishment, are considered as its determinants. These factors are indeed excluded from the development of the Global MPI. Moreover, the intensity and incidence of poverty differ across continents and regions, hence why a need to critically evaluate poverty in Africa based on its distinctive peculiarities. Although the recent Global MPI statistics of 2021 declare that Sub-Saharan Africa is multidimensionally the poorest region in the world, the exclusion of certain developmental factors in the construction of the index may not be adequate to capture the actual extent of poverty in Africa.

4.2. Understanding Poverty in an African Context

The World Bank (2022) provides a generalised quantitative measurement of extreme poverty as the state of living “below the international poverty line of \$1.90 a day—a threshold based on the average of the national poverty lines of 15 of the poorest countries.” This measurement is problematic for some reasons. Firstly, it ignores other dimensions of the deprivations that characterise poverty, for example, the qualitative and psychological aspects of deprivations (Oruka 1997; Chimakonam 2020b; Beck et al. 2020). However, the UN’s 2018-2027 system-wide action plan, *Accelerating Global Actions for a World Without Poverty* (2018: 3) notes the importance of understanding the various dimensions of poverty by emphasizing that, “While income poverty is of critical importance, and is more susceptible to measurement, increasing our knowledge of the multidimensional nature of poverty and thus the actions needed to tackle all forms of deprivation is an important part of system-wide action.” Similarly, Saunders (2004: 2) argues:

Understanding the causes and consequences of poverty involves looking beyond the statistics to examine the processes and events that expose people to poverty, the conditions that prevent their escape and thus lead to its entrenchment, and the consequences of poverty for those forced to experience it.

These emphases by the UN system-wide action plan and Saunders affirms that while poverty may be a global problem, a proper understanding of the problem must be focused on the dimensions

and contexts in which the problem exists for solutions to be adequately directed. This is the first step that cannot be ignored in the fight against extreme poverty in Africa.

According to the 2021 Global MPI (2021: 5), “Multidimensional poverty and monetary poverty (people living on less than \$1.90 a day) are complementary measures, capturing different yet crucial information.” Thus, focusing on one aspect of measuring poverty may result in neglecting those on the other side of the poverty divide. Ravi Kanbur (2006: 19) shares a similar view and argues, “To aggregate poverty experiences with above poverty line experiences for an individual is ... to miss the point about poverty.” This exposes the problem that a generalised approach to poverty measurement faces; it also exposes the weaknesses – and consequent ineffectiveness – that a policy built around such an approach might face in an attempt to eliminate poverty. To buttress the importance of a multidimensional approach, the Global MPI 2021 (2021: 5) presents an example of Pakistan where only 4.4% of the population lives in monetary – less than \$1.90 a day – poverty, but 38.3% lives in multidimensional poverty. Also, in South Africa, 18.7% of the population lives in monetary poverty, but only 6.3% live in multidimensional poverty (ibid.). This further shows why the challenges of poverty must be viewed as going beyond the general lack of monetary income. It also shows why context matters in understanding poverty and the development of policies.

The different dimensions of poverty call for a non-linear understanding and conceptualisation of poverty and public policies aimed at poverty reduction and possible eradication. This is particularly important because the causes of poverty differ from context to context. Chambers (2006: 4) understands the importance of context better and argues that when we fail to understand the problem of poverty’s existence from the perspective of the poor and integrate their experiences into our policy framework for poverty reduction or elimination, it can sometimes lead to the misdirection of efforts. This is similar to the point made by Saunders above.

The above position by Chambers affirms my argument for the importance of a contextual understanding of poverty as an effective poverty reduction strategy. Africa is a victim of this primarily economic/income-based conceptualisation of poverty that ignores context. This has had many negative impacts on the lives of the poor. The focus on economic poverty has led to the neglect of other dimensions of poverty, especially as it relates to the African context and Africans. For context, being poor in Germany differs from being poor in Haiti. In the same way, being poor in China differs from being poor in Cameroon. The needs of the poor in Scandinavia are different from the needs of the poor in Sub-Saharan Africa. Also, being poor in Canada and the United States of America differ from being

poor in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and South Sudan (cf. Bilchitz 2007: 238-240).⁵⁹ According to Chimakonam (2020b: 516), for example, while the poor in a place like the Congo might include a lack of physical security and access to quality health care in their definition of poverty; the poor in Germany who lives in a society where physical security and access to quality health care are guaranteed to all citizens by the government might not. While the poor in Canada and the United States of America, for example, may be deprived of only sustainable basic income, the poor in the DRC and South Sudan are not only deprived of sustainable basic income. They are also deprived of good leadership as a result of corruption and dysfunctional public institutions, peace as a result of protracted wars, basic infrastructure for mobility as a result of underdevelopment, access to quality education as a result of political instability, poor educational funding, and poor social services, social exclusion as a result of social and cultural practices that exclude minority groups (see Narayan et al. 2000: 133-145; UNDP and OPHI 2021: 12-19; Department for International Development 2005: 5; Caterina Ruggeri Laderchi, et al. 2006: 10),⁶⁰ ‘othering’ – a form of social and economic exclusion which stems from poverty itself (Chimakonam 2020c: 435), a forcible displacement which often leads to the “loss of livelihoods and assets and the accumulation of debt” (Klugman n.d.: 12),⁶¹ sexual and intimate partner violence (IPV) (ibid.: 19-20), gender exclusion which women are the primary victims, and other preventable social benefits. Thus, in developing approaches to tackle poverty, understanding, and factoring into our policies, the different factors in these societies that push people into poverty are fundamental in arriving at effective solutions that will address the unique needs of each community.

The above peculiarities lead to the primary question of this section: What does poverty mean in an African context? In other words, what does it mean to be poor in Africa? Poverty poses a serious threat to Africa as a continent and to its peoples because Africa is the headquarters of global poverty—both monetarily and multi-dimensionally. The World Poverty Clock (2022) reports that 460 million

⁵⁹ For example, while there are many people who starve to death in Africa, in general, people do not starve to death in the United States of America and Canada. There are philosophers who argue that no individual should be allowed to die from extreme poverty. John Locke, for example, believes that government ought to provide people with the necessities of food, shelter, and clothing to ensure that no one dies from the lack of these necessities. For a detailed discussion, see Sharon K. Vaughan, *Poverty, Justice, and Western Political Thought* (2008: 49-59).

⁶⁰ Caterina Ruggeri Laderchi, et al. (2006: 11) conceptualizes social exclusion as “the processes of marginalization and deprivation that can arise even in rich countries with comprehensive welfare provisions.” Social exclusion focuses on distributional issues related to the situation of those who are excluded from social and economic opportunities due to certain social and cultural practices. For example, women, the landless, and ethnic minorities. These exclusions often lead to economic poverty. The Rohingya who have suffered decades of violence, discrimination, and persecution in Myanmar presents a typical case of a socially excluded ethnic minority. Narayan et al. (2000: 133-145) provides a comprehensive analysis of the different forms of social exclusion.

