

**BEGGING FOR A TITLE: AN
ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH REPORT
ON ZIMBABWEAN BLIND BEGGARS**

**ANTHROPOLOGY RESEARCH
REPORT FOR MASTERS BY
COURSEWORK AND RESEARCH
BY RUKARIRO KATSANDE
STUDENT NUMBER 395672**

SUPERVISOR: PROFESSOR DAVID COPLAN

I, Rukariro Katsande, declare that this research report is my own work and that I understand that plagiarism is an offense. I have referenced all sources of material used in this research report.

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to examine what blind begging is; why it exists; what it means; what causes it; and how beggars operate. It explores the theme that begging has evolved in Southern Africa through the influence of colonialism linked with institutionalised religion and traditional cultural conceptions: Christian, Muslim or Buddhist that equates giving, particularly to blind beggars, to receiving some form of salvation. The underlying theme is that blind beggars fulfil a requirement in society which satisfies a hierarchal social identity and the need to discard the excess or unwanted articles to those less fortunate in the guise of blind beggars. The hypothesis can be extended to the civilized west needing to be the developed and a polar opposite undeveloped Africa to which to donate and thus discard the excess or unwanted articles to appease some moral outlook but not to extract the blind beggar or underdeveloped state from poverty. Thus, blind begging is a professional response to a perceived market need and the blind beggars have the physical infrastructure to successfully exploit this niche market and thus make a sustainable livelihood that allows them to develop a business plan that guarantees a return that allows them to invest and eventually retire. I used a parachute method where I observed where the beggars operate and approached them for a focus group discussion, then individual interviews with participants. In Johannesburg they operate differently so I approached each beggar individually. This research is important to examine some lives of marginalised disabled in our society that may be misunderstood because of stereotypical social attitudes. It serves to highlight their plight and contribute to possible solutions to social mis-conceptions and practices. Most of the people I encountered giving donations made up the panel of givers.

Introduction- What is it?

39 million people worldwide are blind

90% of the world's visually impaired live in developing countries

82% of people living with blindness are aged 50 and above

Infectious diseases that cause blindness have greatly reduced in the last 20 years

80% of all visual impairment can be avoided or cured¹

Definitions of begging

This ethnographic research essay will examine blind beggars and their assistants, their livelihoods, origins and experiences in contemporary social life in two sites in Southern Africa. It will also seek to understand the popular conception of beggars and the giving of gifts which are solicited. The reason for this ethnographic research is to highlight the plight of these people, which has necessitated for them to trawl the streets and be highly mobile in order to beg.

There has been a marked increase of people begging in the city streets in Johannesburg. The sight of men and women of a wide age range and physical capacity has become common place, alarming, if not an irritating eyesore to many residents and citizens of the city. This development to me is an indicator of the precarious status of Southern African contemporary economy and social life. The current socio-economic environment is disabling for many Southern Africans and especially to people with impairments. This social environment is linked to the economic, political and technological aspects of the society. At almost every urban street intersection in modern South Africa, there is a human who is using their “disability”, or what I will constantly refer to as *infrastructure*, some form of wretched

¹ UNWHO Fact Sheet No 282 updated October 2013. “Visual Impairment and Blindness”
<http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs282/en> Retrieved December 2013

situation, as a means to earn a living. One can see them crouching, limping, kneeling, crawling, and imploring; some with their hands together as though in prayer. They all speak an array of languages including English. Those who have placards to explain their conditions usually have them in sometimes very witty and grammatically correct English statements, which is the chosen language of communication. Some of the placards are humorous and others are tales of unemployment and difficulty. Among them are blind beggars, usually with an able bodied assistant, mingling and competing with other beggars for the empathy and generosity of motorists and pedestrians alike.

Static blind beggars have become a thing of the past. Blind beggars have assistants, able bodied men and women or sometimes children, with whom they beg. *Together*, they make their way through traffic and walk-ways. Blind beggars are very mobile and change locations and performances, adapting to the different infrastructural environments. In a well orchestrated routine which the audience rarely scrutinises, the blind man does not hold the begging bowl, the assistant does; and the blind beggar does not ask - the assistant does. However, the choice of their sites, locations and mobility are choices of the blind one. There is more to this obvious sight than meets the eye.

We have come to accept, visualise, and conceptualise as common sight, that a beggar should be blind or have some disability *and* wretched social situation. Owing to anyone of these situations² it is not out of the ordinary in the 21st century social landscape, nor is it shameful for “them” to solicit gifts, and “us”, to be the ones responsible to give. We do not question how and why this has come about. We do not locate where this man/woman could have come from; far less scrutinise his assistant, the able bodied person who leads the blind man. We may observe but not understand the ritualization of their performance, which has various

² Disability and Begging http://cripples-imbeciles.blogspot.it/2008/07/disability_and_begging.html The Author suggests that some form of disability is “recommended” to be a beggar. Page 4 –Retrieved August 2013

symbolic distinctions. The causes of these conditions and influence in the performances are legacies of “cultural” and colonial, contemporary social and ‘traditional’ religious practices.

The ever increasing visible bloom of beggars in South African streets is part of a broader landscape of a socio-political necessity. Albrecht (1992), states that an analysis must include the social structure and roles within such participants are interacting, the cultures from which the participants come, and the historical backgrounds of the cultures. Analyses of government policies and legislation, political and social movements, social structural and economic processes, prove equally important in the creation of the blind beggars’ subjectivity. This observation is drawn from the normalcy with which begging has come to be viewed. It has become common to see beggars, at all hours of the day or night. The beggars have adapted to numerous ways of seeking sympathy from potential givers, which include collecting waste from vehicles and holding placards that testify to community services like keeping intersections clean and safe. Usually when one has no trash to give them, together with any donation, they will solicit the donation anyway. The conclusion therefore is that the primary aim is to beg for something, *anything*, preferably money.

A beggar, by definition is a person who lives by begging; who asks formally, humbly or earnestly³, and in the case of blindness, also uses a loss of sight as a means. I refer to this blindness as the ‘infrastructure’, required to facilitate successful soliciting whatever the location. The other definition under ‘beg’ in the Collins Dictionary (2008) pertains to my title, and very much the intellectual argument in the paper. **I beg the question**; “put forward an argument that assumes the very point it is supposed to establish, *or that depends on some other questionable assumption*”⁴. The beggars are asking to be recognized as human -

³Collins Dictionary (2008) “beggar”, Harper Collins Publishers, Glasgow, Third Edition 2008 (Emphasis is by the author)

⁴ Collins Dictionary (2008) ‘beg, beg the question’, Harper Collins Publishers, Glasgow, Third Edition 2008

begging for a title, a name or epithet signifying rank, office, and/or function. Primarily they seek not to be marginalized. The third definition which I posit is that begging is a *necessity* in contemporary Southern African society. It is a necessity borne of colonial influence, and a constructed structural hierarchy that dictates the *need* for beggars and begging for our local societal survival and even recognition on a global landscape. Africa as a beggar is a subjectivity that contemporary Africa has been cloaked in through discourse. Africa has learnt and found begging to be successful and lastly applied and performed the act of begging throughout our social hierarchy⁵. Poor communities in desperate need of development are always readily visible to solicit donor assistance. Religious, cultural and societal norms have changed to universalize some structural phenomena.

From my research, all people I spoke to, recognized what I meant by a beggar, and had an experience to share about a beggar. Not many had ever really thought about the disability. It did seem obvious that blind people would beg, and that it would appear normal *in contemporary times* that they do. Through my search of the origins and definitions of the research subject, there still stands no clear connection to blindness and begging in contemporary Southern Africa, culturally or otherwise. Encounters with blind beggars by early anthropologists in Northern Muslim Africa, described them as filling a required role of the “worthy” recipient of charity as declared by religious perspectives. The blind beggar, through his infrastructure, comfortably fulfils the role of the worthy recipient. The recent blossom of begging as a *profession*⁶ and means of survival in Southern African streets, with

⁵ A female African ambassador posted in Europe, once remarked how embarrassing it was to be invited to dinner with fellow African diplomats, who would then be holding private, earnest conversations with European diplomats, which expressed how “We will not be able to make it without you. Please don’t forget about the money”. She expressed a powerlessness to present herself as anything else than a beggar too, after so many of her male counterparts presented their countries as hopeless without intervention from the West (Katsande R, Italy, 2012)

⁶ Kamat KL, “The Begging Profession” <http://wwwkamat.com/kalranga/bhiksha/begging.htm> retrieved September 2012

some people dating 10 years as the maximum period they remembered first seeing the beggars, warranted this research.

The purpose of this research is to examine what begging is; why it exists; what it means; what causes it; and how beggars operate. I use the noun *profession* to declare, and indeed intend to prove that begging requires some “special training” and experience; to know where to be, what to do, what to say, how to look and some form of psychological preparation and analysis of the environment. Both the beggar and the giver have some subjectivity that triggers the symbiotic and semiotic relationship. Conclusively, by calling it a profession, it is a declaration of what the beggar and his assistant does - a full time occupation.

At this point in the definition, enter the assistant; an able bodied person who guides the blind person. Many of those visible in contemporary South Africa are completely able bodied and literate in the social sense. Barnartt (2010:14) talks about the fluidity of disability, and how it can apply to “being part of a community”. I put forward that the assistant also presents some form of societal disability. Assistants comprehend all social symbols of appearance, performance and presentation. Most assistants have some level of formal education. They can read and write, understand where to stand in traffic and how to manoeuvre between spaces within the cities and towns. They vary in ages and sex, lead the blind person to potential givers, and hold the container into which donations are placed. Judging by the size of container, this speaks to a sign of the times. Donations solicited, in my observation, are preferred to be in monetary form, coins or notes, because of the type of container utilized. I have observed some givers of food in plastic bags such as fruit, drinks and a variety of **discarded** or cooked food. This observation made me think how items that are given are **discarded** items or **surplus**, but only a **measured surplus** unless it is for the giver, **worthless**. I will return to these notions that are in bold print later in the paper. The able bodied person is the one who receives all donations. The able bodied assistant begs *for, on*

behalf of, and with the blind person. They beg *together*; and profess their social circumstances *together*, although they appear complete contrasts. One is blind and has different perceptions and options, through this loss of sight to the *other* who is sighted. Other functions appear the same; so too would be social circumstance and citizenship, such as identity/rights and family, social belonging. They are the same, *and* different, *however* profess a social identity *together*, which is deserving of sympathy and evoking empathy. Many assistants live with the blind beggars and claim a shared identity of disability.

Goffman (1963:30) notes that one such as the assistant is a second type of 'wise' person after the activist. He describes him as "the individual who is related through the social structure as a stigmatized individual, *"a relationship that leads the wider society to treat both individuals in some respects as one"* (emphasis by the author). Although the same they ultimately are different.

"Many see the opportunity available for them to cross the border to South Africa by accompanying us. Eventually they progress to better things in life, like owning tuck-shops or other businesses. They just stop coming to work, or are polite enough to tell you they are no longer interested in the job. You can be unfortunate and he leaves you while on the shift. He will say for me to sit and wait while he goes to get water, and just never come back. Assistants find it easier to raise capital for other ventures. Our problems are not the same. Although we may profess the same problems, theirs are finite whereas mine persist; the assistants may turn on us. This turning is very common." (Douglas, Beitbridge, August 2013)

"Some of these assistants end up heading our very own associations. When they accompany us to our meetings, they befriend others in the leadership. When someone is required to count how many attended the meeting, it is the assistant who counts; when it is time for food, the assistant is the one who dishes and distributes the food. The cooks are assistants. All the while he is getting

into the structures and benefitting from resources that are for my upkeep.” Ernest, Beitbridge Dec 2013)

It is at almost every urban street and commercial intersection in modern South Africa that there is a human who is using their “disability” or wretched situation as a means to earn a living. At the main research site, at a border post between South Africa and Zimbabwe, they form a large community as the visible characters of blind beggars. Zimbabwe is still reeling from endless socio-economic and political strife, and the legacies of displacement have led to an exclusive and peripheral existence for the blind beggars at the Beitbridge/Messina border post. A flexible number, which averages 25 blind people, patrol the border posts and parallel towns of Beitbridge and Messina. I was informed that there used to number up to 75 people. There was an extensive police raid a few years ago, where many were arrested and detained which drastically reduced the number. Many moved on to other towns like Johannesburg, or returned to their homesteads. The majority of those who remain reside under a tree at the public market which doubles up as a taxi/ and inter-city bus rank. Their housing and furniture consists of makeshift plastics and card board papers to make up structures and bedding. A few have arranged lodgings in the town as tenants, through sympathetic land and house-owners. One blind beggar who has arranged such accommodation is Ernest, a 46 year old blind beggar. He has arranged (rented) a very large wooden kennel, for a small house, where he resides with another blind woman. She too begs for a living. The wooden housing does not have ventilation besides the entrance door, and has no room for any furniture or else. There is only enough room to sleep two people in a very tight fit. The roof is covered with black plastic sheeting, and I was alarmed to see that his blind partner uses a wood fuelled fire near the entrance to this structure. The majority of the blind population who live under the tree are women and children, with only two other men. In the winter, the site under the tree had a stagnant stream of green coloured waste water which attracted a swarm of flies. The huge

green flies buzzed on food stuff and on the people. In the summer and rainy season this transformed into an unhealthy river of sewage with many more flies and mosquitoes. Ernest told me of how his bedding and tuck-shop stock was once washed away one very heavy rainy season from under this tree. I was made to understand that the site was provided by the local government, as a non-levied market business opportunity specifically for the blind people. The site is separate from the rest of the market for sighted vendors, and the tree acts as a part of the infrastructure that marks the site against a wall. The blind people live and cook behind and underneath their stalls. They sleep on the enormous exposed tree roots or on cardboard boxes and plastics on the ground. I will highlight parts of conversations with this group and other beggars in Harare and Johannesburg throughout the essay in interviews I had over a seven month period.

