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What does it mean to be poor? Investigating the qualitative-quantitative divide in Mozambique

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ABSTRACT

Motivated by the siloed nature of much poverty research, as well as the challenge of finding inclusive operational definitions of poverty, this study reflects on the merits of seeking to reconcile economic (quantitative) and anthropological (qualitative) analytical approaches. Drawing on detailed evidence from Mozambique, we highlight fundamental philosophical tensions in poverty research along three main axes: social ontology (what is the form of social reality?); (b) epistemology (what can be known about poverty?); and (c) aetiology (how is poverty produced?). We argue the quantitative tradition is rooted in an atomistic view of the social world, which is allied to an etic epistemology in which causes and effects are treated as analytically separable. Anthropological work in Mozambique is anchored in an emic perspective, where the diverse forms of poverty are revealed through investigation of their generative mechanisms. This provides a view of poverty as a relational process of social marginalization and directs attention to the diversity of lived-experiences, as well as structural factors that limit individuals' agency. In clarifying their distinct philosophical commitments, we contend that a forced empirical marriage of the two approaches may be unhelpful. Instead, we recommend the virtues of each approach are leveraged toward genuine mutual dialogue.

1. Introduction

Poverty reduction continues to be a central objective of policy initiatives in low income countries. A primary mission of the World Bank is to 'reduce extreme poverty to less than 3 percent of the world's population by 2030' (World Bank, 2018). Similarly, Goal 1 of the new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is to 'end poverty in all its forms everywhere' (United Nations, 2015). Despite this widespread commitment to reducing poverty, debates around its proper measurement remain lively. The formulation of the first SDG suggests poverty may take different forms in different contexts; and Target 1.2 of the SDGs calls for a 50 percent reduction in 'poverty in all its dimensions according to national definitions' by 2030, leaving open what metrics are to be used.

In practice, various approaches to investigating poverty are encountered. Monetary approaches have dominated within economics, but such methods are criticized, in part due to their focus on biophysical (material) needs to the exclusion of wider social and subjective components of wellbeing (e.g., Laderchi, Saith, & Stewart, 2003). Multidimensional indexes have grown in popularity, often widening the definition of who is poor to include dimensions such as health, education, housing and security (World Bank, 2018; Alkire & Santos, 2013). A large swathe of mixed methods research in the 'Q-squared' tradition seeks to achieve an enlarged but nonetheless integrated and measurable conceptualization of poverty by combining qualitative and quantitative insights, at times integrating subjective considerations (see Kanbur & Shaffer, 2007; du Toit, 2009; Schaffer, 2013a, 2013b). Alternatively, there are participatory poverty assessments, such as the 'Voices of the Poor' project (Narayan, Patel, & Shafft, 1999; Narayan, Chambers, & Shah, 2000) that was explicitly framed as an attempt to 'humanize' existing quantitative measures.

In this paper we contrast two empirical perspectives on poverty, namely that coming from a quantitative (economic) tradition and that from a qualitative (anthropological) approach. To make the discussion concrete, we focus on the case of Mozambique. Official analysis and discussion of poverty in the country has been dominated by consumption-based metrics (e.g., Arndt et al., 2012), which follow a Cost of Basic Needs methodology. But this view has been challenged by anthropological work which focuses on understandings of poverty coming from peoples' own (emic) experiences of structural oppression, social relations of inclusion

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and exclusion, as well as 'intangible' cultural dispositions, values and norms. Consequently, we ask whether the dominant quantitative view might be reconciled with anthropological findings so as to achieve an integrated, single view of poverty. And, if not, we discuss alternative ways to ensure that all forms of poverty are given adequate attention.

Our interest in Mozambique is twofold. First, Mozambique is a relevant yet complex case. While it registered one of the strongest sustained periods of aggregate economic growth of any country since the early 1990s, consumption-based poverty in Mozambique remains high (INE, 2010, 2015; MEF, 2016). Close to half of all Mozambicans live in households who cannot afford a minimal basket of goods that meets their basic needs – i.e., rapid economic growth has not mapped into especially fast poverty reduction.

A second motivation touches on the personal. Both authors have worked in Mozambique over many years, largely sitting in different disciplinary silos – economics and anthropology. We have observed that responses to the dominance of quantitative narratives around poverty in the country have been either to dismiss this kind of analysis (e.g., as technically problematic or lacking in subjective validity), or to commission qualitative studies in order to place a more 'human face' on existing quantitative perspectives. These moves mirror more general trends whereby qualitative studies are used to nuance or expand, but not fundamentally contest, 'official' quantitative findings. This has been a source of dissatisfaction and has inspired the present reflections.

By way of structure, Section 2 grounds the discussion with a synopsis of the broader Mozambican context. We then review the main insights deriving from the dominant and official quantitative approach to poverty measurement in the country (Section 2.2), which we then juxtapose to findings from a series of longitudinal qualitative ethnographic studies, undertaken in different areas of the country (Section 2.3).