⁶¹ According to Jeni Klugman (n.d.: 12), a “forcible displacement” which often leads to the “loss of livelihoods and assets and the accumulation of debt” is another factor that contributes to poverty. Forcible displacement caused by protracted wars is one of the leading cause of poverty in many parts of Africa.

people currently live in extreme poverty in Africa as of May 2022. A figure which accounts for 33% of the continent's 1.4 billion population. On the other hand, the Global MPI 2021 (2021: 4) reports that “1.3 billion or more than one in five of whom are multidimensionally poor—account for about 92 percent of the population in developing countries” where Africa is the headquarters. The situation becomes more worrisome when one considers the fact that nearly 85 percent of the world's 1.3 billion multidimensionally poor live in Sub-Saharan Africa (556 million) (ibid.: 4). The rates of destitution are also highest in Sub-Saharan Africa (Alkire and Robles 2017).

Thus, to answer the question of what it means to be poor in Africa, my response claims that being poor in Africa – for the African – entails starting in life on an unequal footing with people in other regions of the world as a result of the social, cultural, economic, military, and political factors that directly deny poor Africans access to economic mobility to escape poverty. Social exclusion, like *othering* (see Chimakonam 2020c), which is predominant in Africa – and India in Asia – denies the poor access to opportunities. Ethnicity and group-based social exclusion also contribute to poverty in many African societies. This may take the form of social and economic exclusion based on one's cultural or ethnic identity and exclusion based on belonging to a minority group. Certain cultural practices also contribute to poverty in Africa by denying particular groups, for example, women, and young people the right to inherit or own properties or to participate in some economic activities solely because of their gender and age group. Poor economic output due to Western-led international political exclusion and sanctions also contributes to poverty in Africa. Zimbabwe is a good case in point. Military oppression and colonial exploitation of the African continent from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade to the colonial regimes and the lingering psychological, economic, social, and political effects is another dimension that characterises what it means to be poor in Africa. The apartheid regime in pre-1994 South Africa offers a good example of economic exclusion, political oppression, and colonial exploitation that directly contributes to poverty.

4.3. Contextualising Poverty: An Approach to Extreme Poverty Reduction in Africa

Contextualising poverty matters, especially when we take into cognisance the factors and influences that go into its conceptualisation and definitions. Seipel understands these factors better. For Seipel (2003: 192), “the effort to define poverty is largely a political rather than an empirical activity,” and these efforts only “reflect the ideologies of the prevailing power” of the society in question that is doing the definition. This makes contextualisation significant to poverty reduction policies. Without the recognition of contexts and the application of approaches appropriate for specifically identified

contexts, any attempt at proffering a general solution to the challenges of extreme poverty in Africa will amount to what Chimakonam (2020b: 102; see also Graness 2015: 132) best describes as “dispensing Northern medicine for Southern problems.” Chambers (2006: 4) shares this position and holds that the lack of contextualisation “narrow and standardise vision, leave out much that matters, and do not allow for the multifarious ways in which people can be enabled to enjoy a better life.” He adds, “Policies and actions need to be informed much less by top-down targets and much more by the diverse bottom-up realities of the powerless” (ibid.). Chambers’ view is particularly important here as it directly supports my position on the need to prioritise contexts as an approach to fighting extreme poverty in Africa. This will help to bypass the pitfalls approaches like Oruka’s *human minimum* face in prescribing general enforcement of the poverty threshold at the risk of plunging those on the fringes back into poverty in an attempt to fulfil Oruka’s well-intentioned obligations.

A non-contextual approach to fighting poverty risks excluding the most vulnerable populations in policy formulation and implementation. It presents a general picture of poverty that ignores the peculiarities of the different societies and regions in which poverty exists. In other words, it ignores the socio-cultural and socioeconomic factors like ethnic and gender exclusion, environmental factors like climate change, lack of access to quality education, political instability caused by fragility, conflict, and violence, and other forms of conflicts in measuring poverty. Consequently, blanket poverty reduction policies produce blanket outcomes with minimal impact. This affects the lives of poor people negatively as policies aimed at tackling poverty problems tend to have minimal effect on the specific needs of each group and community.

The biggest mistake policymakers make is thinking that poverty means the same thing for all communities and takes a similar form in all contexts. This often leads to policy failures. Seipel (2003: 199) affirms this point thus: “Anti-poverty strategies that rely on resources allocation, economic growth or any other approach have not always been effective.” This shows that to significantly impact the fight against extreme poverty, poverty reduction policies must move beyond blanket resource allocation and capital investments to recognise the peculiarities of individual and societal contexts that define needs. Community A might be rich in agricultural produce but poor in infrastructure and technology. Community B might be rich in infrastructure but poor in arable land for agriculture or access to clean water due to environmental factors like soil pollution. In some communities, due to unbalanced cultural practices, poverty might be prevalent among a particular group, like ethnic minorities and women – with the cause of poverty being customary laws that exclude and discriminate against women and other minority groups. For example, those in the lower social class/caste. In such instances, a general measure of poverty and the solution that follows from such a measure fails to

understand and contextualise the different factors – social, cultural, religious, economic, etc. – that contribute to poverty. In the absence of contextualisation, solutions fail to achieve maximum impact. At best, it only creates a sense of fulfilment of responsibilities on the path of government and the private sector working to eliminate extreme poverty while having minimal impact on the lives of the poor. This necessitates the contextualisation of poverty as an approach to poverty reduction in Africa. It is important to stress that the current Global MPI construction does not adequately capture the contextualisation of poverty in Africa due to certain distinctive factors that contribute to poverty in the continent that are not considered in the development of MPI. Chimakonam raises this concern about the inadequacy of the current MPI in measuring certain qualitative aspects of poverty. According to Chimakonam (2020a: 108-109):

MPI can measure standard of living because it comprises elements like water, electricity, cooking fuel etc., which are either present or not. But the MPI may be unable to measure education and health, because these are mostly services provided by institutions, and institutional weakness is a problem in most parts of sub-Saharan Africa. What happens when one can access the institutions but not the services? Think of, say, a person who receives 12 years of schooling without education or has access to hospitals without healthcare. According to the MPI, such a person's poverty measurement will be shaded non-poor for education and aspects of healthcare, which will be a false result. Many cases of child mortality in Africa are not caused by lack of access to health institutions but lack of quality healthcare services in those institutions. This shows that the MPI may be a useful way of measuring poverty but there are unique contexts, especially in the sub-Sahara, in which some of its indices would have to be defined in greater detail.