Beggars are littered throughout the various intersections of Zimbabwean space, alongside the vehicles resident in Beitbridge, and en route to and from South Africa. They operate in organized day and night shifts within the closed space of the busy border crossing, which sees millions of travellers annually. Their positioning, from primary observation, is strategic and has definitely changed from being a static one to a mobile one. Through my research, it was established that many of the beggars do not come from the areas they beg, and that they move in between the spaces they operate. This, through structural constructs and infrastructural restraints, necessitates that they therefore require an assistant. This role and implications of the assistant will be an important role to examine and establish throughout this research.

In the Collins Dictionary definition of what it is to beg, is an expression which is, to ‘go begging’. This expression also is defined as to be unwanted or unused, **discarded**. In their profession of begging, the pair (beggar and assistant), professes that they are unwanted, **discarded**, although having different capacities and physical constitution. They share a social rejection which is mutually agreed to by using the other’s social rejection to a shared

advantage. They both appear ‘beggarly’ which the dictionary suggests, “*is impossible to describe*”. That which they solicit is *anything*, with no fixed definition from food, clothing, money and even sponsorship for business projects. What I observed being given was **discarded**, or a **calculated surplus**, to a **discarded** social class. They are **discarded** because they are on the periphery of contemporary social life. Legislation in Malawi⁷ and Zimbabwe restricts the practice of begging, where it is punishable by a hefty fine and or jail sentence of up to 3 months⁸. With increasing privatisation of property and private policing, it is also very difficult for the beggars to operate in South Africa, in the streets, outside malls and on private property. A South African blind busker, Goodman Nono, brewed a media storm after an altercation with municipal civil protection officers at a mall in Cape Town in May 2013⁹. Comments from the social media on this incident will also contribute to a wide variety of opinions from what contemporary society think of begging, no matter what the means.

My first interest in examining beggars was stemmed from one of my visits to the Vatican in Italy. As I approached the *piazza* in front of St. Peter’s Basilica, the street was lined with *very* disfigured and wretched looking beggars. Some had festering wounds which looked leprous and contagious. They looked the classical biblical imagery, which required a *miracle* more than money or material goods. They sat lined against a wall on the pavement, in layers of cloths used as scarves and shawls to cover themselves up. They appealed to people, using pitiful faces and droopy pleading eyes, calling attention to themselves and their plight in some unintelligible mumble. Their corned knuckles, blackened nail tips highlighted their

⁷ Section 180b and 180f of the Malawi Penal Code deems idle and disorderly, “every person wandering or placing himself in any public place to beg or gather alms, or causing or procuring or encouraging any child or children to do so”, and “every person wandering about and endeavouring by the exposure of wounds or deformation to obtain or gather alms. The punishment for the first offence is K20 and 3 months imprisonment; subsequent offences are K50 and six months imprisonment per conviction.

books.google.co.za/books?id=pj1FAQAAIAAJ

⁸ Interview with Ernest in Beitbridge July 2013

⁹ Cronje J and Koyana X, “Metro Police Bust Blind Busker”, Cape Times July 9 2013

<http://www.iol.co.za/capetimes/metro-police-bust-blind-busker>, Retrieved August 2013

Molefe T O, “Busker by-law? There is no busker by-law” Mail and Guardian July 18 2013

<http://www.thoughtleader.co.za/tomolefe/2013/07/18/busker-by-law> Retrieved August 2013

crusted and cracked fingers which stuck out of dirty gloves, aimed at the pedestrians who passed daily to visit the Basilica. I wondered why the Catholic Church particularly at the Vatican – the headquarters of the Holy See, as one of the leading preachers for charity and brotherly and sisterly love, did not intervene for these wretched creatures. Surely, after all the centuries of financial accumulation and infrastructural capacity, the Catholic Church was best equipped to cater for people with these kinds of dilemmas. I tried, unsuccessfully, to persuade the beggars to crawl a few more yards in the direction of the Basilica and ask for more sustainable help from the priests, nuns and cardinals that roamed the Basilica and its surrounds. Through this experience, I was then drawn to ask many more questions about beggars and those who gave them gifts. If the Catholic Church was able to “ignore” those beggars who were in full sight of the famous Papal window, where His Holiness often waved to crowds or celebrated mass, who was supposed to intervene then? I, in a personal capacity, am limited in what I can afford to give, yet the church is abundant in resources and can claim a surplus.

In my own context, I related these phenomena to my own reality here in Africa. A new clear definition, through ethnographic examination, is what was sought to describe and understand the blind beggar and his assistant, and what begging in a very broad performance by multiple actors means in contemporary Southern Africa. I expected the blind person to either receive assistance from the state so he would not be the political exception¹⁰. I also expected some form of intervention from his family as the immediate care-givers, so he would not have to roam the streets to look for “anything”, discarded items, like a discarded individual. I expected to find an African answer to the western individualism in “Ubuntu”, and claim that colonial disruption is what exposed the beggar. In contemporary times, the government is

¹⁰ Agamben G, 2005, “State of Exception”, Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press

unable to offer substantial help, the socio-economic conditions are limiting whatever help family can afford and “Ubuntu” has been more rhetoric than practice.

“The help we used to get was even educational. My late parents never paid a cent of my school fees, I had a sponsor from grade one to form four. I was not counted among the children at home. I have one brother who is still alive, and three sisters who are married. The sibling relationship we have now is- if I go round and visit, they may buy me something to drink (Coca-Cola), or if I have serious problem they may consider helping out, but their assistance is not regular or guaranteed. I know they say charity begins at home, but even closer, I have 6 children, 2 girls who are married. Both of them have no disability in their homes, their husbands all go to work, but none of the two ever thinks of including me in their budget. There is only one person who managed to break this cycle I talk about, a beggar called Charunengwe. He educated his son to become a teacher. His son educated his siblings and each child was eventually able to send groceries home. These children collectively were also able to buy two stands, one in the village (Chivi) and one in the city (Gweru) for their parents. The parents eventually stopped begging because they saw no need to. This is the only example where I saw a successful begging to stable life.” (Ernest Purazeni Beitbridge Dec 2013)

From my findings, I have observed that the beggars’ subjectivity is linear and stable. They accept the static nature of their disability which will not improve with rehabilitation, or change through miraculous deliverance. This acceptance transcends even efforts by their teachers or parents to make them able in social society. Infrastructural and structural restraints deject their spirits and make it very difficult for blind people to have a successful life course. Deegan (2010;25) states how “a long time disability is part of a person’s everyday life, biography, and self...any disability ultimately shapes the self and its relationships with the life world”. Some of the stigma they suffer is manifest in their subjectivity and, is a result of the relationships with the priors and society. Life experiences

that involve exclusion from membership in one's immediate family through education, and relevant assistance from immediate family (like Ernest's case) are personal. Exclusion from the modern economy and work experiences to fulfil one's life course without assistance (structural and architectural) are social and are an everyday obstacle. Their poverty stems from their non-ability to participate in mainstream opportunities like employment. The system is structurally designed to make them exceptions that need assistance whether physical or social. This acts as a stereotype for them to follow and us as a society to enforce. Many givers who donated to beggars felt pity for them just from an imaginary stand point, and most importantly as the more deserving recipient of charity. The infrastructure of their disability is seen in a linear pattern that is not changing. Many of the beggars are not new to begging. Some have been practicing for over a decade making it a stable subjectivity that is related to work and business.

The beggars call begging work "**kubasa**", and use all the language associated with commerce and employment. They *hire* an assistant after an interview, they *invest savings* in *business* ventures to cover for days when they do not earn any income or for future development of their families. They *invest* in the future of their children by educating them rather than using them as assistants. In one sense using their own children is bad for business, as givers frown upon this obvious perpetuation of "**the poverty cycle**". In another sense educating their children is a savvy business investment as it may work in their favour if the child becomes successful and is able to alleviate the family from dire poverty. This is evidenced by what Ernest had to say, the hope does exist. They have *working hours*, *seek better markets*, are *mobile (migratory)*, *borrow and lend money*, and are *networked* by mobile phones for communication. They hope to *retire* from begging. Blind beggars in particular can be extremely defiant of the law and authority, in part protest and frustration at their condition of non-ability. In examples I will give, (in the case of Lunga Goodman Nono and Ernest

Purazeni) I saw this frustration as an expression of their sense of entitlement to some reprieve against all the odds they face, this is what I refer to as ‘title’.

“I would really like to tell those police that I did not rob anyone, or break into anyone’s house. I’m playing [guitar] to support my family. There is nothing else I can do to support my family. They must let me work. How they dragged me on the ground and tore my clothes - that hurt me. It broke my heart” (Lunga Goodman Nono, July 2013)¹¹

They suffer this frustration on two fronts. A disability caused by the impairment that excludes them as a formative member of society, and a non-ability to be able to participate in many social and economic spheres without assistance. There exists a sense of expectancy from the beggars, which stems from an acceptance of this resolve, resulting in them resorting to this type of existence.

Their practices however, are not linear or stable. In practice, like all migrant labourers, they are developing expanding networks using social media. Due to social and economic changes across the region of Southern Africa particularly Zimbabwe, blind people who survived begging have expanded their migratory patterns to appeal to a wider market. Hundreds have crossed transnational frontiers and are operating in very much the same manner as sighted migrant labourers from their respective countries. They are saving money and sending remittances home. From their experience in local migratory patterns, coupled with mobile phones, they are able to move across borders using the changing infrastructure to suit their purposes. I was surprised that they were even informed on trending social media. Ernest asked if I could help start a Face book page for him and his group.

“What you could do is post our group on Face book. You see people would be able to be more informed about our plight, they will be able to come and see for themselves how we are living. It

¹¹ Cronje J & Koyana X, “Metro Police Bust Blind Busker”, Cape Times July 9, 2013

would be extremely helpful when we get arrested, because we have to pool together to send food for the prisoners. No-one of us can afford the fines.” (Ernest Beitbridge, July 2013)

The assistants also contribute to the blind beggars’ use of technology and the media. The one girl assistant also recommended the recent Smart phones which can use interactive voice commands among other functions.

Why it is- Historical and Contemporary Causes of Begging

John Iliffe (1987) *The African Poor; A History*, concedes that poverty is the huge umbrella over a topic such as beggars. Blind begging resonates throughout social conversation under the general topic of poverty. Under most legislation begging is classified as criminal activity, equating it to vagrancy and disorderliness¹². This confirms my earlier proposition that the appearance of blind beggars with an assistant in contemporary life, is a *normal* vision, as one of the facets of *normal* poverty in Africa. Normal can be associated with a sense of naturalness. Iliffe says that “Christianity robbed poverty of some of the shame which caused it to be hidden and disguised in other African societies” (Iliffe 1987:17). This statement suggests that issues like care for the blind, incapacitated, and poor was done by community or family in “traditional” Africa. He presents some cases of community care in other countries such as early Ethiopia and West Africa, but this was based on religious determination. Was an affliction such as blindness hidden and disguised from public social life, and if so what has caused the shift in contemporary Southern Africa? Was it merely the introduction of religion to Southern African lives which developed moral conception of the incapacitated? A market for monetary and material exchanges to the poor, incapacitated and blind people has since developed replacing any previous practice. Religious instruction and individual expectation began to relate to religion as a basis for the evocation of sympathy. Through this evolution, the rational answer by the beggars to contemporary societal marginalisation has been a moral obligation to beg from society at large, derived from human nature and nurture.

Cultural perceptions, religious influences, contemporary economic orders and their histories in Southern Africa are certainly part of the fabric of begging. Three important subjectivities

¹² Byenkya K, “Zambia must stop locking up vagabonds” Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa December 4, 2012 www.osisa.org/law/blog/zambia-must-stop-locking-vagabonds Retrieved September 2013 , Ehlers, L, “Outdated vagrancy laws must go” Open Society Initiative for Southern Africa, July 22, 2013 www.osisa.org/law/blog/outdated-vagrancy-laws-must-go” Retrieved September 2013

were established, one of the beggar, his assistant, that of the contemporary giver and the role of the “authority” in charge of public policy. Firstly, important material necessities and religious morality inspire the blind beggar and assistant to beg. Secondly, religious morality and social organisation play an important part in what inspires the giver to give. Third, a play between political motivation, religious and social pressures influence the stance and position of the “authority” towards the plight of the beggar. The offering of a gift, a religious symbol as suggested by Iliffe (1987) that could best be described as a token or ‘favour from God’; a cognitive recognition of societal failings; an important part of performance and a symbol of positionality in societal hierarchy. In Muslim, Buddhist and indeed other religious practices it is a well known to give alms, and by preference to a disabled person. Western society rationalise it more than an act of charity but as a moral standard (Devlieger 2010:96).