Comparisons of quantitative and qualitative poverty research have often focussed on methodological choices – e.g., respondent selection criteria, sample coverage, level of aggregation, or type of data collected (Kanbur, 2003; Schaffer, 2013a; Randall & Coast, 2015). These are important; nonetheless we contend that differences in perspectives go beyond empirical methods and often reflect divergent philosophical commitments.[1] Previous studies have highlighted philosophical tensions within poverty research (e.g., Dasgupta, 1990; Bevan, 2007; Kanbur & Shaffer, 2007; McGregor, McKay, & Velazco, 2007; Schaffer, 2013b). In Section 3, we draw on these to propose a set of overlapping tensions in three interrelated domains – *ontology* (the presumed form of social reality), *epistemology* (the form of knowledge about poverty) and *aetiology* (how poverty is produced). Tensions in each domain are considered explicitly with reference to the evidence from the Mozambican case. From this, we argue that poverty is seen quite differently under different traditions. In the economic approach applied in Mozambique, poverty is conceived as a definite material outcome (condition), which can be considered separately from its possible causes. In the anthropological tradition, local notions of poverty become visible (*ex post*) through an investigation of causal mechanisms and relations of power.

In Section 4, we reflect on the implications of these tensions. Instead of seeking a single integrated approach to measuring poverty in Mozambique, we recommend that a plurality of approaches is actively nurtured and each is given formal public space to speak *on its own terms*. As such, we support the continued use of a quantitative (e.g., consumption-based) methods – the approach is well-known, nationally and internationally, and has distinct advantages on account of its focus on observable material needs and definitional consistency across space and time. These features underscore the privileged position of economic approaches to poverty measurement. Our call is that this approach is not taken as the *only* useful perspective. Quantitative assessments should be framed (ideally, officially) as just one input into a broader dialogue around the various meanings of poverty in Mozambique and *how* they are evolving.

Before proceeding, it helps to clarify the scope of this paper. We recognize that the conceptual field of well-being spans a multitude of distinct theoretical and philosophical traditions, some of which cannot be easily classified into either quantitative or qualitative camps. As such, our discussion concerning poverty in Mozambique is not comprehensive and focuses on just two main analytical approaches. While these methods are employed extensively beyond Mozambique, they nonetheless represent particular positions within a diverse field and we do not claim they are representative of either 'quantitative' or 'qualitative' poverty research.

Also we do not dismiss the existence of complementarities or overlaps between alternative positions. More specifically, our argument is that where scholars seek to integrate methods to generate a single perspective, there is a risk this ignores fundamental trade-offs at the philosophical level and, in doing so, the philosophical commitments of either one or other tradition tend to dominate. Allowing contributions in different traditions to speak freely and on their own terms thus does not preclude one from arriving at complementary findings, but it does permit important and productive contrasts to emerge.

2. Poverty in Mozambique

2.1. Context

At least until recently, Mozambique was widely considered to be a leading success story in sub-Saharan Africa. Following a devastating and prolonged conflict, which ended in the early 1990s, the country sustained aggregate real rates of economic growth of around seven percent per year up until 2015. A key objective of the government during this period was to attract and sustain foreign capital inflows to fund investment, both in the public and private sectors (via foreign aid and FDI respectively). Economic growth has been accompanied by progress in many social indicators, such as infant mortality and school enrolment. Nonetheless, reflecting its low starting point, the country continues to rank comparatively poorly on many standard development metrics, such as average GDP per capita and the Human Development Index (World Bank, 2017; UNDP, 2017).

Mozambique is a multi-party democracy and the ruling party, Frelimo, has won all five national elections since Independence, sometimes with only narrow margins. In keeping with other Southern African political movements, Frelimo was originally constituted as a Marxist-Leninist formation. Today, market capitalism is widely embraced and many political figures, as well as the political party itself, have extensive business interests. Opposition parties are active and have been able to take several provincial assemblies/municipalities in the central and northern provinces, where they have their strongest following. However, there are no elections at the more local level (e.g., districts), where state representatives are appointed by government. Overall, the Frelimo government maintains hegemony, with extensive control of the state apparatus and the economy (Orre & Rønning, 2017).

Over the last decade, the country's natural resources (coal and natural gas) have dominated much political and economic discourse (Castel-Branco, 2014). Expected revenues from large natural

[1] Different philosophical commitments underlie a number of studies in anthropology and sociology that explicitly reject standard economic methods used to quantify poverty (Hastrup, 1993; Woolcock, 2009), at times considering them to be actively misleading (e.g., Green, 2007; Harriss, 2009).

gas deposits were arguably a main motivation for the build-up of large external commercial loans by the government in 2013–2016, which were not initially disclosed to the public. Suspicion of large-scale corruption in conjunction with these loans has severely undermined a once-trustful relationship with the donor community. The ensuing reduction in access to concessional loans and grants, including donor budget support, has restricted the government's fiscal space over the past few years. Since 2015, the currency has halved in value, as has the rate of GDP growth, prompting concerns that poverty is on the rise (Orre & Rønning, 2017; Hanlon, 2017).