The above concerns by Chimakonam about the MPI affirm the necessity for a contextual approach to fighting poverty in Africa. Other factors to consider presented by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), includes the quality of human development,⁶² the life-course gender gap,⁶³ women's empowerment,⁶⁴ environmental sustainability,⁶⁵ and socio-economic sustainability.⁶⁶ These factors should be integrated into the MPI to understand the dimensions of poverty's existence in contexts peculiar to groups, communities, and regions. Others are social, cultural, political, and gender-based beliefs and practices that make some groups/communities more susceptible to poverty than others.

⁶² Available from: <https://hdr.undp.org/quality-human-development>

⁶³ Available from: <https://hdr.undp.org/life-course-gender-gap>

⁶⁴ Available from: <https://hdr.undp.org/womens-empowerment>

⁶⁵ Available from: <https://hdr.undp.org/environmental-sustainability>

⁶⁶ Available from: <https://hdr.undp.org/socioeconomic-sustainability>

In the next chapter that follows, I highlight some of the implications of Oruka's proposal of the enforcement of a global moral obligation on every moral agent as an approach to fighting extreme poverty in Africa. I further engage the subject matter of who should bear greater moral responsibility in ensuring that a society attains the *human minimum* as a practical approach to extreme poverty eradication.

Chapter 5.

5.1. A Conversation on the Moral Implications of Oruka's 'Human Minimum' Approach to Tackling Extreme Poverty in Africa

Having considered the various dimensions of the deprivations that characterise extreme poverty in Africa, and the relevant actors in the debate, I now turn to the most important chapter of this discourse. In this chapter, I seek to answer two important questions: Firstly, what are the moral implications of adopting/enforcing Oruka's 'human minimum' approach to fight extreme poverty in Africa? Secondly, who should bear the greater burden for the attainment of *the human minimum* in Africa? In other words, who should fund it? I shall employ the conversational method to ground my discourse on the subject matter. In so doing, I hope to open up new frontiers for discussions on the subject matter of practical approaches to obligating responsibilities for the elimination of extreme poverty in Africa and beyond.

As I have noted in the previous chapters of this dissertation, Oruka's approach to eliminating extreme poverty – *the human minimum* approach – raises some questions and has some unfavourable implications, which I will consider shortly. Oruka (1997: 85) proposes the "*human minimum*," away from the dominant principles of international charity and rectification for historical injustices, as a principle that provides the base for foreign aid and the global moral obligation to eliminate extreme poverty. Oruka believes that *the right to the human minimum* is a universal moral right of every individual that supersedes territorial boundaries. Thus, in enforcing a global *human minimum* as a society, we will not just be eliminating extreme poverty, but also restoring the dignity of the world's poor as moral persons. However, what are some of the implications of enforcing a global moral obligation that is blind to the peculiarities of context and economic differences of individual members of society? Is there a point at which Oruka's good-intentioned enforcement of a global obligation to the poor becomes counterproductive due to its negligence of individual economic differences? These are the questions that I seek to answer in the paragraphs below.

I now return to the first crux of this chapter which concerns some of the implications of enforcing a global moral obligation that is blind to the peculiarities of context and economic differences of individual members of society. The first and most concerning problem that I find in Oruka's *human minimum* approach definition of who counts as poor and non-poor is the porous nature of the poverty line Oruka subscribes to. The idea that anyone situated above the *human minimum* threshold – is economically stable enough and thus – has a moral obligation to contribute to – or fund – the elimination of extreme poverty ignores the economic differences of the categories of those who count as non-poor. This negligence is based on a faulty assumption of the economic

security/comfortability of everyone situated above the *human minimum* poverty line. While it is true that having physical security, health care, and subsistence might prevent one from being “a brute or a human vegetable” as Oruka (ibid.: 87) would call it, it is not entirely true that the possession of those ‘necessities for a decent definition of a human being’ makes one economically capable of funding the fight against extreme poverty. The implication for everyone above the poverty threshold – especially from the perspective of the income-centered poverty index – is that whether you have just one extra dollar added to your \$1.90 PPP, you qualify to contribute to the fight against extreme poverty, even if doing so puts you at risk of falling below *the human minimum* poverty threshold. Most importantly, in the African context, an individual who has physical security, health care, and subsistence, but who lives under a repressive regime might be regarded as morally qualified to contribute to the attainment of *the human minimum*, irrespective of their lacking substantive freedoms which may lead to other forms of deprivations, for example, psychological deprivation. This lack of a distinction base on economic disparities renders Oruka's global moral obligation enforcement mechanism problematic and unsustainable.

Similarly, Saunders highlights this lack of delineation as constituting one of the points of criticism that have been levelled against the headcount poverty measure. As Saunders (2004: 3) put it, what this implies is that “someone whose income is one dollar below the poverty line is defined as poor, whereas someone whose income is one dollar above the line is not poor.” Saunders (ibid.) follows it up with an important question: “Can we ever be confident that such small income differences represent substantial differences in actual well-being? Clearly, the answer is no.” Having an extra dollar added to one’s \$1.90 does not make one non-poor. While one might escape the income poverty line, one might still be psychologically and multidimensionally poor. Faced with the latter categories of deprivation, we cannot plausibly say that one is economically well-off enough to contribute to the elimination of extreme poverty. That the negative conditions of extreme poverty leave its victims with negative impacts like psychological trauma is a fact that cannot be obliterated by a dollar increase in one’s monetary income. The situation is not different for those who get out of poverty either as there may always exist the fear of one falling below the poverty line again, a condition Haughton and Khandker (2009: 3) aptly refer to as “vulnerability.”⁶⁷

Oruka’s failure to understand the nuanced economic differences among the non-poor members of society leads to the second problem with his approach: it is morally self-defeating and economically counterproductive. By making the fight against extreme poverty the responsibility of every moral

⁶⁷ According to Jonathan Haughton and Shahidur R. Khandker (2009: 3), vulnerability can be defined as “the risk of falling into poverty in the future, even if the person is not necessarily poor now.”

agent, i.e., those classified as non-poor and living above *the human minimum* threshold, Oruka's good-intentioned enforcement of a global obligation to the poor becomes counterproductive due to its negligence of individual economic differences. It risks plunging the poor back into extreme poverty. This is especially true in a region like Africa which houses the highest number of both absolute and multidimensionally poor people in the world. We must note that poverty comes in different dimensions. The implication of the different dimensions of poverty means that while a person might not be living below the poverty line or what Oruka refers to as the *human minimum*, they might still be multidimensionally poor, and consequently, deprived in many other aspects of well-being. Thus, by asking a multidimensionally poor individual to contribute to the attainment of the *human minimum*, we might be directly pushing them from the state of multidimensional poverty into extreme poverty. This is self-defeating as it creates a never-ending cycle of moral obligation to the same cause.

In the next section, employing the conversational method (see Chimakonam 2017a, 2017b) and philosophical analysis, I explore the question of who should bear the moral responsibility of ensuring that a society attains the *human minimum* as an inclusive approach to extreme poverty eradication. I will justify why a disproportionate distribution of moral responsibility is a better approach in the fight against extreme poverty than Oruka's indiscriminate global moral obligation model.