The early Judaic concepts of beggars were very negative and are tied into biblical perceptions, to denote a person or people cursed by God. Beggars were cursed to *wander* and the nearest expressions in Hebrew to begging being ‘to wander’ or ‘to seek bread’¹³. In most of the legislation, beggars are arrested for wandering, loitering and soliciting alms. The development in appearance and performance by professional beggars, parallel the growth of large cities in ancient Jewish times.¹⁴ *Beggary* was a curse beseeched from God to afflict the less righteous (Psalms 109:10). David’s observation after extensive life experience is, “I have been young, and now am old; yet have never seen the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging bread” (Psalms 37:25). Indeed there are many references to encounters with beggars and the incapacitated poor in the scriptures and how Jesus performed a miracle by restoring their sight (Matthew 20:30-34). In another allegory to poor and incapacitated attitudes influenced by religion, Jesus tells a parable about the rich man and a poor man, Lazarus. In the parable, the moral is to do good to disadvantaged people to achieve divine after life (Mark

¹³ Bible History “Beg; Beggar; Begging” <http://www.bible-history.com/isbe/B/BEG%3B+BEGGAR%B+BEGGING/>

¹⁴ Ibid Bible History Retrieved August 2013

9:48, Luke 16:20-31). God calls for the equitable treatment of the poor (Exodus 23:6, Deut 24:10-11). God blesses those who consider the poor (Deut 24:13, 24:19) and God provides for the poor (Exodus 22:27). Moral messages spread by missionaries throughout Africa, and religious views of various other non-Judaic religions brought such influences, on how to view *and* the practices of, beggars, poor and incapacitated persons¹⁵.

To best describe the context of other social conditions that may have contributed to this increase in beggars, I add some historical context in Southern Africa. To be poor in an African sense, as portrayed by historians, was to have no family or land (Iliffe 1987:143). One who did not have a wife or children was ranked as poor. One could also be considered poor in having land, and no-one to help till it or put it to productive use. In South Africa, with land appropriation legislation (Land Act 1913), an increase in industrial towns and commercial agriculture, many Africans found themselves poor in a contemporary context (Iliffe 1987:114). Many had to migrate to cities to seek work to survive and lead successful social lives. Although this situation was not only limited to Africans; many Caucasian (white) small holders with big families, also became poor with inheritance traditions, which broke big farms into smaller farms. Many rural white farmers eventually migrated to industrial towns to seek employment in the factories and other growing industries (Iliffe 1987: 114-119). There was intense scrutiny to deal more with white poor, than Africans, and there was more state and religious intervention into studies to determine why, who and how many were poor. The Carnegie Foundation funded the Carnegie Commission which issued a key document in the history of poverty in Africa, the Carnegie Report 1929-1930. The Dutch Reformed Church too was instrumental in publicizing the plight of the poor, albeit “Poor White Problem” (Iliffe 1987: 117). This report highlighted the start of structural poverty that had never been seen in Africa. It was long standing (sustainable poverty) and not due to

¹⁵ Iliffe (1987) “The African Poor; A History” Press Syndicate, University of Cambridge

international depression or other conjuncture; it was due to “political and climatic instability” (1987:117). Many of the report’s recommendations supported the political motivations of industrialisation, and the racial attitude of the settlers, who resorted to segregation in towns and repatriation of all unemployed male natives. Most aid given to the poor during this period (for example Cape Town General Board of Aid) largely benefitted minority white settlers. Although there was other legislation that decentralised aid, among private charities, The Dutch Reformed Church had the most extensive throughout Southern Africa with interventions specific to certain categories of poor, and returning to the topic, of blind people. The Salvation Army also provided institutional care, but so too most religious bodies.

State intervention through a Department of Social Welfare within a Department of Labour, in 1933, developed to a Department of Labour and Social Welfare in 1935, and further to a Department of Social Welfare in 1937. Iliffe (1987), notes that this was an important development in the growth of central government power. The state drove to categorize who needed aid, and to centralise the investigation of applicants’ legibility. They discouraged private charities from giving indiscriminately and to providing general relief. They encouraged relief to particular categories of poor (Iliffe 1987: 122).

As mentioned earlier many Africans suffered poverty through political and climatic conditions. Land appropriation, persistent droughts and cattle plagues which resulted in cattle deaths, increased the number of what was to be categorised as rural poor. Plagues and droughts from 1896 to 1931, around the Cape, Ciskei and Pondoland left pastoral peoples diseased and close to starvation. Children suffered malnourishment due to a lack of ox power to plough and transport food¹⁶. Social and community pressures forced many African men and women to migrate to cities and towns to seek work; this included beggars and the incapacitated that became very visible. In 1935, James Ntshinga formed the Blind

¹⁶ Hunter M (2010), “Love in the Time of AIDS: In equality, Gender, and Rights in South Africa” pdf

and Crippled League in Port Elizabeth, which was imitated in Johannesburg in 1937. An African Blind Welfare Association was also founded in 1940 and a Handicapped African Welfare Association in 1945. Ntshinga's aim was *"to consider how to combat the daily occurrence of the [African] blinds and crippled, begging from door to door for necessities of life"* (Iliffe 1987: 134). The Chairman of the Handicapped African Welfare Association importantly added to the theme of the argument of this paper, *"The crippled and blind African beggars who daily stand at City street corners are just where they ought not to be....Among the important signs that a race has passed out of barbarism is that which is characterized by the earnest efforts of that race to take care of its less physically or mentally privileged members"* (Iliffe 1987:134 emphasis by author). It is therefore evident that the blind and crippled had already started to come to busy commercial centres to seek aid. It affected some of the newly industrialised African communities' views on begging.

Other pioneer Africans who worked in rehabilitation and care included Sister Dora Nginza who worked in Port Elizabeth and created the public health service in the New Brighton location. In 1941, the then Minister of Social Welfare, Jan Hofmeyr opened a School of Social Work in Johannesburg that began to train the first African social workers. Hofmeyr was also instrumental in the inclusion of monetary claims to be included and paid in The Blind Persons Act 1936, and for Africans in the 1943. Much parliamentary criticism caused the state to abandon comprehensive schemes, but Hofmeyr managed to salvage important African benefits. Pensions were extended to other incapacitated or elderly Africans and were to have a profound effect on the future history of poverty in South Africa (Iliffe 1987: 141). Under the National Party until the 1980's, South Africa was to "elaborate the most extensive welfare system in Africa... a system born of urbanisation, inequality, state power and rampant technocracy" (Iliffe 1987: 142). The blind beggars in Beitbridge and Johannesburg admired

the South African welfare system and decried the monopoly that the Zimbabwean government maintained in channelling the benefits to them.

“South Africa is more organised in arranging social welfare for the elderly, single mothers and the disabled. Their associations are more organised and are dedicated to their causes. Here in Zimbabwe, the associations prohibit one from doing any of the activities that actually keep us alive (begging). They want us to enter into their fences, while they drive big cars.” (Douglas, Beitbridge August 2013)

In Zimbabwe, issues such as the aged, incapacitated and destitute persons, came to the fore in 1933 in Bulawayo. Congregations of the needy in towns increased with legislation (Southern Rhodesia’s Land Husbandry Act 1951) that cancelled land rights of aging workers, their widows and dependants. This Act forcefully depleted the African herds, reduced land under cultivation, and forced uprooting of families and entire villages¹⁷. Jairos Jiri, with the help of others who would become future leaders (Joshua Nkomo), formed the Jairos Jiri Association in 1950. Although Jiri had started being involved in rehabilitation work since the early 1940’s, the official formation of this association for the disadvantaged and disabled was monumental in the transformation of aid for the poor and incapacitated; rehabilitation centres soon spread to other cities countrywide, to teach them to make curios and to teach music and dance¹⁸. Jairos Jiri centres developed to include homes and legal representation for the disabled. Importantly Jiri, Nginza and Ntshinga were the African pioneers of self help for disabled Africans, rather than seeing them trawl the streets for donations. Jiri received many accolades throughout his life, including an MBE in 1959 from the Queen of England for outstanding contribution to his countrymen and a reception with Pope Paul VI in 1975. He is

¹⁷ Ibid Illife (1987), and also Weitzer R, 1990, “Transforming Settler States: Communal Conflict and Internal Security in Northern Ireland and Zimbabwe”, University of California Press,

<http://ark.cdlib.org/13030/ft2199n7jp/>

¹⁸ Jairos Jiri Website homepage <https://www.Jairos%20Jiri%20historical-background>

rated as Africa's greatest philanthropist, with 32 years working in rehabilitation, after his death in 1981.

From earlier mention, religious organisations were also active in charities that dealt with specific categories of poor. In Zimbabwe (then Rhodesia), The Reformed Church started the Copota School for the Blind in 1915 at Morgenster Mission in Masvingo, a town approximately 300 kilometres from the South African border. Their first student was a blind child who was rejected by his father because of his blindness, and condemned to be drowned. Devlieger (2010:84-96) elaborates on other Bantu cultural practices toward people born disabled. Attitudes are informed by cosmological, physical difference and language used to describe the disability. Most of the linguistic cultural descriptions of the disabled view them as not whole or deformed. The concept of a "bad child" is also existent in the Songye of the Congo, where a "faulty" child is believed to come from another world and is anchored in the cosmology of good and evil, this world and the supernatural. Very broadly disability is viewed as a visual reminder of infringements between man, God and the spirits. It also serves as a reminder of a lost battle between good and evil. Faulty children are also thought to be caused by God, and reveal the belief in a distant God that determines human fate (Devlieger 2010:91). The practice of infanticide in many traditional African societies is meant to facilitate a return of the spirit of a being that does not belong in the human realm (Devlieger 2010:92). Albertina Mukanhairi who is blind gave birth to a stillborn child in Johannesburg. She narrated that she was told by the nurses that

"..the baby died because I was not supposed to give birth because it is very bad, unnatural, for blind people to have babies. They wouldn't feed me properly in hospital and then they said I could not see the baby or bury until I paid them R2000. The baby was only buried after a doctor stopped them." (Johannesburg 2011)

At Copota Dzingisai, later baptized to Samson, became an evangelist after completion of his education at the school. This centre has been credited with supporting the visually impaired and deaf across Southern Africa with students from Mozambique, Botswana, Zambia and Malawi. It houses 480 students, most visually impaired, in a primary and secondary boarding school that teaches income generating projects such as agriculture. Programmes include animal husbandry (piggery, poultry) and market gardening; art and craft, which comprises weaving, and basketry and educational chalk production¹⁹. Recent political and economic challenges have frozen state support, and threatened the survival of the school. Funding is now strictly limited to Church funds and individual international donors. The chalk they produce for sale has stockpiled, with the health risks it poses in comparison with the new dustless chalk. The animal production has stalled too due to a shortage of capital to fund most of the projects²⁰. Zimbabwe has seen a decline in international tourism due to the political and economic instability, so therefore sales of curios have also seen a slump. In recent years the school has had to reject children because they do not have the capacity. Some of the children at the school and new applicants are orphans, with no family, and would have nowhere to go if the school was to close.

In contemporary times, events such as the political and economic meltdown in Zimbabwe have led to a huge exodus of Zimbabweans of all walks of life to many countries far and wide including South Africa. Blind and incapacitated people have been very much part of this migration of people who left home because of social and economic difficulties²¹. Logistical and economic problems that plague homes like Copota School for the Blind in Zimbabwe,

¹⁹ National Association of Societies for the Care of the Handicapped (NASCOH) June 21, 2007, "Copota School for the Blind-forerunner of disability empowerment" www.kubatana.net

²⁰ Luton Wigmore Copota PDF document Reformed Church Zimbabwe International "Copota School for the Blind", High Street, Lye, Stourbridge, West Midlands, Birmingham, DY9 8LF

²¹ Saxon T, "Search for Survival; Disabled Begging on the Increase" <http://www.thezimbabwean.co.uk/human-rights/59382/search-for-survival-disabled-begging.html>

among others, have been part of a trickle-down effect of socio-political problems that have made life untenable and given poverty new meaning for many Africans.

In Zimbabwe, statistics are not very clear on employment figures between 2008 till now, 2013. It is safe to say however, that there is a majority of unemployed youths and adults who cannot make a R50 a day on a regular basis, and are not disabled. Some of the blind beggars I have met on the Johannesburg streets are from Zimbabwe and Mozambique. For example, a young boy who has no hands, I have previously met him in Beira, Mozambique (he followed me home once pleading for money). I have met him in Harare, Zimbabwe and this year in Johannesburg, South Africa. I also determined these relocations by the language; some could speak Portuguese and others *Shona* (a Zimbabwean dialect and official language), but all of them could speak English and *isiZulu*. Begging is a particular way to survive and make money.

As well as being an international crisis that has increased economic prudence from donor agencies and charities²², local political and community attitudes and mismanagement have led to bad governance and regional instabilities²³. Individual household expenses and economies have also been reduced due to high unemployment, resulting in less people being able to afford to support extended disadvantaged family and communities. The trickle-down effect of this new definition of poverty, has left many blind and incapacitated people being further marginalised. In contemporary times, in the age of globalisation, human rights, and social welfare; Bill Gates, Desmond Tutu, Mother Theresa, Oprah Winfrey, Pentecostalism and the United Nations (UN); in this age where traditional values that have been re-invented

²² Kellet J & Sparks D, (2012), "Disaster Risk Reduction: Spending Where it should Count", Global Humanitarian Assistance. www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/wp./GHA-Disaster-Risk-Report.pdf Retrieved Dec 2013

²³ The Zimbabwe Land Reform Program 2000, led to economic and political sanctions against Zimbabwe, forcing many western funded agencies and donors to freeze funding for social programs. The Economic Crisis of 2008 also led to reduced spending by the West to international relief and social interventions.

to idolise a spirit of empowerment, Ubuntu and a proliferation of a “Renaissance”²⁴; we still find blind beggars being led by an able bodied person in the streets and gateways of major cities and towns. Amid all the religious fervour, bureaucracy, legislation and human rights, how are blind people falling through the cracks and being displayed or displaying themselves in this context that has long standing traditional roots and meanings for different communities worldwide? Blindness continues to draw sympathy enough to solicit gifts; as a means for individual expression and survival. Society, including economically successful blind people, have the necessary means to alleviate poverty for their fellow blind however, blind begging as in other locations and traditional practice, continues. At first it did prove difficult to understand the subjectivity of the blind beggars and why they resort to this form of eking a living in an age when there are so many other avenues they could claim benefits. In cases like Zimbabwe, many were not receiving any money from the government ministry at all. This then led me to understand why the assistant joined the blind person in this performance of social distress.

Cultural conception also adds to how people make sacred of the blind and crippled²⁵. In a coach I boarded to the research site once, a blind man alighted to solicit donations from the passengers. I deliberately started protesting why we had to be subjected to a blind man stumbling the length of the bus aisle, singing a religious hymn, and whether this was at all professional in terms of the conditions of service by the bus operator. It seemed the whole bus was in unison in shouting me down. The lady who sat next to me tugged at my sleeve and

²⁴ The African Renaissance Statement of Deputy President, Thabo Mbeki, 2004, www.dfa.gov.za/docs/speeches/1998/mbek0813.htm Retrieved August 2013

²⁵ Ghanaian Chronicle “Disability Law in Limbo; Beggars on the Streets” <http://www.modernghana.com/news/350623/1/disability-law-in-limbo-beggars-on-the-streets.html> Retrieved July 2013

drew close to my ear. She spoke softly yet firmly and clearly that it would do no harm to let him beg *in* the bus. She explained how God was watching over all, we the passengers and the blind man, and that our paths had crossed for a reason. She continued that if I did not have anything to give, or did not feel like giving, I should allow others to do so. She then fumbled among the clothes she was wearing, and withdrew very few, low denomination coins.

Contemporary legislation in Southern Africa does not favour begging yet the practice symbolizes a class action to survive. Dennis Baker²⁶ writes a very interesting paper that investigates and castigates society's association with beggars and criminal activity. The type of poverty found in beggars is extreme and entails all facets of the way they live. Often they live on the street, their appearance is dirty, and they exist without rights and protection from or against the law. Devleiger (2010) states that begging with a disability, is living life on and indeed within a boundary. In his research and indeed mine we both found begging unacceptable both in the rural areas and in the cities. In previous research in Steelpoort, a rural town in South Africa, I noticed this absence of beggars or street people. However disability becomes more visible and marginalised in the city than the rural areas.

“While in both zones, begging may be unacceptable; it becomes acceptable at the boundaries. The very act of singing by the blind beggars in Harare is another symbolic act because, situated at the boundaries, their singing transgresses the profane and challenges the spiritual life of anyone who cares to listen” (Devlieger 2010:94)

The blind beggars challenge every boundary moral or religious. Some countries like Zimbabwe criminalise begging²⁷. In South Africa there are many laws and by-laws that prohibit begging and soliciting especially in malls and busy stations. In July 2013, a blind

²⁶ Baker J Dennis, “A Critical Evaluation of the Historical and Contemporary Justifications For Criminalising Begging” <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2063740> The Journal of Criminal Law (2009) HeinOnline

²⁷ Vagrancy Act http://www.parlzim.gov.zw/attachments/article/96/VAGRANCY_ACT_10_25.pdf

busker, Lunga Goodman Nono was man-handled at St George's Mall in Cape Town for playing his guitar in a designated public place outside the assigned time. From one of the numerous articles that covered this incident, City of Cape Town officials conceded that the law was informed by an Apartheid-era policy document last updated in 1993. Both the Mayor and Mayoral Committee Member for Safety and Security implied that the actions of the law enforcement officers had some basis in the rule of law. Lunga's guitar was broken during the altercation. He was thrown to the ground, then frogmarched to the back of a law enforcement vehicle. He was later fined R500 and charged with "malicious injury to property", while his wife who was present at the time was fined R1000 and charged with "disobeying an instruction from a peace officer". There was huge public outcry at the law enforcement officers' actions and a call for their dismissal. However City officials said Lunga had repeatedly ignored warnings and that complaints had been received from local businesses. A shop owner opposite where he operates was blamed for making the complaint and demanding Lunga's removal. Abigail, his wife, explained how they commuted by minibus taxi on a 60km roundtrip to perform mostly gospel songs, making about R200 from passers-by on a good day. The peoples' response was to donate two guitars and Lunga was offered a recording contract by Rooftop Recording Studio.

These are some of the comments from the public about the incident in Cape Town supporting the law enforcement agents-

"Nothing brutal about it. Imagine you have a shop there next to him? What about their rights? Police just doing their jobs. If you wanna see brutality google Rodney King. This is the SAPS (South African Police Service) - go peacefully. Just because he is blind does that make him more equal?????" (Pieter Mynhardt July 9, 2013)

“Looks more like he was resisting. Of course this is the normal story we should be use to it by now. Secondly there is a reason there are bylaws. Today one what happens tomorrow when there are 100 and the customers take their money elsewhere? I can show you a few places where similar thing happened and I can show you what those places looks like today. It’s like complaining about how the taxis drive but they have been doing it like that for so long that you can’t just tell them to stop or that it is wrong. If taxis where handled in the beginning and forced to abide by the laws and rules of the road we would not have the problems we have today. I’m sorry for the guy but there is a right way and a wrong way. If you just let people do as they please then the place will become just another slum. (Mc Apple July 9, 2013)

“Much ado about nothing; storm in a teacup. Can’t believe this is such big news!”
(Kortbroek.duplessis July 9, 2013)

“He needs to do so INSIDE the law...an honest living is inside the bounds of law. “Innocently” breaking the law and repeatedly-over many days- back chatting and ignoring the cops? He wasn’t housebreaking but he sure was law-breaking. That rubs the shine of “honest” living. Breaking the law- that’s why the cops came to move him along. ” (Maka Drama July 9, 2013)

“I am afraid I am with the police here. The law is the law and it is there to be obeyed. If he was breaching the law by playing later than permitted, and had ignored repeated previous warnings, then he has to suffer the consequences of his choice. South Africa is largely lawless- I would encourage the police to enforce all laws in a reasonable manner” (Geronimo Feather July 9, 2013)

“Buskers, crusty jugglers, living statues. Take them away” (Anon Sardonicus July 9, 2013)

“That is right, arrest them! Arrest all of these people that stand at the robots and sell items, beg for money” (Leatitia Ferreira, July 9, 2013)

“Look at the facts first. Just because he is blind does not allow him to be above the law” (Paul Van Niekerk July 9, 2013)

“The attitude of “minor “crimes don’t matter is part of the bigger problem of the lawlessness in this country. The SAPS do need to be mindful of how they handle a blind person...But let’s not turn our backs to bylaws as it’s these that keep society in check” (Rohin July 10, 2013)

And for reform, sympathetic to Lunga’s plight-

“Yes but he is blind, and was being pulled along too fast. He doesn’t seem to be resisting, but rather trying to find his footing. Imagine being unable to see a thing and being pulled so quickly through a crowd like that. Undignified for his condition. Just because extreme violence lives, doesn’t make lesser incidences ok...” (Mya Schultz July 9, 2013)

“THIS IS EVIL...I CANNOT BELIEVE MY EYES” (Alicia Louise July 9 2013)

“If this is really the kind of society you want to live, then you are disgusting. Get some humanity. A blind man just singing to try honestly support his family and you want to lock him up, you should be ashamed...Do we want to live in a society that violently throws blind men in jail for singing. The law must bend to how we want society to be, not the other way round, and I expect the people in the system to act as human beings with decency and with the goal of the law and SAPS being to SERVE AND PROTECT the public. Is this serving and protecting? Protecting people from a blind man singing?” (Jay Kganyago July 9 2013)

“A harmless blind man..” (Muke Matsaba July 9, 2013)

“Damn silly if you ask me, YES there is law, that doesn’t make it the right law. Apartheid was law...and? These people that play good music give an atmosphere to our city, shame on you police. Shame on you. Why the hell can’t I stand where I want and make music, did people complain about him disturbing the peace? His music was making peace. In this case the police should peace off in my opinion. How can you stop someone from earning a living?? He needs to feed himself! (Billy Bob July 10, 2013)

“He sings songs on the side of the walk way. It’s not like he’s hanging in to your car window”

(Carina Welman July 9, 2013)

There is no law against Rag Week students dressing like idiots and soliciting cash so why would there be a law against a blind man trying to make ends meet? What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. I’d rather give a man who really is in need.” (Momma Cyndi July 23, 2013)

“Glad to see it all turned well in the end- free advertising a new guitar and probably bigger tips”

(Chris P Noodle July 10 2013)

Punishments for Zimbabwean beggars meted out by South African social workers included removing them from the street corners and detaining them for whole days without food and water. Some have claimed to have been beaten with rubber pipes. In Zimbabwe, informal punishments for beggars begging at the Beitbridge border post include collecting firewood for whoever is the authority, or rolling in the dirt, which is sandy and very dusty. Ernest laughed heartily, that if he had the US\$300 for the fine, he would not beg,

“I would go home and start a chicken project that will pay me more than what I get from begging.” (Ernest, Beitbridge, July 2013)

“That was just a way of getting us off the streets, they want us to feel the pain of detention and desist from begging. But this does not deter us, because the day we are released, and we go straight onto the roster with the other beggars.” (Maria, Beitbridge, August 2013)

“This is when the children suffer the most, my colleagues cannot afford to look after their own children never mind my own. The children spend long periods out of school and malnourished when parents are arrested”, (Maria, Beitbridge, July 2013).

Disability rehabilitation methods and practices in Zimbabwe, and indeed most post-colonial African countries, were introduced and are maintained by western patrons. Vocational

training in the early 1980's was a post-colonial intervention aimed at changing the previous conceptions about disabled like the blind. Government programmes were set up through the ministries of health and social welfare largely because many of the ruling party's ex-combatants needed these services.²⁸ Devlieger explains how cultural concepts determine attitudes to disabilities like blindness and resources afforded to them. With non-governmental foreign organizations reducing aid to churches and private organizations, the blind among the disabled have experienced an evaporation of resources for their development. With various recommended economic reforms like ESAP (Economic Structural Adjustment Programme, 1989) the government also reduced public spending and has been retrenching in various departments. Bilateral aid was further reduced to Zimbabwe after the controversial Land Reform Programme and economic collapse. This has led to a peripheral existence for many ordinary Zimbabweans. As Clifford Geertz (1973:5) aptly framed it, all these "webs of significance" have led to blind people to use their disability to survive.

Cultural conceptions reinforce the practice of begging. The blind people I met are using their disability to exercise charity, diminishing themselves to objects of pity. They are maintaining the "us" and "them" ideology, which will be ingrained in their performance and subjectivity. These also form societal and hierarchal identification patterns, which do not exist, which are constructed and practiced. "Such negative self-definition reinforces already established practices" (Devleiger 2010:80). Ernest explained how the legacy of this hierarchal classification had transcended a generation in his family.

"My daughters have not been successfully married either, their husbands have only paid an acknowledgement fee ("tsvakirayi kuno" in Shona), so I know where my daughter is. It is difficult for our children who come from such poor backgrounds (beggars) to get married. When they do,

²⁸ Devlieger, PJ, "At the Interfaces of Classification: Notes on the Category of Disability in Sub-Saharan Africa", from "Disability as a Fluid State", edited by Sharon N. Barnartt, Rea

they suffer abuse in the homes they get married into. They are looked down upon and scorned, because they grew up surviving on begged items. They are used to that language. They have to bear the abuse and the children of these men; stay there because they also know that there is nothing to come back to - and are reminded of that too! They tell us these stories, and even we do not know how to respond. They realise that they could end up changing many men who will all abuse them and tell them this type of language, therefore they opt to stay with the one and bear the abuse, fighting back as best they can. There is a lot of domestic abuse among beggars, even in our histories. Women (in our community) do not report abuse.” (Ernest Beitbridge September 2013)

Life indeed for the blind beggar is on and within the boundary. “For women, marriage is often excluded and when it is, it is a marriage that has not the same symbolic value as other marriages because the dowry rules are often not honoured. While marriage may not constitute the same barrier for men, capability to work in the fields and productivity in other employment may be serious challenges to the stability of marriage and the man’s status within the marriage”. (Devlieger 2010: 95)

Classification of people with disability is at the interstice of classification itself. Deborah Little (2010:191) points out how the vast majority of people with disabilities are poor and disempowered. She also highlights the relationship between class and disability; disability and the need for economic resources, disability and the limitations on family income, disability and the marginal status on the labour market. “In essence, there is a connection between poverty and the creation of disability as well as between disability and the creation of poverty”²⁹ Ernest already knew his status from a story he knew about his father.