5.1.1. The Question of Moral Responsibility in Ensuring a 'Human Minimum' in Africa

In *Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right: Who Owes What to the Very Poor?*, Pogge (2007: 11) makes the declaration: "Freedom from severe poverty is among the most important human interests. We are physical beings who need access to safe food and water, clothing, shelter, and basic medical care in order to live well." However, Pogge (ibid.) also notes that "[v]ery poor people lack secure access to sufficient quantities of these basic necessities" to secure the means necessary for living well. This raises the question: If people in severe poverty lack secure access to sufficient quantities of necessities needed to lead a life of value, who should be responsible for providing this access? Put differently, who should bear the responsibility for ensuring the realization of the *human minimum* of the world's extremely poor population, especially in Africa? For commitment to the cause of eliminating extreme poverty to receive any significant attention and action, some sort of obligation is not just important, but necessary. It is a prerequisite for victory against all forms of extreme deprivation. Thus, closely tied to the idea of responsibility supposed in the question above is the notion of – moral – obligation. But firstly, what is moral obligation? And as humans, do we have moral obligations, and to whom?

Although the idea of what moral obligations we have, the nature of moral obligations, and to whom we have them is diverse and contentious (Kant 1998; Zimmerman 2006; Gyekye 2010; Behrens 2012; Molefe 2016; Akhlaghi 2020); that we have moral obligations as moral agents – primarily towards other moral agents – cannot be gainsaid. J. G. Schurman (1894: 641) defines moral obligation as “the response of our nature to the recognized authority of moral law... It is the feeling of an imperative addressed to the will and ordering it to adopt the right and to eschew the wrong.” Furthermore, Schurman (ibid.) highlights that “[m]oral obligation is not necessitation. The moral law commands but does not coerce us” (cf. Tomasello 2020). From the definition presented by Schurman, one sees that while the notion of obligation appeals to the will of moral agents ordering them to adopt the right course of action, it does not compel them to do so. Obligation, thus conceived, recognises the existence of alternative courses of action and choice.

On the question of moral responsibility to provide the poor with access to the *human minimum* necessary for leading a life of value, I agree with Oruka – and, indeed, all the poverty experts/philosophers/economists/think tanks, etc. – that governments and generally, the non-poor should bear that responsibility. Although I differ in my position on the degree of responsibility that should be borne by the different segments of the non-poor population. Before expatiating the basis of my disagreement with extant views on the degree of responsibility that should be borne by the different segments of the non-poor, let us first consider the basis of the responsibility of the non-poor to the poor.

A curious inquirer might ask: What is the basis of this demand for moral responsibility from the non-poor to ensure that the poor are helped to attain *the human minimum*?⁶⁸ Are such demands grounded on any foundation with moral legitimacy? Can morality be wrongfully demanding or *overdemanding* in its imposition of moral obligations? Firstly, regarding the question of the basis of the demand for moral responsibility from the non-poor, it is important to mention that a moral obligation may arise from several factors. For example, ideal, reciprocity, compassion, divine command/moral laws, emotional experience, and moral cognition. In the African philosophical tradition, for example, a moral obligation primarily arises from the conceptualisation of all humans as objects of moral concern. According to Kwame Gyekye (2010), this humanitarian conceptualisation of obligation stems from the idea that moral duties *ought* to be induced by a consciousness of the needs of others, rather than their – positive or negative – rights to our obligations. Thusly, from this

⁶⁸ It is worthy to note that the idea of obligations has the advantage of being more realistic concerning the burdens it places on individuals to act positively for a particular cause. This makes the idea of moral obligation practically attractive as a tool for motivating action in the fight against extreme poverty.

conception, “people fulfill—and ought to fulfill—duties to others not because of the rights of these others, but because of their needs and welfare” (ibid.). Here, responsibility, say, in the context of providing for the poor in Africa would arise from the humanitarian ground of human welfare—from our sympathies, reciprocity, and moral cognition of the sufferings of those living in abject poverty.⁶⁹ It recognises the fact that beyond any claims of rights and entitlements, our common humanity imposes a moral burden on all members of the non-poor collective to ensure the realisation of the *human minimum* of the poor.⁷⁰ In other words, our common humanity justifies reciprocal moral obligations towards each other. Our consciousness of the suffering that victims of poverty experience as being inherently bad and unpleasurable,⁷¹ awakens our sense of obligation to act towards eliminating the sufferings of the poor.

On the contrary, in the Western tradition, a moral obligation arises primarily from the conceptualisation of all humans not just as objects of moral concern and inherently worthy of respect and dignity, but as claimants with rights/entitlements to our moral responsibility. A good example of the Western entitlements conception of moral obligations is Immanuel Kant’s (1998) – unconditional – Categorical Imperative that is binding on all moral subjects. Because of its binding nature, moral agents can, as a matter of right/entitlement, demand certain moral duties from all other moral agents. This sharply contrasts with the predominantly humanitarian/communitarian/welfarist African conception of moral obligation. Under the African view of moral obligation, sometimes, obligations can be withdrawn if one fails to meet certain conditions for acceptance into the moral fabric of society (see Menkiti 1984). I would like to clarify here that these differences in conceptualisation do not in any way entail the superiority of one conception over the other in line with the conversational philosophical framework that guides my analysis of the problem of poverty in the African context. Different approaches and conceptualisations can complement each other⁷² so long as the goal is to

⁶⁹ In the complementary ethical framework that grounds this research, moral responsibility to the poor by the non-poor is grounded in acting to promote what Asouzu (2022b) refers to as “the common good.” According to Asouzu (2022b: 141), the common good encapsulates human “commitment to the joy of being as the ultimate transcendent foundation of meaning in our actions.” As the source of legitimisation for human actions, it negates absolute possessiveness and encourages concern for the need of others.

⁷⁰ Thomas Nagel (2005: 118) shares a similar view and argues that at least, from a humanitarian point of view, “there is some minimal concern we owe to fellow human beings threatened with starvation or severe malnutrition and early death from easily preventable diseases,” except one is an ethical or psychological egoist who believes in the strict advancement of only one’s self-interest.

⁷¹ The recognition of the conditions of extreme poverty as being characterised by negative/unpleasurable experiences and therefore bad, imposes some burden on the non-poor to contribute to the elimination of extreme poverty. As Schurman (1894: 643) rightly argues, recognition of some things to be good and others to be bad “always carries with it a feeling of obligation to pursue what is approved and to eschew what is condemned.” This echoes the famous Socratic teachings on knowledge which is aptly captured by the dictum: “To know the good is to do the good.”

⁷² Non-conversationalists might hold a different view to this position.

ensure the attainment of the *human minimum* and the elimination of extreme poverty in Africa and beyond.