“My father was a miner at Mashaba Mine (Zimbabwe then Rhodesia). His white friend who was a manager at the mine, gave him some used clothes as a gift. On his journey to our rural home, he

²⁹ Stone 2001 in Little D 2010 from Sharon Barnartt

was marched off the bus and beaten by white police at a road block. He was accused of stealing the clothing. He was arrested and had both handcuffs and leg irons for wearing clothes above his status.” (Ernest, Beitbridge, September 2013)

The causes for begging are complex but clear for all to see in this chapter. These range from religious perceptions of those less fortunate than ourselves, the onset of certain diseases that cause blindness, to colonial practices and Western discourses versus cultural African beliefs regarding disabled people. It is more a necessity for survival than a vice to coerce money from the public. The following chapter examines what begging means along with the legislative view of the practice. Society is pivotal to determining why this is so.

What It Means- We as Society make up the Laws and Legislation

We, through our role as givers, perpetuate some stereotypes about blind beggars that need to be examined in this contemporary age. On the other hand, liberation sociology determines that by contributing to the production and reproduction of the able-bodied world, persons with physical disabilities become their own oppressors (Deegan 2010: 37). As participants in the social relations with beggars, we maintain their presence on the streets through practice in the small amounts we give them, and definitely through language. Through the ethnographic evidence, the majority of people gave only a measured surplus that amounted to small denomination coins, used items and discarded surplus food. Although there have been some individual exceptional donors the majority are small donors, even if they can afford more.

“I give to beggars because I see them all the time, at the service station, at the border. I give what I can, when I can. I first see what I need, so that I do not run out and make decisions based on the surplus. You know it is difficult to have surplus among us blacks.” (Taxi driver Beitbridge July 2013)

“I always give what I can, hey! I have one guy I always give food and stuff, like whenever I can. I haven’t seen him though for the last couple of weeks now- I went looking for him, and he wasn’t there at his spot!” (Mixed race female, Johannesburg, September 2013)

First it occurred to me how many times I had heard this type of comment. In my mind I imagined this blind man or woman waiting for the sporadic impulses of charity they would have to rely on to survive. The woman expected the beggars to be there whenever she felt the need to give them something. People anticipate the beggars to be there. Some people keep and carry on their person, surplus or dedicated items to give to those less fortunate than themselves. Many people consciously or not, prepare to meet them in every day social life by keeping loose coins in small amounts to give beggars. These types of behaviours reinforce my opinion that, we as society need there to be beggars, and that the beggars, willingly or

unwittingly assume a necessary societal role- recipient. It is an unspoken social agreement, on the merits of one's social status over another. The blind beggars use the societal structure and their infrastructure to assume a certain role within society, which is widely accepted and understood. Their receiving charity accentuates their position in society "and becomes a "trigger" for feeling disabled" (Deegan 2010:35). Their participation with society is at a disadvantaged level and as a recipient of aid. Goffman (1963:3) in his description of stigma notes how "it constitutes a special discrepancy between virtual and actual social identity". Whatever it is they imagine themselves to be, is put into question when they interact with society as blind beggars, and can contribute to identity imagination of the same.

Goffman (1963) continues on how the attitudes we have towards people we regard as not normal exist, because there are responses. Benevolent social action is there in civil society groups and individual action, and is designed to ameliorate the lives and experiences of people like blind beggars. Those who participate in benevolent social action also exercise a type of discrimination against those they aim to ameliorate. They *construct* a social ideology to explain an inferiority and superiority that affects social classification. Specific stigma terms are used in daily discourse as metaphors and sources for imagery.

In my field work, while observing static beggars and watching the crowds walking by, I noticed how adults usually did not make eye contact with the beggar, although the beggar could be shouting quite loudly asking for help. Children in their formative years and holding on to their parents' hands however, stared intently somewhat startled and were a case to wonder if not retained. Goffman mentions how "the very anticipation of such contacts can lead normals and the stigmatized to arrange life so as to avoid them". In the case of the blind beggar his aim is to meet as many people as possible. One of the comments from the Lunga incident in Cape Town was very direct in dealing with society's perception of what beggars

need. After the incident, there was a public outpouring of guitars to replace the one that had been broken. Lunga ended up with more than one guitar

“How is a blind man going to protect multiple guitars? Get him a guide dog!” (Jess Henson July 9, 2013)

“Five basic misconceptions that the public makes with regard to disability: (1) disability is a biological condition that is synonymous with the person, and therefore the cause of other’s behaviours and attitudes; (2) problems encountered by the person with a disability are a result of the disability; (3) people with disabilities are “victims;” (4) the disability of the person is central to his or her self-definition, social comparison, and reference group; and (5) disability is synonymous with needing help and social support.”³⁰

The following quote illustrates how a blind artist responded to a view that blind people live a less fulfilling existence

“That would lead immediately to the thought that there are many occurrences which can diminish satisfaction in living far more effectively than blindness, and that lead would be an entirely healthy one to take. In this light, we can perceive, for instance, that some inadequacy like the inability to accept human love, which can effectively diminish satisfaction of living almost to a vanishing point, is far more a tragedy than blindness. But it is unusual for the man who suffers from such a malady even to know he has it and self-pity is, therefore. Impossible for him” Chevigny, op, cit., p. 154. Language and behaviours in Southern Africa support a view that blind people live a less than satisfactory existence. Devlieger (2010:76) does point out that “a comprehensive notion related to impairment has been mostly foreign” to African culture and is still being fostered.

We imagine that the blind beggar lives a torrid existence without ever asking him. Even if we did ask him, it definitely would be a wretched one, to go out and beg frequently. At the

³⁰ Fine and Asch, 1988 from Pepper K. Mueller et al in Sharon Barnartt

Beitbridge border post, I held discussions while they worked the immigration and customs queues of travellers and business people alike. They sat under a tree away from the main buildings that housed official business. There were five blind women, two who had babies under one year old, and one man. Among them they had three assistants who took the beggars in turns to work the long lines of people in the dusty and wretched heat that epitomises a well-worn path. The all-female assistant crew sat together with the beggars as they surveyed the continuing traffic choosing where the best targets would be. Every time more trucks and buses drove into the immigration and customs enclosure, one of the assistants would take a blind person, in turns, from the shade and walk towards the new potential and ask for “rubatsiro”, which translates to “help”. These beggars seek help in any form, but the plate or cup the assistant carries, suggests that money would be easier and more desirable to cope with every day necessities. Once the complete round has been done with one beggar, the assistant accompanied them back to the tree and picked another one. This was done so each beggar could therefore be able to receive individual help depending on particular tactics used to solicit donations. The beggars were sometimes with babies on their backs, sometimes with the assistant carrying the baby on her back, sometimes in tandem of two beggars and one assistant singing a duet. On one unitary separate occasion they were all huddled together led by one assistant singing a choral song. In all scenarios appearance and performance is important to seduce the donor.

Sharon Barnartt (2010:2), in her definition of disabled, explains the fluidity of ability. In an economic sense, the blind beggar is lucky, to be one of those people who is able to make some living, however wretched, and he accepts his fate for it. A good day is any day that he gets paid or any day he has the opportunity to beg; just the same as an able bodied person is able to go out to look for work. These blind beggars had been begging for decades, and going out every day and asking for donations is part of who they have become. The group explained

to me that this was their existence, living under trees and in temporary shelters while they begged for a living. They leave their families and relatives at home in some rural area or township and make their way to busy commercial centres where they camp and beg, saving small amounts to send home for food and school fees for their children. Ernest, was very specific to explain that he knew no other way to survive, and professed faith in God who provided for birds as well as he. He cried for the legacies of his children who often suffered the consequences of his lengthy imprisonment for begging, when they relied on him to send everything they required from his earnings. Ernest had a strong belief in God's presence in his life,

“Sometimes I ask 20 people and they don't help me, but the 21st will provide as much help as all the 20 put together. He will offer real help. Sometimes we will receive small amounts from many people and this accumulates to become sufficient for the needs of my children. In both scenarios, life is going on. Sometimes the children are out of school for long periods of time because I cannot send any money, but God always finds a way, whenever he chooses to and we work with that. This is how we survive.” (Ernest Beitbridge July 2013)

To summarize this chapter, I draw a conclusion that dynamism in socio-economics and societal expectations through social structure is why it is that blind people beg. An elderly beggar I interviewed in Auckland Park,

“We don't like staying away from home for long periods, begging for small amounts. In years gone by we did not need to come to Johannesburg and other towns to beg. We had great begging in Zimbabwe, before the happenings (political and economic turmoil). I would start at 10 in the morning and finish at 1 pm, and that would be enough. (Zimbabwean)\$10 then, was enough for that amount of time, such that \$20 was enough for me to purchase a cow! In those days we used to receive grocery too. I would sit on shop and grocery store verandas and not have to call out or sing. We did not even have begging bowls or cups, and people and the shop owners would donate

groceries, clothes maybe old furniture. Money was for personal development like extending or building a home and such. Even when you approached someone who has the talent for building- you could ask them too to build you a house and he would do it for free. One just needed doorframes and window frames. Things began to get difficult, that's when store owners would say, maybe come to the shop on Fridays only, but they still would give us groceries. This still gave me options to make other developments with the money. Now that times have changed- if you go and look at the verandas there are fewer beggars. We prefer to be at the border post or here in Johannesburg because there are more people. This is a sign of changing times" (Johannesburg September 2013)

"Our main reason for being here in South Africa is not to make something. It is just to make a living here. It is a hard living, but it is still a living- something we can't do in Zimbabwe, because, even if the economy is slowly recovering, people don't have a lot of money to give us. In south Africa or Zimbabwe, our jobs are the same-we are beggars." (Kennedy Nyoni Johannesburg 2011)

What Causes It?

It was explained to me that there are different classes and hierarchies among blind people. Education was a key factor in determining social station and performance of a beggar.. Ernest confessed that he was not very academically inclined at school even though he got a secondary education at Copota School for the Blind. Out of eight possible subject passes he attained two. Currently several policies in the social system and economic conditions have changed such that the school does not provide funded education for the blind anymore and instead provides for anyone who can pay for the education. Blind children now have to attend resource classes based in villages, run by “specialists” who teach Braille. Previously blind students were provided with an education and resources like Braille material, which Ernest or any ordinary parent could not afford. He pointed out how it was difficult for continuity in school for the children and how many stopped attending even before they got to the final year due to fees. Some who were extraordinarily talented managed to have sponsors arranged for them and continued past secondary school to gain specific training in various fields or attend university. Even these he said found great difficulty in fulfilling their lives. Many of them required a seeing assistant and usually the wages of the assistant were drawn from the blind person’s. If a blind person was unable to pay for an assistant to help in his profession, then they usually lost the job. He remembered how a program was started in 1985 by government, to pay the assistants a salary equivalent to a temporary teacher, but this program only lasted for two years then was abandoned. Many of the Zimbabwean blind beggars in South Africa have a teaching qualification and experience. Jethro Gonese used to work

“...at a normal school as a schoolteacher. I had an assistant to help with the marking and the chalkboard work but it reached a point when the government said they couldn’t afford to keep

paying the assistant. I shared my Z\$1000 salary with him for a while, but it got to the point when a loaf of bread cost more than that. Then there was no point in carrying on, so I came here”³¹

In current times it was more often that blind people coupled with a sighted person on a commission basis, so as to access the help they required.

Ernest mentioned how there were two main organizations that represented blind people in Zimbabwe, but did not want to mention which of the two he belonged to. He said these organisations were not useful at all and often gave misleading information to the media and public, whenever they did their surveys and encountered blind beggars like him.

“They act as though we run away from facilities that are available for us. But when they are asked which facilities, they are unable to point to, or name a single functioning project. When they are looking for sponsors and donors to donate money, they portray as though there are already existing successful projects running. All they want is to administer projects for us or remove us from the streets and claim they resettle us in homesteads. I have been made to stand by a grinding mill for a photo to be sent to donors, who I was told were willing to sponsor five of us for a grinding mill project. When I went to enquire weeks later, I was told not yet. Subsequent visits ended up in me being restricted from the premises. Months later, I found out the grinding mills had indeed been donated but were corruptly distributed. I have no means of recourse in matters like these and cannot really do anything because I cannot see. If only there were laws that punished those that took advantage of our disability for their own benefit, that would be a great help. Imagine those five grinding mills? That would have been five less of us. And if we had five of us removed from the street every year, this would be a big number over a period of years. This disability of blindness has decreased since I was a boy because of modern medicine. I am a result of a bad case of measles. But now there are vaccines and much improved health systems such

³¹ Tolsi N, “Blind beggars search for a better life in Jo’burg’s darkest corners” Mail and Guardian September 30 2011 mg.co.za/article/2011-09-30-blind-beggars-search-for-a-better-life

that there are a reduced number in cases of blindness than before. Yes there are cases of accidents or war, but not like the old days.”