To answer the question of the possibility of the *overdemandingness* of moral duties, Robert E. Goodin (2009: 2), for instance, argues that if the moral demands put forward by morality – or moral claimants – about what people are due are right and legitimate, then moral demands cannot be too demanding. Goodin (ibid.) further asserts: “The problem is not that legitimate demands demand too much; the problem is instead that people find themselves able to give too little.” Perhaps, the right argument should be that *people find themselves willing to give too little* to certain moral demands (see Scheffler 1986: 531). But what are moral duties without demands when the point of morality is to establish certain principles to guide human actions/conduct? As Goodin (2009: 3) rightly argues, “A morality that was never prepared to make any demands would be a pretty useless morality.” This is why in subscribing to the principles of morality, we also subscribe to its inherent characteristics of demandingness. Suffice, then, to argue, that moral responsibility to the poor by the non-poor in the fight against extreme poverty cannot be *morally overdemanding* so long as in doing so, the non-poor do not risk falling below *the human minimum* threshold.

However, such moral obligations might be rightly argued to be overdemanding, if based on existent economic disparities, those with fewer resources even though they are situated above *the human minimum* threshold, are obliged to contribute to the attainment of *the human minimum* of others below the poverty line. Particularly, if the enforcement of such obligations demands them to contribute equally as those with more economic resources. For example, governments, non-governmental/nonprofit organisations, rich individuals, and those adequately situated above the *human minimum* threshold. This argument that such moral obligations are overdemanding – or disproportionate – is informed by the thinking that if helping another human being get to the *human minimum* threshold will render the helper morally and economically worse off, then such an act fails both as a duty and as an end. It fails because its end is not achieved and its duty to the self is ignored.

Such actions can also be rightly categorised as morally inauthentic in line with the complementary ethical framework that grounds this research. Complementary ethics prioritises “the fulfilment of both the common good and individual good for an action to be determined right” (Chimakonam and Ogonnaya 2022: 59; Asouzu 2022b). What this implies is that if an action fails to promote the good of the individual and their community, then such actions cannot be rightly adjudged as morally right and authentic. This is because such actions, in principle, fail to promote the joy of the acting agent – and lack a comprehensive complementary balance – which is one of the defining

characteristics of a morally right action under the complementary ethical framework as articulated by Asouzu (2004, 2022a). The failure of those marginally situated above *the human minimum* threshold to become better off after contributing to the fight against extreme poverty, and the failure of their actions to make any significant difference due to the risk of their falling back into extreme poverty exposes the moral inauthenticity of their actions under the complementary ethical framework.⁷³ The latter provides a philosophical grounding for a disproportionate model of distribution of moral obligations in the fight against extreme poverty in Africa.

Describing how a moral obligation can be overdemanding or disproportionate in its demands, Goodin (2009: 7) states, “A morality's demands might be 'disproportionate' either because the gains in view are too small or because the sacrifices that would be required are too great.” Similarly, Anne Schwenkenbecher (2014: 66) avers: “A moral duty would be overly demanding if it required at least one agent involved in discharging it to sacrifice something of disproportionate moral worth.” This would lead to *overdemandingness* on the path of such moral duties. The demands of an obligation whose fulfilment leads to the reproduction of more conditions that created – or will multiply – the need for a future obligation to the same cause is not just morally counterproductive, but it undermines the very principle of moral obligation as an ethical category. This is especially true in the context of Africa where a majority of the population is multidimensionally poor. Thus, I here argue that those inadequately situated above *the human minimum* threshold in Africa, ought to be excused from the obligations of contributing to raising others above the poverty threshold in Oruka’s conception of poverty. This is justified by the fact that if in fulfilling such duties, those inadequately situated above the poverty line are required to sacrifice something of unequal or disproportionate moral worth, which also risks plunging them below the poverty threshold, then such an act fails as a duty and as an end and is thus morally overdemanding and economically counterproductive under the complementary ethical framework. This necessitates the need for a model of moral responsibility that distributes burdens according to an individual’s economic resources in the fight against extreme poverty in Africa and beyond. In the next section that follows, I consider what this model of moral responsibility might look like.

5.1.2. On the Degrees of Moral Responsibility for the Human Minimum

In determining the measure of moral obligations imposed on individuals and the state vis-à-vis the fight against extreme poverty in Africa, some factors must be taken into account. Factors like the

⁷³ A morally inauthentic action is an action that fails to promote the joy of the acting agent.

number of resources possessed by individuals and the state, the extent to which such individuals will remain well-off after fulfilling such obligations to avoid relapsing into poverty, and the constraints that might inhibit their ability to fulfil their obligations, for example, the prospects of their donations falling into the wrong hands and not getting to the poor. Extant research on poverty alleviation is not decisive on the question of who should bear the greater financial and moral responsibility for funding *the human minimum*. Hence why my proposal of a more decisive and critical approach seeks to address the pitfalls of the current framing of the solutions.

Historically, moral obligations to help the poor outside of one's community or national borders were of little concern to those within it (Sidgwick 1907; Wasserstrom 1975; Bilchitz 2007), as obligation was often associated with personal ties and reciprocal relationships. Contrary to the view that responsibility to the poor outside one's community is strictly a matter of charity, except in cases of rectification for historical injustices, Oruka (1997: 90) defends the position that "morality knows no national or racial boundary."⁷⁴ And because as humans, we share the same moral universe, responsibility to distant poor people cannot be excused, not even by the principle of national supererogation. Oruka (1997: 103) further argues, "There is, first, the moral obligation that requires every moral agent to protect, if he can, the right to life of every human being." This obligation, Oruka (ibid.) adds, "is not confined just to relatives and members of one's nation. It is a global duty for every member of the human race." Here, Oruka builds the premise for his justification for a global moral obligation to fight extreme poverty on 'the right to life of every human being'. The right to life, here, is one of the three basic rights⁷⁵ identified by Oruka (ibid.: 85) as human rights that ought to be guaranteed to every individual simply by being a member of the human species. Oruka (ibid.) ties the right to life to self-preservation and describes the latter as constituting "a basic necessity for an individual if he is to enjoy any other right." However, he fails to tell us those that qualify as having the economic resources to guarantee this right as a moral duty, besides the criterion of being 'moral agents' or a 'non-poor' in Oruka's conceptualisation of extreme poverty.

Singer (2002: 168-170) takes a similar view when he argues that it is unfair not to aid those who belong to distant – and different – national communities from us based on them not belonging to our "community of reciprocity." For Singer, given the same opportunity, those in distant national communities would readily reciprocate whatever help they receive from national communities that are in a position to help. Singer's position is informed by the argument that poverty affects the entire planet

⁷⁴ See also, Pogge (2007) and Nagel (2005).

⁷⁵ The other two basic rights identified by Oruka are the right to health and subsistence. These basic rights are also regarded as inherent rights of persons.

and is thus a global inequality. If poverty is a global problem that affects every society and that can lead to oppressive relationships, then for Singer (2002: 173), “globalization means that we should value equality between societies, and at the global level,” by providing aid to eliminate inequality between societies and extreme poverty within societies. Failing to do so, for Singer (2002: 194), “shows indifference to the indefinite continuation of dire poverty and avoidable, poverty-related deaths.” Thus, from Singer’s viewpoint, such indifference can and does constitute an act of unkindness and injustice on the part of the affluent.

The above leads us directly to the question of the degrees of responsibility to the poor by the non-poor states/citizens. The latter question may be formulated in the following terms: What obligations, if any, do rich foreign countries owe to poor countries? Oruka (1997: 83) had earlier raised the issue of *unequal exchange* that characterise foreign aid and how beyond the former, the obligation of rich countries to their poor counterparts must be motivated by the principle of global justice encapsulated in the *human minimum* principle. In addition to this relationship of *unequal exchange*, I argue that imperialist and unfair economic policies, for example, unilateral sanctions imposed on poor countries by their rich counterparts in their bid to secure favourable political interests, also, impose a moral burden on rich countries to contribute more to the elimination of extreme poverty in Africa. Although such sanctions are sometimes argued to be targeted at dictatorial regimes that violate human rights, the fact remains that in most cases, they tend to be ineffective on their primary targets (Grebe 2010; Dendere 2022). Instead, the poor masses who are not connected to the government/ruling class tend to suffer more and are driven into extreme poverty and harsh living conditions (Popal 2000; Daponte and Garfield 2000; Ogonna 2017; Thabani 2019). The European Union and the United States of America’s sanctions on the Zimbabwean government of Robert Mugabe in the early 2000s and the Iraqi government of Saddam Hussein in the 1980s are a good case in point. Pogge provides a typical example of these unintended consequences of some social rules – like sanctions – and how it provides a ground for culpability. As Pogge (2005b: 194-195) puts it:

...social rules that do not explicitly mandate or authorize conduct that violates human rights may still violate human rights. This is most clearly the case with economic rules that avoidably produce massive extreme poverty or even famine, as exemplified by the economic regimes of feudal France and Russia, the economic rules Britain imposed on Ireland and India (causing the Irish potato famine of 1846 to 1850 and the great Bengal famines of 1770 and 1942 to 1945), and the economic regimes temporarily imposed in the Soviet Union and China (the "Great Leap Forward"), which led to massive famines from 1930 to 1933 and 1959 to 1962, respectively.

Pogge (ibid) further avers:

The assertion that the mentioned economic regimes violated human rights crucially presupposes the claim that the horrendous deprivations and famines in question were in part due to those regimes and would have been—partly or wholly—avoided if a suitably modified regime had been in place instead. If this presupposition holds, the economic regimes mentioned were indeed in violation of human rights.

In the paragraphs above, Pogge offers clear instances of a rich country – in this case, Britain – using its superior military and economic position to create an economic condition that contributes to the rise in extreme poverty, famine, and in most cases death in other countries. This establishment of direct/indirect responsibility for the growth of extreme poverty, justifiably, imposes a greater moral obligation on rich countries to contribute their resources to the elimination of extreme poverty. Thus, all the rich European countries and the United States of America responsible for the brutal enslavement of Africans, colonialism/neocolonialism, economic exploitation, resource theft, and many punitive economic sanctions that violate the human and economic rights of Africans, have a greater moral duty to fund the fight against extreme poverty in Africa. While I believe that the non-poor adequately situated above the poverty line should contribute to the fight against extreme poverty, I believe those who directly contribute to the problem, for example, richer/imperialist nations whose wealth derives from the exploitation of the poorer countries have a greater obligation to do so.

Furthermore, the idea of identifying who should bear the greater moral responsibility for the fight against extreme poverty in Africa is borne of my thinking that the attribution of special responsibility based on superior financial capacity is the most practical way of tackling extreme poverty without economic repercussions. Goodin (1988: 681), for example, shares a similar position in his argument that “our general duties toward people are sometimes more effectively discharged by assigning special responsibility for that matter to some particular agents.” As Goodin rightly observes, the assignation of special responsibility, here, confers on an individual a special call to duty. Duty, here, entails “a joint function of desirability and responsibility” (Pettit and Goodin 1986: 668) to contribute to the elimination of an undesirable state of affairs. This has the potential to magnify responses that would otherwise have been characterised by indifference.⁷⁶ The same can be said of governments both at the local, national, and international levels, NGOs, think tanks, wealthy private citizens, etc. Placing more burden of financing the fight against extreme poverty on them – instead of leaving it to ‘everyone’ above *the human minimum threshold*, irrespective of their economic standing

⁷⁶ I should note here that the call for the attribution of greater moral burden on the rich members of society does not in any way exonerate the not-so-wealthy members of society from contributing their fair share to the fight against extreme poverty—when it is safe to do so. What my proposal guards against is the counterproductiveness of making contributions to a victim of deprivation today that renders one a victim tomorrow.

– has the potential to call their attention to the special duty they owe to the extreme poor in and around them.

However, philosophers like Bilchitz might disagree with my disproportionate distribution of moral obligations. Bilchitz (2007: 88), for example, is of the view that “A society that treats each individual with equal importance must aim to impose an equivalent level of sacrifice upon each individual.” Anything contrary to this “ would mean that greater burdens are placed on some rather than others, suggesting that the lives of some individuals are less worthy of respect than the lives of others” (ibid.). This view by Bilchitz is problematic and misses the point of moral duties. Like Oruka, Bilchitz fails to take into cognisance the unequal economic conditions of different individuals and proposes ‘equal’ economic obligations/expectations from economically ‘unequal’ individuals. Why would I place unequal financial and moral burdens on the rich over, say, the lower middle class who are just one moral duty away from falling into poverty? I here argue that the rich in our societies lead a lifestyle that contributes to a massive depletion in the number of resources that is available to other members of society, especially the poor. This imposes a moral debt on them to contribute more than any other non-state actors to the fight against extreme poverty and the attainment of *the human minimum*. Furthermore, Sen’s view is instructive in this respect. According to Sen (1983: 167), “[I]f a transfer drags a person from above to below that threshold while reducing the income gap of a poorer person, it is not obvious that the overall poverty measure must invariably be expected to decline.” Invariably, obliging people who are themselves not properly situated above the minimum threshold to contribute to the attainment of *the human minimum* becomes counterproductive. It is immoral to place a burden to act on individuals, if the action makes the individual worse off by increasing their suffering, and contributes nothing significant to the recipient of such moral duties. This is why everyone must not contribute equally to the enforcement of Oruka’s *human minimum*.