This was not a choice for Ernest, to beg for a living. He associated begging with his hierarchical station in life and used his available infrastructure to survive. His infrastructure of blindness helped a student who would have had as much difficulty as the average Zimbabwean to get a secondary education, employment or just survival, to be able to be bait for donor sympathy. Therein is a paradox of luck being associated with blindness. Although he is valuable in soliciting donations and materiality, his disability prevents him from complete control of accessing the resources. The people who take advantage of him see him as valuable and disposable in one clean sweep. It is difficult to determine if he is valuable or worthless, but in a sense is made disposable. Other people I interviewed, for example a taxi driver who encounters them every day in traffic, considered the blind beggar lucky because he could evoke such sympathy. The taxi driver had to actually work to survive, the blind man was able to survive “like a bird, which has no employment, no field”. He did not think that begging was work. The Bible posts the blind as vessels for miraculous works. Jesus, in John 9:3 answers his disciples after they asked who caused a man to be blind. “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him”³²

It is their reality to live under this tree at the public market for months at a time, like birds. They sleep under its shelter even during the rainy season and stand beneath it when the rain is too heavy. The stream of green sewer water flows during the rainy season, above the surface, gliding past their temporary home. The beggars know the water flows from the sewers of the nearby location and can do nothing about it. Mary, one of the more cheerful blind women explained that when her children first came to visit her in Beitbridge, they were traumatised

³² New International Version biblehub.com/john/9-3.htm accessed January 2013

when they realised that this was where they were going to sleep. A taxi driver complained about their outdoor accommodation beside the taxi-rank,

“They are blind and cannot tell when day breaks. Sometimes they copulate out here in the open, without realising the children have started walking to school” (Taxi driver Beitbridge August 2013)

These blind beggars do not live to expect anything from the state or any authority. If anything they have to survive in that grey area which overlaps between the legal and illegal, between inclusion and exclusion. Their existence beneath this tree in a public space, makes public their private lives. It equates almost to the local tourist attraction. Their social status and failings are for all to observe. They are treated with free health care but are ignored in social matters like their welfare, employment and sanitised housing. Sometimes they are arrested for begging as explained earlier and face huge fines or spells in prison, where they are not offered any food, relying mostly on relatives or colleagues.

“At the hospital is where we have a foot hold. We can access any medical treatment for free, that is one thing I cannot complain about. That is the best thing to us”. (Douglas, Beitbridge December 2013)

I asked what the use was of treatments against dysentery and diarrhoea for the beggars if they still had to return to their habitation which caused the disease.

“Well they don’t really treat anything then. It’s these politicians! Many people don’t believe it is possible to actually live like this. Many issues only end in promises (pledges), but nothing ever materializes. In election years like this one, many run out of campaign promises because they have used the vast majority and failed to deliver before the next election. We vote for the majority of these representatives for a lack of choice from the ones presented”. (Maria Beitbridge, December 2013)

Blind people require special needs for their survival in a contemporary world and especially for their education. In Zimbabwe, from 2000 there has been a serious lack of financial, physical and material resources. Many of the teachers who had been trained for the special needs classes have left the country among the hordes of migrants destined for greener pastures or escaping economic and political tensions. Many teachers in Zimbabwe were targeted by ruling party youths for inciting political change especially in the rural areas. Unfavourable teaching conditions such as no salaries, poor housing and lack of equipment have led to a brain drain especially in the education and health sectors. The economic conditions have caused dwindling finances to reduce the production of material resources such as Braille material and hearing aids. There has been a sharp decline in donor support as a result of the country's isolation and international financial collapse. Although many local individuals and international benefactors have stepped up since government collapse in services for the disabled, escalating costs and disruptions in the availability of other resources such as electricity, fuel and feeds for animal husbandry have also hindered progress for successful self-help projects. In the newly resettled areas, where new African farmers have been allocated land, there are shortages of infrastructure and human resources like schools and sufficient qualified staff to man the schools. On a national scale there have been several years of incidents of mismanagement in exam marking and leaks in exam papers³³. There have also been reported incidents of marks awarded for exams not written and vice versa. These problems still prevail. Teachers still bemoan poor remuneration and heavy work-loads due to shortages of staff. Government is unable to increase salaries due to financial constraints. Infrastructure in existing schools has deteriorated due to this lack of funding for maintenance during the last decade. The HIV/AIDS pandemic has also affected the blind, with the loss of alternative support systems through parents and partners alike.

³³ "Zimsec probes exam leak", The Herald, November 24 2013 www.herald.co.zw/zimsec-probes-exam-leak retrieved January 2014

Begging among blind people will probably be a practice that will continue for yet another generation and judging current socio-political conditions may even increase within the urban and populous zones. The refrains “Life is better here than in Zimbabwe”, “It’s much better here” from the beggars in South Africa, as expressed by previous researchers, is true. Many of the beggars I spoke to said they were going to be in South Africa for the foreseeable future and would remain on those fringes without legal documents. In Zimbabwe, new resettlement schools still do not have adequate infrastructure, qualified staff, teaching and learning materials. There is also no funding for provision of tuition grants for those who cannot afford to pay for education.

“We don’t want charity, we just want an equal opportunity” (Jethro Gonese Johannesburg 2011)

How It Operates

All the blind beggars I spoke to were from Zimbabwe. The beggars operate in and all over Zimbabwe and many of them have been doing so for decades. At Beitbridge they do venture

across to the South African side and commute all the way to Johannesburg. Here they are also on the fringes of the law and at odds with the authorities. All of the beggars I met in Musina were Zimbabwean, two were in wheelchairs with official letters from the Zimbabwean Ministry of Social Welfare addressed to the public to assist them wherever necessary, strung around their necks. Another blind woman sat in the middle of a pedestrian pavement with a metal bowl. They were all strategically placed in public spaces, but at the entrance to private spaces like the mall, the taxi rank and another at the KFC outlet.

“Of course we need passports to cross the border, but sometimes the officials let us through to Musina. Here, yes we can be arrested for improper documentation, because their argument is that we do not have visas that allow us to beg. Sometimes they say that passports are not licences to beg even when we have documents from the Ministry. They do not keep us for long but just return us back to the Zimbabwean side. This is not common but it does happen especially when the beggars are too many and they want to reduce the numbers. They do not arrest us specifically for begging, in fact they don’t care that we beg”.

This is not always the case as in Johannesburg the beggars had more severe stories of harassment. There have been reports of abuse and beatings in Hillbrow³⁴

“...they take us and drive us far away from the city and leave us there, even in the forest. Our assistants follow the wheel tracks to the road and then we stop a motorist who can take us back.”

(Gift Mupambiki Johannesburg 2011)

“They just talk, “We want to send you back, we want to send you back”. It’s their country, we can’t do anything” (Rachel Johannesburg Jan 2014)

³⁴Khumalo T “Blind Zimbabwean Beggars try their luck in South Africa” Radio Netherlands Worldwide Network Africa, January 13 2012 www.rnw.nl/africa/article/blind-zimbabwean-beggars-try-their-luck

“Luckily they don’t notice we were Zimbabweans, I don’t want to be harassed” (Jethro Gonese Johannesburg 2011)

Ernest specifically differentiated the treatment that blind beggars received from border authorities to the ordinary border-jumper. He recalled in by gone years when persecution was at its highest in Johannesburg, police would escort a single beggar from there to Musina in a Home Affairs vehicle, while other border jumpers were kept and accumulated, a process that could take weeks, maybe months before deportation. Another story about migration I was told by a young female assistant who was explaining how stubborn some of the blind people she works with can be. She explained that when they were passing through the gates at the border- no matter how many times or loudly the border patrol called out to him to come to their offices- he just kept on walking towards the exit gate and would eventually be found already hiking to the next town. Blind beggars she explained tend to behave as though they are outside the normal laws and got away with it.

“His luck is has to be explored in the city. If he remains in the village, he will not survive on the economy that exists there. He has to come to the city or to locations where money is spun so he can have more chances on his luck. He has to catch the bus and come to the city or centres that have more activity.” (Transnational Bus Conductor, Johannesburg, September 2013)

They definitely have a religious influence in how they operate, and this is ultimately expressed in the language they use to ask and in their reference to God in all forms of their plight. There is also a strong belief of an all knowing omnipotent God who answers prayers when the time is right or according to what he thinks is one’s ration in life. The beggars know better than to expect a miracle and are content to be able to solve life’s problems one at a time. All the beggars I met and was able to interview, professed to having faith that God

would not totally abandon them. The group in Beitbridge was forth-coming in exacting that response.

“We know that people will respond positively because of a moral responsibility- which is God!”

Ernest attributed this trait in him, as a socialisation of this subjectivity from his parents. He however had never heard of a successful Pentecostal miracle that had restored sight.

“This is why you find most blind beggars sing religious songs when begging. Even when we go to bars (and taverns) to beg, we must sing those religious songs. It is for credibility. Some who I have met who beg and have guitars may have other genres of songs, but they will always know some religious songs.” (Douglas Beitbridge December 2013)

This conversation brought about the discussion of the various types of begging employed by the beggars. These can be called skills to try and influence the outcome of how much is received on any day begging.

There are the beggars who sit, for example, in pedestrian pave walks, major entrances and exits or in what one of the ladies in the group called a “trap”. They sit with a cup or basin, usually alone, and may sing or call out but from this one place. When they find many people pass and do not donate, they may call out to call attention to themselves or highlight their plight. This type of begging I called static begging in the introduction. I observed several such beggars who held out a metal plate with a low denomination coin in it. They tossed the coin around in the bowl making a regular clanging sound and calling out as people walked by. I found mostly young men gave a few coins and that this appeared to be hard work, with all the calling. The traps I have seen are outside a bank, at the entrance to a mall and are all strategic to people having some loose change from shopping or surplus from the bank. The beggars make sure not to directly breach the privacy laws by being inside the premises. At the border post is the one place they were inside, but they were not static.

Ndinokumbirawo rubatsiro, (I ask for help)

Ndinokumbirawo rubatsiro vanhu vaJehovah (I ask for help Jehovah's people)

Ndinokumbirawo rubatsiro vanhu vaMwari (I ask for help God's people)

Ndirangarireiwo hama dzangu (Remember/think or don't forget about me my relatives)

Ndinokumbirawo rubatsiro vanhu vedenga (Help me people of heaven)

Ndibatsireiwo ndirame hama dzangu (Help me to survive my relatives)

Ndinokumbirawo rubatsiro vanhu vaShe (Help me, the Lord's people)

(Mai Talent, Harare Dec 2013)

One lady (Mai Talent-meaning Talent's mother) who is a static beggar in Harare, starts begging as early as 8:30am outside a local bank by herself and chants all these chants while tossing her coin in the metal plate. Whenever someone puts another coin(s) in it, she expresses gratitude and immediately removes the coins (I did not observe any notes) leaving the solitary low denomination coin, and starts again calling the chant. As I stood observing who answered her plea and her performance, she broke for a few minutes to make a call on her mobile phone to her male partner to find out his whereabouts. I also noticed she used the key sound tones to determine numbers, not touch as Braille on the number buttons. From the conversation he indicated that he was on his way to join her and in due time did. When he arrived hours later, he settled with his guitar by her side and started strumming religious songs, while the plate and coin added to the percussion in a more rhythmic clatter.

The second type of begging was one where the blind beggar was more mobile with an assistant. They follow vehicles in traffic and heavily populated areas where there are crowds. The blind person in this instance remains silent and the assistant is the one who calls or speaks to specific people who he can see or whom he leads the blind person to. This type of begging is more confrontational in the sense that the giver is approached directly, and the

effect to evoke sympathy is attained through visual contact. The group I interviewed in Musina were several blind people with three assistants. They have formed a combined group of all blind beggars in Beitbridge and split themselves into smaller groups who are assigned shifts at the lucrative border post. As the border is operational for 24 hours every day, there are two 12- hour shifts (day and night) where everyone gets to work. The most lucrative is the night shift when buses from South Africa are crossing, therefore the shifts alternate to make sure everyone has a chance at night. They were working within a prohibited enclosed space inside the transit area where official buildings are situated. The assistants would work the queues and cars with one beggar and make a complete circuit walking from car to queue. On completion, the assistant would come back to the tree and leave the beggar and take and lead another around the same area in maybe a different order. Without close scrutiny, a donor could easily not notice the same assistant changing the blind beggars. Sometimes the blind beggars lead each other, or share assistants in cases like this. Ernest refused my offer to be his assistant and lead him while he begged. He said that usually the assistants are people who have also fallen on tough times, and it was important for him to interview them for the post first, to assess sincerity and suitability. Once one passed the initial interview they were trained on how to beg and had to be monitored constantly to avoid having things or money stolen. I did not qualify to be an assistant.

“Sometimes I put R10 in my front pocket, and R50 in my back pocket deliberately. Then I pretend to be confused and give him (the assistant) the R50 note as though it is R10 and wait to see his reaction. I use these types of tests very regularly on my assistant to see if he is trustworthy. If they fail one such test I fire them on the spot and call someone else to come and pick me up, if necessary.”(Old Man Auckland Park Dec 2013)

The third type of blind beggar is what can be termed a busker, a person who entertains in streets or stations for money. “These are the ones who have instruments”. It is thought to

derive from the Spanish '*buscar*' which means to look for. These beggars sing any variety of songs including popular modern songs. Only the first two types of begging strictly adhere to singing religious songs and/or reciting certain biblical chapters and verses, "God says give and you will be blessed", was the unanimous refrain to my question regarding God's position about giving to the beggar. The translation from Shona to English is "to be glorified or blessed", almost like a refreshing tonic- '*ropafadzwa*'. People give to blind beggars (the deserving) so that they are blessed by God or the universe depending on their beliefs. The beggars are completely aware that donors feel religious and moral guilt, and use it in their strategies or as part of their tactics to draw givers to give. They also realise that this form of earning money, is the most lucrative of all their other available options. Ernest even called it a talent, gift, equating it to having a musical ability.

"No matter how difficult life can get, if you are musician, you will always have to play more music to survive. My line of work does not only appeal to the religious, the rich or the poor, I get donations even from drunkards. All I need is your attention, to turn and look at me. It does not need to be a dour exchange. Sometimes I sing funeral songs which are emotional, maybe it's a happy song (and here he breaks off into song) '*kupa kune mufaro*' – 'oh to give with a joyous heart', or 'I've understood your word Lord, I want to be with you'. These are different to the one 'young maidens with a (biblical) talent' which ends 'have you resolved to deny your relative?' Yes I do use different tactics especially when I am unsuccessful. There are times when it not only becomes taxing to the body, walking around, but it also starts to hurt in my heart. There are times I just say what is in my heart. I tell people that there are many ways to survive, some people steal, some are entrepreneurs, but I am just asking for your help, any help no matter how small. That small amount combined with other small amounts becomes a big amount and enough to pay school fees for my children. When times are hard and I don't get anything, I perform in a way that makes my audience question themselves. When even my best performances and most heart-

wrenching sermons don't work, I have to face myself and realise maybe the town folk do not like me anymore, or they are used to me and I have to change towns. So I pack up and go to another town. Religion is just a strategy we found that works for us and is a successful means to evoke sympathy but we know that it may not be real. Many of those who sing religious songs or preach biblical sermons may not even be religious themselves or attend church. Others do attend church, pay tithes and contribute to the pastor's upkeep; others who do not go to church end up with a surplus; they do drink, and smoke what they like with the same money we receive from donors. We realise that the mercy we evoke from donors comes from a moral place in people and we exploit that." (Ernest Beitbridge Dec 2013)

The last method of begging is when the beggars ply their trade as blind beggars only. There are towns and places where blind beggars are self-sufficient.

"We don't really like having to use assistants all the time. I can safely say that within Zimbabwe as a whole, we don't really need assistants, can speak the language and can get around the terrain. All the people can understand me and I can even speak *Ndebele* in Matabeleland. (Ernest Beitbridge Dec 2013)

In some very small towns I met some beggars who were operating alone. Most were in their hometowns at the town centres or in transit to bigger towns. The one beggar was there with his infant son as his guide. The old man was having difficulty restraining the lad. The young boy was obviously too young to maintain the concentration levels for long periods of time. He often wandered off and wanted to play, leaving the old man alone. I also encountered many child beggars, in the cities and smaller towns. Some claimed they were accompanying a parent who had some inability or begged as a group of young boys. The one boy told what seemed to be a well rehearsed story that he said he had been told by his mother. It included money required for transport to go to the capital city to collect a prosthetic leg for his mother.

His father had abandoned them his mother had told him. In each instance the parent/guardian was always out of eyeshot. The one day I “caught” the parent who was a teenage girl, packing their collection, including food into a satchel. When I confronted her on how she could be the parent of over 4 young boys, she just smiled and quickly walked away. Her appearance was not beggarly.

In terms of adequate daily financial returns from collections it was difficult to determine what constituted a lucrative - “good day” begging. Ernest said R50, his partner said R30, the ladies were divided between R30 and R200. Lunga Goodman Nono said R200. What was clear though is that the beggars never set out to raise any certain amount or any particular type of help. It is an industry that does not set specific targets but relies on what is received.

“Givers give what they can and we appreciate anything. People ask us all the time to be specific when we “kumbira rubatsiro” – ask for help, what it is exactly that we want? I respond food, or clothing, or money. They say name your price?’ I respond any amount, but they insist that I name a figure. So eventually I say R50! I have had many who have laughed at me, at why I ask for such a lowly figure, when I could ask for more. They usually go ahead and give me R200 for example, or more! As beggars, we don’t look forward to miracles- to one day receive this huge wealth or a string of good fortune. On other days, which we perceive as perfect: The day is month end, the weather is fine, there are crowds at the malls and everywhere- we don’t receive anything. This happens to all of us, and on the same day I wonder how I could not have received anything, all my fellow beggars also report not receiving anything. We have learnt that this is our life. I have been taught that God is the one who leads one’s life.” (Ernest’s partner, Beitbridge, July 2013)

I understood what she was explaining to me in the social theme of informal employment, in that she would go out every day and just pitch her claim to being a discarded member to society. I also felt she had resigned herself to her station in life. She could not affect the

outcome of any day, no matter how or where she begged, so therefore a “good day” was non-existent.

Blind beggars, as explained throughout this essay run on a pseudo business model for their profession except for the inability to project daily returns. The model has changed over the years to adapt to the changing political and prevailing socio-economic conditions but maintains some fundamental traits. This demonstrates the blind beggars are also capable of running other ventures given the opportunity. The market table system observed in Beitbridge-

“The arrangement we have about the tuck-shop is we have assistants and we share. The table belongs to the blind people. Per table there can be three or four blind people with items 75 different things. We share at 25 items per blind person and the assistant gets a share from the 25 items Total tables are 9. Those who wanted the tables were 29. We start over every year. 27 people with 9 tables. We choose popular items that can change at any time. In times of hunger we even sell mealie meal, but not in good times. We find assistants just like we are talking now. We strike conversation and begin to form a relationship. I will probably then ask him if he can help out at my stand at the market and negotiations on item sharing start from there. If he wants to he will, if not he won't, but I will already have established his suitability through prior conversation. There is an added advantage that we don't pay council levies for our tables. I don't like staying at the market because I am aware people find me repulsive. Many people won't even greet me just to avoid me. There are times when I too have to be rude because of the stigmas I suffer from some people. I have had to enlighten many people who thought that blindness was contagious. Others think we have terrible tempers because we have assistants. They think the assistant is there to restrain me. People think that if I get hold of them I will not let go and have fantasies or nightmares about me. Other people think that the assistant is my controller. So we also get the assistant as a mediator between the ordinary people and us. Even when we beg, people prefer to

face an able bodied person rather than me. My assistant is usually a capable person. We have asked our market to be separated from the ordinary market contrary to whatever the councillors tried to advise us that we are all human and that we should not create divisions. However the reality is, our capacities are very different compared to the sighted competitors. Black customers like to go to market stalls that are well stocked with a large variety of goods, and we would suffer with the few items we have. Because of this we asked to have a separate market from everyone else, until we too can order more stock and can compete with the sighted vendors. It is a temporary market where we aim to step up. It is poverty that separates us from the rest of people, we cannot compare our resources. That's why you see some people have baskets or dishes (mobile vendors) rather than tables because they do not have enough to put on tables. We have maybe 3 years in business here, before that individuals just used to buy stock and sell it all and not re-capitalise the business, but use the profit. Now we have to work it out professionally. This has come with the difficulties of the changing times and the fewer earnings we are getting now. We spend more hours begging and are receiving much less, so therefore the business is our safety net that may increase our earnings. I invest my earnings in stock to increase the value of my money. Some people come to buy from my market instead of giving me a donation.”(Ernest Beitbridge, August 2013)

“I know a case of someone who got a donation of stock instead of money. The donor finally opened a shop for this lady at her home and she does not have to beg anymore.” (Maria Beitbridge, August 2013)

The assistants are not all bad or untrustworthy and are good for something.

“We take assistants where we need assistance only, like among traffic or in busy places. It also helps to know the gender of whoever you are asking for help, not to ask a lady for help and address her as a man. We wouldn't be able to negotiate among the cars. We always need assistants.” (Old man, Auckland Park Dec 2013)

What we really need the assistants for, is to negotiate in areas where we cannot, for example in heavy traffic. I need to know where to stand and not get in the way of moving vehicles. Even when motorcycles move among the traffic I have to stand out of the way, when the traffic light changes and so on. When I am in the border, some of the trucks are left hand drive, and I have to know if I am begging on the side where the driver or if someone is in the truck. Sometimes when we are waiting for travellers, we cannot tell if the queues have formed or which direction they are going.” (Ernest Beitbridge Dec 2013)

The blind beggars have networks, where they know each other and have contact mobile telephone numbers. Many know each other from childhood as they have attended some of the educational institutions together. Others have met through their profession. One is able to move from one town and set up in the next town quite easily through these networks.

“If I want to travel, I travel for free among cities when all other passengers have to pay. There are good bus/taxi conductors and passengers. There are also very stubborn conductors who tend to be overzealous in performing their duties and passengers who also do not offer up their chairs. Some conductors offer us seats in the aisle on buckets or pieces of luggage, some passengers offer their seats they have paid for and stand in the aisle for long distances. When I meet uncooperative conductors, I usually beat the bus with my metal staff. This gets me into trouble and I have ended up in court on charges for destruction to property. But it usually looks bad for the conductor because I am a blind man who can obviously not pay the bus-fare and therefore for the damages or the fine.” (Old man, Auckland Park, December 2013)

Blind beggars are unified through their disability and their means of earning a living and sharing of information wherever possible. In group interviews, many professed their unity in arranging begging route rosters, accommodation, sharing assistants and information, financial assistance given the circumstances. Many of them have been in the same system for a long time. Although when together they may share assistants, they each are responsible for getting

themselves an assistant. At the market place where there are more beggars than assistants, sometimes the blind ladies have to go and bath alone in a group with no sighted assistant to look out for them.

“In an assistant I look for someone who is poor like me. Some sighted people get stranded at this market and they approach us for help. We learn about their lives and we evaluate if we can work with them. Some we immediately see that we cannot. We train them to work with us, and some understand what we do and have natural talent at getting donations. Some junior assistants who have little experience surpass more senior assistants at begging and are highly commended. By the time we allow one to hold the cup we have assessed that we can work with you. I spent almost 5 years with one assistant. We used to travel everywhere together. When it was time for us to go home, we would start at my home first and drop of groceries and money. We would then proceed to his home with groceries and money, before we would come back to our begging posts together. If he decided to spend more time at home, I would stay at my home for some days and he would stay at his. He would then come and collect me from my home and I would go and spend time at his home. We would spend a lot of time together and get close even with each other’s families such that everyone knew what our arrangement was. His relatives would then be able to know when something was amiss. Sometimes I get someone from my own homestead, it could be an elder child or my brother’s. But adolescent and not children. We do not like using our own children because then people made fun of us and our children that we were constantly ‘had them by the shoulders’ and that they were not getting educated. Some men ask for our assistants if they are women (for sexual purposes) in return for more money. They ask for them, ‘for a little time only’. They ask if it is your wife or daughter, and are usually not interested if the assistant is a wife. Sometimes they say the money is a distance away and want the female assistant to accompany them to fetch it; when they return the women tell us stories that they have been proposed. This is very common and regular but we refuse, because we are afraid of diseases. I

realise that many other married women are doing this and pretending to be selling doilies while participating in sex work.” Douglas Beitbridge August 2013)

Contrary to appearance it is the beggars who direct the assistants and not the other way round. As mentioned in the introduction, the compelling infrastructure is with the beggar and that it is difficult to raise the money that beggars are able to through mainstream employment in contemporary times for many youth. Many of the assistants who are not relatives take on the role as an opportunity during a tough life situation, but move on when other opportunities arise. The networks beggars maintain are also important in the control of assistants

“WE are in charge in that relationship, and the way we are close (as beggars) to each other, if I spread the word that an assistant is unreliable, he may never get work again. Sometimes when we work, we suspect issues like the amounts we receive. The problems arise when it is paper money. A giver will give R100 which does not ring in the cup or bowl and the assistant will say it is R10. Our instructed procedure is the assistant must thank the giver audibly, this way I know we have been given something. The assistant is also supposed to hand over the money as soon as possible. We usually catch them when they steal because they do not realise givers who give paper money hold themselves and the deed in higher esteem than those who give coins. They usually will want some recognition for it. The giver will wait to see where the money goes. So for example at the traffic light, when it changes to green and cars have to move on, the assistant sometimes continues to lead me to other givers without handing over the initial donation. The giver may go and park his car after the traffic light and come back on foot. He will ask if I have received the paper money- and if I have their will be no problem. If not there will be trouble, and what happens is our relationship with the assistant ends right there at the traffic light. All the money we will have raised since morning together immediately is mine alone. I phone my fellow beggars and tell them that I have uncoupled with my ‘horse’ – (in a reference to a horse and trailer like heavy haulage trucks) and I need them to come and collect me. I will always find someone with a reliable

assistant to come and collect me, because what will have happened to me can happen to them too. This why we never beg alone. If we have problems with the assistant we can rely on each other. Paper money has great temptation among assistants especially in denominations. Sometimes even when I separate the money among my pockets so I remember which is which, at the end of the day, I do forget. I can no longer remember which is US\$1 and which is US\$10; so when I want to pay him his commission, he may take the \$10 and leave me with the dollar. We never trust completely and don't rely on anybody, we always have to verify everything." (Old man, Auckland Park, December 2013)

Douglas envied sighted people and felt that people with eyesight are more unified. The old man I met in Auckland Park had the same sentiments because he felt we could do more for each other, or needed each other more.