5.2. Possible Objections to the Moral Obligation to Eliminate Extreme Poverty

As convincing as the position on the collective responsibility of the non-poor to help the poor might sound, some support a contrary position concerning such obligations. Consequently, how do we respond to those who might argue that we have no moral obligation to help the poor? For example, the case of the extreme libertarian or the social Darwinist who might argue that we have no moral duties to the poor; that poverty is a failure of the individual to meet the needs of self-preservation and as such,

places no obligation on other members of the human collective to intervene.⁷⁷ Below, I anticipate and respond to possible objections to the moral obligation to fund the fight against extreme poverty in Africa.

The first possible objection might question the justification for a collective obligation to the private interests of individuals to lead a good life above the poverty line. To wit: it is the responsibility of the poor to find their way out of poverty as it directly affects them. After all, “[w]e do not live in a just world” (Nagel 2005: 113). This objection might also take the form of Bilchitz’s (2007: 57) rejection of Thomas Nagel’s argument for an agent-neutral reason⁷⁸ by arguing that “[t]here is a difference between being able to understand a reason and its motivating force from an impersonal perspective, and endorsing that reason and motivation from that perspective.” What this means in the context of this objection is that even though we might admit that extreme poverty is inherently bad and harmful to the lives of the poor, the recognition of the negative effects of such harms does not in any way necessitate a moral obligation to the poor. In other words, recognition does not equal obligation, and neither does it provide a sufficient reason for an obligation. Bilchitz (ibid.: 48), for instance, points out that it is okay to claim that certain pleasant mental experiences are inherently good for human – and non-human – beings; however, “it is a completely different matter whether one is entitled to claim that others must provide one with pleasant mental experiences.” The question that arises from this would ask: What is the justification for entitlement to certain interests? Do individual interests in pleasant experiences and their abilities to enjoy the same confer some kind of responsibility on others, say, governments, rich private individuals, NGOs, etc., to provide them with access to such experiences? This objection is also encapsulated in the position of extreme individualism that justifies all forms of inequality as deserving and commensurate with an individual’s work ethic (see Lötter 2011: 10-19).

It seems, to me, that a befitting response to this objection would be to reject the claim that the recognition of the harmful effects of poverty on individual members of society does not necessarily impose a moral obligation on those adequately situated above the poverty line to act by rejecting the premise of the objection in itself. That is, we have to reject the premise of extreme individualism that this objection embodies by interrogating the veridicality of independent existence in an

⁷⁷ See J. Wolff, *Beyond Poverty* (2020: 26).

⁷⁸ Thomas Nagel had argued that in order to counter solipsism – personal or subjective reason – that motivates us to see the world from a particular perspective, we require an impersonal standpoint on the world that is agent-relative or agent-neutral to achieve equality and impartiality. Bilchitz, however, rejected Nagel’s position on the basis of failing to establish a justification for all agent-relative reasons to become agent-neutral reason for everyone. For Bilchitz, it is problematic to leap from principles that apply relative to a particular standpoint to those that apply generally even when they are not relativised to a particular standpoint. For a detailed discussion of Bilchitz’s rejection, see D. Bilchitz (2007: 53-57).

interdependent/interconnected world. A good starting point would be to pose the question: Is it possible to exist independently of other humans in a community that is characteristically defined by our interconnectedness with other humans? Asouzu (2004, 2007), Jonathan Chimakonam and L. Uchenna Ogbonnaya (2021), Aribiah Attoe (2022), and indeed many African philosophers have provided a relational conception of human beings as being relational and interdependent. Asouzu (2007: 112) aptly captures this notion of interdependence in his complementary dictum, which states that “anything that exists serves a missing link of reality.” What Asouzu means here is that it is implausible to exist in isolation. If this notion is taken to be true, then, based on our common complementary relationship, we owe the poor some duties to ensure that their private interests to lead a good life above the poverty line are provided for, just as they would owe us if they were in a position of economic advantage.

The above response can be extended to another formulation of this objection which might argue that even if we do have some obligation to look after the private interests of the poor to lead a life of value, such obligations are limited to our immediate families, communities, and compatriots as against citizens of foreign states as Oruka suggests. Perhaps, I should emphasise the fact that globalisation and its attendant technological spread have rendered this limitation argument pointless. For example, Larry Temkin has objected to the position that claims the limitation of our moral reach and duties based on territorial boundaries by highlighting how such demarcations have been breached by modern scientific and technological developments. According to Temkin (2004: 381):

No longer can people in one country confidently claim that they are not responsible for the situation in other countries, either because they did not do anything to directly produce that situation, or because they could not do anything to ameliorate it...as our causal powers have expanded, so, too, have the demands of morality and justice.

Temkin’s point above is even truer in today’s globalised society where the world has become a global village with events in one part of the world reverberating and having direct implications for other parts of the world.⁷⁹ Currently, the negative global economic implications of the war in Ukraine for territories situated far away from the war zone best capture the accuracy of Temkin’s argument.

A second objection might argue that the assurances provided by an unconditional moral obligation to the extremely poor in society might incentivise the poor to make little effort to get themselves above the *human minimum* threshold of extreme poverty (cf. Nozick 1974). The corollary of this objection holds that no one owes poor people charity.⁸⁰ This objection might also take an

⁷⁹ Cf. Peter Singer, *Famine, Affluence, and Morality* (1972: 232).

⁸⁰ Bilchitz (2007: 48), for instance, argues that it is okay to make the claim that certain pleasant mental experiences are inherently good for human – and non-human – beings; however, “it is a completely different matter whether one is

extreme form of individualism that justifies any form of existing inequalities as being deserved (see Lötter 2011: 10). Thus, we are not morally obliged to enforce Oruka's *human minimum*. Consider the view of poverty shared by Western philosophers like John Locke, Alexis de Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill, and G. W. F. Hegel. For these philosophers, poverty results from the kind of lifestyle that poor people lead. In other words, it is a product of a certain cultural practice or behavioural trait. According to Vaughan (2008: 5, 107-113), these philosophers view poverty as resulting from the lack of self-respect on the part of the poor themselves and the absence of motivation to work hard to better their socioeconomic situation. Locke in particular, views the poor as those who enjoy taking resources from other hard-working members of society while contributing nothing in return (ibid: 49).⁸¹ Consequently, they argue that assurances created by government and individual aid through obligations to assist the poor contribute to the dearth of motivation on the part of the poor to better their economic condition and this creates a cycle of dependency and intergenerational poverty.