"In my experience with assistants, I find that sighted people look after each other. If you look at the bus rank, there is a tout who gets paid for just calling out destinations and calling people to board the bus. Another is just writing tickets for passengers and another is loading the bags. When the bus has a puncture you seek out the man who fixes tyres, but in all this you look out for each other. There are casual assistants even our own sighted children who used to run away from looking out for us to go and sweep the inside and wash the outside of buses for money. We may have a strong solidarity among us but we cannot help each other out like this, for life building projects or in crucial financial matters. All we can offer each other is solace, and a place to sleep so we can defend each other against sighted people." (Old man, Auckland Park, August 2013).

Observations and Recommendations

Observations

From the partnership between the blind beggars and the assistant the definition of disability becomes blurred as it stretches to include the disability of the able bodied to participate in the modern economy. Both the blind beggar and his/her assistant share the same marginalisation from a special hierarchal class that is the exception in contemporary times- on the interstices of classification. “Any individual can be “regarded as” disabled provided they have been “regarded by” others as such” (Pepper K. Mueller et al:162)³⁵. The definition of disability has advanced to include a structural angle. The partnership exposes an intertwinement between the physical and structural disability that affect daily life and social environment. The authors comment how Marks (1999:118) states that disability is socially produced and reproduced. Resultant impediments create physical and attitudinal barriers. Blind and poor young people experience prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination, and stigma.

Begging is a hard way to survive and is very unpredictable. Many who practice this profession have been doing it for a long time because of the miniscule amounts of financial return from the actual practice. The little amounts keep them in the cycle of poverty that guarantees survival but not prosperity. Many see this way of survival as bleak and without a future. Their plea for help although immediate is for more long term sustainable assistance. Their participation in investment projects and earning for their homes is evidence of this. State and international institutional mechanisms are now more aimed at epidemiological and public health support. There are fewer institutions involved in the vocational assistance of post rehabilitated blind people. There are however private corporations which have adopted policies to employ blind people, however not all blind people are destined for successful

³⁵ Mueller KP, Houser & Riddle MD, (2010) “Regarding Disability: Perceptions of Protection Under the Americans with Disabilities Act” From “Disability as a Fluid State” edited by Sharon Barnartt, Research in Social Science and Disability Vol 5, Emerald Group Publishing Ltd.

careers in mainstream employment. This is evidenced by the presence of blind beggars on the streets which demonstrates the fact that many are unable to sustain themselves. Many of these corporations are in developed countries.

The blind beggars offer no physical threat to anyone and legislation labelling them as vagabonds and loitering should be answered by concrete social welfare interventions to sustain them and keep them off the streets. Indeed individual attitudes and perceptions are being reinforced within social structures making institutional discrimination flourish. Legislation such as by laws criminalize the exhibition of poverty and reduces the urgency to deal with the outward manifestation of poverty effectively.

Many of developing states health and rehabilitation policies are determined by the international donors who fund most of the projects. Technological equipment and resources are still very limited in developing countries to satisfy the needs of their disabled. Talented children from disadvantaged families are unable to access these resources when available and proceed with their education because of financial constraints. Many eventually end up on the streets. The majority of African blind people are dependent on charities and social services. In most cases charities and social services are also the first casualties of any austerity measures. In contemporary times blind people with and without professional skills find themselves on the streets begging to survive. Blind people have been involved in IT since the 1970's and there has been strong support in technology for voice recognition in applications. They also work in call centres across South Africa. Traditionally they have also worked as receptionists. Visually impaired people can do anything provided society or corporates remove barriers and provide assistive devices. In Zimbabwe there are some lawyers, social workers, teachers, lecturers, CEO's and a Special Senator Nyamayabo Mashavakure in the Zimbabwe Upper House of parliament representing people living with disabilities. He has worked as a Shona and Bible Knowledge teacher at Copota.

“I want to fight for a level playing field for people living with disabilities in parliament, industry and commerce, government and even in the indigenisation programmes. I will advocate for the inclusion of disability policies in the Education Act to address those issues. Other Acts such as the health Act and others need disability issues factored in. We wanted 10% of the seats in Parliament, but we only got two”.

Mr. Mashavakure has already raised a storm challenging the US\$20 monthly stipends that people living with disabilities receive for Department of Social Welfare.

Assistants too are a disabled class of society. Marginalized by no employment opportunities they couple with blind beggars to alleviate their conditions. Such disability may be temporary or permanent, but experiences of marginalisation are commonplace. Almost 50% of givers I interviewed had experienced some form of marginalization especially with work. Such marginalisation can be enduring, perpetuating disability both physical and structural.

Beggars’ performance enact the ritual of colonial domination. The roles of the giver and the beggar portray a weak subservient recipient and a powerful benevolent colonist. The giver feels they are a better person doing their moral social obligation to fellow human and in turn will make for a better world and a brighter future. The beggar must appear grateful for insufficient donations that are not consistent with his needs. He must also listen to his benefactor and depend on his visions and resources for his development. The benevolence has become widely expected from certain quarters in society and the enactment reinforces the commitment to the creation of a social identity of difference. This performance reinforces the maintenance of social hierarchies.

In respect to beggars, ubuntu has been reduced to a debate than a practice. Most givers I interviewed gave because of moral guilt and few expressed religious fervour. Many gave

because of the hierarchal societal expectation and presumed the beggars to be poor. Some gave because of personal experiences of poverty. One giver even said to me

“So what if he wants to buy booze instead of food- I would too”.

Others were sceptical about beggars because of publicized incidents in the media or personal experiences. One man I met vowed never to give to beggars again after his blind neighbour bought a new fridge that equalled his.

Recommendations

I recommend that international organizations such as the UNWHO must adapt their policies to include those already affected by blindness. The World Health Assembly approved the 2014-2019 Action plan, a road map for Member States. The core action of this plan is at increasing prevention of blindness and does not include those already blind. Blindness is increasingly become privatised with most of the onus lying on the sufferer to source their own development and progression in society.

Education sector revival- it is imperative that the government embarks on reviving the education of the disabled as part of the economic recovery. As mentioned in the fact sheet in the introduction, 90% of blind people live in developing countries and constitute a large population that could provide a resource. Vocational training has seen many able to develop sustainable projects in animal husbandry and in the informal sector as entrepreneurs. Adequate financial resources have to be sourced and made available for the education of the disabled and for the retaining and enticement of qualified staff to teach. Government can assist in setting up boarding schools such as Copota School for the Blind where children will be able to get maximum benefit under a conducive environment. It is important for

government to re-engage with their western development partners or develop new eastern ones. The corporate world and relevant international development agencies in education must also be brought on board to complement their own efforts. Government needs to task a particular ministry to care for the needs of the disabled.

“The government should address the issues affecting blind people and other disabled people. We cannot have people going to the Ministry of Social welfare every time to be given letters so they can access health services” (Susan Mhashu Harare Dec 2013)

I think blind people do not need hand-outs, they need lifelong skills. Alternatively beggars can be rehabilitated in centres where they can embark on self-help activities. They have also been known to work in reflexology and massage therapy in Singapore. There is a difference between a disability and impairment. If one has no eyes they are visually impaired and gets disabled when society puts barriers in such a person’s way. An example in Zimbabwe is one of the best ranked cricket commentators, Dean du Plessis. He is a part time radio sports host, runs sports bulletins and writes for a newspaper column with a voice enabled mobile phone. Du Plessis gauges the on field action with his ears: a bowlers grunt as he reaches the crease, the drag of feet across the pitch, or the crack of a bat slamming into a ball.

Governments must lead public perception of the marginalised like blind people, especially when they have to resort to begging to make a living. Social welfare programmes need to be prioritised for the disadvantaged and legislation amended to decriminalize them when they search for survival. With the prevailing employment market many youth are also being marginalized and are being regarded as disabled because of poverty. More youth centred programmes need to be developed to increase their participation in long term government policies of poverty alleviation. Empowerment and indigenisation programmes need to be targeting youth. Other recommendations are infrastructural and architectural designs to

buildings and roads that should assist the blind people to be more independent. Impediments to such independence is a structural example in Zimbabwe where there now exists a multi-currency economic system. The blind are not able to identify the denominations or the currency because of a lack of Braille on the notes or coins.

“There were notes we had in previous eras which had different sizes and a variety of defining marks we could identify the denominations. Some of the currency even had Braille figures on it for us to identify the denominations. These days with the variety of currencies, it has become very difficult for us to identify the money without help.” (Old man, Auckland Park, Dec 2013)

Conclusion

Begging especially in blind people is a natural response to a societal constructs. These constructs will not disappear without concerted efforts to change perceptions and practices. People who beg are not all blind and this points to this problem as very broad and social. More efforts need to be applied to engage with a holistic approach to re-aligning structural practices that affect employment and self-sustenance. Beggars have become international migrants because they too are people and have material and social needs to fulfil. Immediate help needs to be availed to maintaining existing infrastructure for the disabled including post rehabilitation access for successful lives. In developed countries the problem has become disabled people just receiving a social welfare cheque and not developing other facets of their lives due to these attitudes that provide barriers. Regional efforts in planning and equating programmes for the disabled are paramount to alleviating their lowly status and allowing them to contribute to development in human resources. Colonial attitudes of class and racial hierarchy need to be discarded to promote equality with disabled people. Appropriate technology and conducive infrastructural designs to our landscape are mandatory to this

development objective. Governments must apply incentives to engage corporates to assist and expand employment opportunities for disabled citizens.

I feel this ethnographic research is extremely important to highlight a lack of attention from academics and particularly anthropologists to this very visible social occurrence in contemporary southern Africa. There appears to be a deliberate attempt to hide or ignore the effects and on-going policies and practices which have resulted in begging. There has definitely been an increase in the number and types of beggars in the southern African landscape. The lack of attention has been proven by the shortage of geographically relevant research material or detailed ethnographic material for blind beggars and beggars in general. They have appeared as though they have not warranted attention and are also discarded by the academics. Much information available is not geographically relevant, or based on unfounded assumptions, prejudices or suppositions. Few beggars are able to catch headlines in public media and related technology to expose their social conditions. Alas such little literary public exposure has done little to influence public practice and how they are treated. I too have hesitated to do this research to help shed more light on their stories because of social myths and stigmas that influenced my imagination. A closer and much more intensive examination is definitely required of beggars and beggars with disabilities, to establish relationships between class interactions and adapting subjectivities. I look forward to working with any social scientists interested to further efforts in this pioneering work. This will help enlighten society not to stigmatize marginalized classes.

I conclude that begging is a profession and is responsible for educating and sustaining countless households across southern Africa. As a practice that is inspired by social events. Some historical evidence of their sightings in early colonial Africa has resulted in their institutionalization and their low social position. In recent times they have been categorized as vagrants yet they follow particular migratory patterns, very similar to migrant workers, to

sustain themselves. It has been established that interventions such as rehabilitation and acceptance by society as worthy of social support are very much a western influence, and are not yet fully embedded in the African cultural imagination. A collapse in economic systems has had an equal effect on social relations which supported such interventions. In many post-independence states, blind people have been left exposed and resulted in their adapting to begging and the related subjectivity. This subjectivity guides their agency to beg and travel trans-national frontiers to seek a better life for themselves and their families. They use adaptive methods to entice sympathy which are influenced by multiple historically significant interventions in the social life of Africans and other residents. They have been included in the “lumpen proletariat” of contemporary African society, and experience very much the same problems as many able bodied young and old Africans. They cannot get jobs or set up businesses and are having to adapt to traditional (age old) and informal means of survival. Blind beggars, although unemployed, have to practice a craft using the skills they have acquired through some of these western interventions such as religion. They are able to interact and even merge other social misfits and disadvantaged into a common cause for survival. Many Africans suffer the same problems as blind beggars such as unemployment and marginalization but are unable to solicit any material sympathy because they cannot provide infrastructure that appeals for any such social action (such as alms giving). Blind beggars act as a visible sign of a social problem which really does exist for certain classified members of our society. They have little representation and even less recognition from societal structures and are often to fend for themselves in an ever adapting world. Through their practice they are able to accumulate material goods and receive money. Some are able to save and invest in meaningful personal development

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