I will provide two responses to resolve this objection. My first response argues that nobody would be proud of being identified with indigence or as a poor person; the tag itself robs the poor of their human dignity and provides little by way of social and psychological incentives to warrant a proud identification with poverty.⁸² For some, that one finds themselves in poverty is purely a matter of the lottery of birth (see Pogge 1994). I will further add that, besides the psychologically degrading effects of poverty, supposing the existence of some sort of pride in poverty is failing to draw the line between acquiescence and pride. While it may be true that some poor people, due to the grim economic conditions they find themselves do decide to acquiesce to the realities of their conditions because of the feeling of psychological defeat, it does not necessarily imply that they derive pride in their miserable state and would recommend poverty to the non-poor as a worthy or acceptable way of life. Most importantly, this is not to be confused with the case of those who decide to become intentionally poor for religious reasons. For example, Buddhist monks – bhikkhu – and other hermits who for some personal or religious reasons, take vows of voluntary poverty.

entitled to claim that others must provide one with pleasant mental experiences." The question that arises from this would ask: What is the justification for entitlement to certain interests? Do individual interests in pleasant experiences and their abilities to enjoy the same confer some kind of responsibility on others, say, governments, to provide them with access to such experiences? See also Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights. Ethics & International Affairs* (2005b: 2).

⁸¹ Contrary to the Lockean, Millian, Tocquevillean, and Hegelian views of poverty as resulting from laziness, Karl Marx views poverty and inequality as being a by-product of capitalist exploitation of the proletariat. For a detailed discussion, see Karl Marx, *Wage-Labour and Capital* (British Socialist Party, 1918).

⁸² Wolff (2020: 26), for instance, makes a similar argument that while providing charitable assistance to the poor constitutes a moral improvement compared to not doing so, however, it fails to restore pride and humanity on those on the receiving end of such charitable gestures.

My second response argues that even if it was the case that certain poor people would sacrifice the basis of their self-respect⁸³ for the incentives of being provided for by other members of society, the dangers that poor people pose to the human collective, and the safety we owe ourselves and the preservation of our loved ones from such dangers imposes an even greater obligation on the non-poor to act to eliminate extreme poverty in all its forms. Mathias Risse shares a similar line of thought in his non-moral prudential justification for helping the global poor. To Risse (2005: 94), even if it were the case that our commitments to our national political institutions constrained our abilities to be concerned for global inequalities and poverty that exist between countries,⁸⁴ the inequalities that exist in other countries would still pose a problem for richer societies, “from a point of view of rationality, rather than from a moral point of view.” Risse (ibid.) posits that “a world with massive inequalities is likely to be an unstable world” because “collapsing states spread refugees, involve others in domestic conflicts, or undermine regional stability” (ibid.: 109) among other challenges. For this reason, even if moral considerations support an attitude of indifference to the pursuit of economic equality, enlightened self-interest will demand that everyone works to reduce excessive global inequality as the consequences of instability that might arise from such societies will likely affect people beyond their borders. There is thus a sense in which the act of helping the poor by the non-poor becomes an act of self-preservation in the long term.

Moreover, as rightly captured by Vaughan (2008: 139), “poverty in the midst of prosperity” has the potential to create a feeling of “resentment among the poor who in turn have a negative influence upon the state.” Oyekan Adeolu Oluwaseyi shares a similar position in his argument for a prudential approach to poverty by the affluent/non-poor as a matter of self-preservation. Oluwaseyi (2013: 32-35) argues that “the high rate of immigration, cross-border banditry, and, most importantly, the ‘villagisation’ of the world in an age of information technology and integrated economies have extended the consequences of poverty far beyond the borders of the struggling nations.” Thus, contributing to the fight against extreme poverty goes beyond the principle of charity, reparation, and restoration of the *human minimum* of the poor to constitute an act of self-preservation on the part of

⁸³ Self-respect – or the social bases of self-respect – is one of the central social primary goods in John Rawls’s theory of justice. According to Rawls (1971: 54), primary goods are “things that every rational man is presumed to want.” To Rawls (ibid.: 155), a sense of an individual’s worth embodied by their sense of self-respect is “necessary if they are to pursue their conception of the good with satisfaction and to take pleasure in its fulfillment.” If Rawls’s argument is taken to be true that every rational man would naturally want/value their self-respect, then it seems difficult to imagine the poor giving up this essential bases of their humanity for the incentive of being provided for by other members of society. For more discussion on the notion of self-respect, see John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*. Revised Edition. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971).

⁸⁴ This view stems from the argument that “societies do not exist in the kind of environment in which they can make redistributive claims upon each other” (Risse 2005: 103).

the rich and non-poor, against the ‘irrational actions’ that the poor might be forced to engage in, in their attempt to preserve themselves against the scourge of extreme poverty. As Oruka pointed out, extreme poverty can reduce a person to an irrational brute, depriving them of not just socioeconomic needs but the capacity for self-consciousness and fair action. Contributing to the attainment of *the human minimum* by governments, NGOs, private and rich individuals, and all those adequately situated above *the human minimum* threshold becomes an act of self-preservation. Thus, moral obligation to the poor goes beyond a matter of charity in Oruka's *human minimum* framework, to encapsulate a moral obligation for the self-preservation of the non-poor and their loved ones against the dangers associated with the irrational ways the poor might act to secure their self-preservation. The latter makes a solid case for a moral obligation to fight extreme poverty in all its dimensions in Africa, and beyond.

Conclusion

Throughout this dissertation, poverty and its attendant deprivations have been established to constitute a serious threat to both human and societal development. Poverty has been defined and conceptualised from different perspectives and dimensions. From the lack of adequate income for subsistence that leads to deprivations in well-being—income or consumption poverty, a combination of both physical and psychological deprivation—the HMM, the lack of social and political resources or substantive freedoms, to multidimensional poverty among others. However, what is common in these conceptualisations is that poverty is a state of deprivation that causes severe suffering in the lives of its victims. This suffering undermines an individual's ability to lead a life of value which in some sense, constitutes a moral violation of an individual's fundamental right to living well.

Oruka proposes *the human minimum* as a principle that will provide the base for the justification of aid from rich countries to their poor counterparts as a global moral obligation to humanity in the fight against extreme poverty in Africa. Oruka's proposal calls for an equal moral burden to be placed on all moral agents to ensure the implementation of *the human minimum*. Contra Oruka, and indeed, extant literature in the poverty debate, I have established in this dissertation why Oruka's approach is morally problematic and economically counterproductive in its demand for equal moral responsibility from all moral agents, irrespective of their economic differences, especially in Africa. I defended the position that a disproportionate distribution of responsibility which is sensitive to the economic disparities that exist among the non-poor population holds a better promise for success in the fight against extreme poverty in Africa. I then established why ignoring the economic differences – and inequalities – of those who qualify as moral agents in Oruka's conceptualisation of extreme poverty, particularly in continental Africa, risks plunging more of those who live a little above the *human minimum* threshold into poverty due to the economic inequalities that characterise the non-poor population.

By way of conclusion, I hope this research will inspire a new approach to distributing moral obligation in the fight against extreme poverty in Africa through the adoption of a disproportionate responsibility model that is sensitive to the economic disparities that exist among the non-poor population. While moral responsibility by those who live above *the human minimum threshold* is important for Africa's fight against extreme poverty, what is most important is ensuring that the distribution of responsibility follows a practical approach that seeks to end a counterproductive cycle of obligations to the same avoidable cause.

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