Reflecting the continued scale of development challenges, Mozambique remains a largely agricultural country. Some 70 percent of the population lives in rural areas and practices small-scale agriculture (Jones & Tarp, 2016). While the capital and power-centre, Maputo, is located in the extreme south of the country near South Africa, the most populous and agriculturally-productive provinces, Zambézia and Nampula, are situated between 1500 and 2500 km to the north, with poor transport connections.

Geographical divides are accentuated by differences in historical experiences, political affiliation, ethnolinguistic background and religion (Newitt, 2017). The Southern part of the country is predominantly pro-government, patrilineal, Christian and under the socio-cultural influence of urban Maputo (and South Africa). The Central region is a mix of pro-government and opposition supporters, is patrilineal and largely Christian, but much further out of the reaches of Maputo and (in parts) with strong connections to neighbouring countries (Zimbabwe and Malawi). The northern part of the country is generally pro-opposition, albeit with hubs of government support, is matrilineal and largely Muslim, with (mainly) coastal regions now facing an incipient form of Islamic terrorism that has been linked to deepening frustration with the economic and political environment (Haysom, 2018).

2.2. A quantitative perspective

Throughout the past 25 years, poverty reduction has been a political priority, evidenced by the adoption of various national poverty reduction strategies. As elsewhere, government policies and academic debates around poverty in the country have been dominated by economic approaches to poverty measurement. The main focus has been on progress against an absolute national poverty line, quantified using a Cost of Basic Needs (CBN) methodology. As set out in Ravallion (1998), the CBN approach is grounded in a money-metric notion of utility, which postulates that a given level of welfare (utility) can be expressed in monetary terms. Of itself, money-metric utility says nothing about the particular level of welfare below which an individual is deemed 'poor'. The distinctive feature of the CBN approach is that it anchors this welfare level to the value of expenditure required to meet minimum food and non-food needs, which is intended to constitute a fixed and consistent threshold benchmarked against "normative activity levels appropriate to [economic] participation in society" (Ravallion, 1998: 30).[2]

Within a money-metric utility framework, the value and composition of the consumption bundle required to achieve a given level of welfare is expected to vary over time and space, particularly due to differences in prices. This is generally addressed by using actually-observed information, taken from detailed surveys, about the prices of available goods alongside household expenditure shares on different items. Together, these are used to cost a 'typical' bundle of goods aligned to the chosen basic needs welfare threshold in different locales. As such, while the nominal value of the poverty line may vary, the underlying concept of poverty – namely, deficient purchasing power in relation to a minimal set of goods that ensure biophysical survival – is fixed.

In Mozambique, nationally representative surveys of households have been undertaken in 1996/97, 2002/03, 2008/09 and 2014/15 by the government's statistical agency (*Instituto Nacional de Estatistica*, INE). These included detailed budget modules and constitute the primary data from which a CBN approach and ancillary analyses have been elaborated (e.g., DNEAP, 2010; MEF, 2016). Descriptive statistics derived from these surveys are presented in Table 1 and Fig. 1 below. They indicate that following reductions in the aggregate consumption-based (official) poverty rate from 69 to 53 percent between 1996/97 and 2002/03, the share of population living in poverty has fallen more slowly, reaching 46 percent in 2014/15. As indicated in the top row of the table, this implies that the median household has registered real consumption growth of just 2.1 percent per year since 1996. The same evidence suggests that the depth and severity of poverty almost stagnated over the past decade; and that urban areas have benefitted more from economic growth over the most recent period, evidenced by a large jump in inequality (Gini coefficient).

There are many ways in which household survey consumption data can be analysed. Here we restrict ourselves to a review of some of the specific combinations of characteristics that tend to be associated with being poor or non-poor. In keeping with a generic poverty profile, these can be isolated from a regression of the log. welfare ratio (multiplied by 100), defined as the logarithm of the number of consumption baskets equal in value to the poverty line available to each household member, on a set of household characteristics (e.g., Datt, Simler, Mukherjee, & Dava, 2000; Datt & Jolliffe, 2005). If a household is poor, then the log. number of such consumption baskets is less than zero. Note that the unit of observation here is the household, not the individual; and we use declared consumption rather than income to evaluate poverty. This reflects the challenge, found in many lower income countries, that a large share of economic activity is undertaken outside of formal employment (e.g., in small-scale agriculture). In turn, consumption levels (values) are best measured on a joint household basis.

The explanatory variables used in the regression model are standard. They encompass the characteristics of the head of the household and others members (e.g., ages, genders, education levels of working members etc.). We also include dummy variables for the main forms of income generating activities undertaken by the household. Following Jones and Tarp (2013, 2016) we classify households into four mutually exclusive categories, reflecting their predominant economic activity. These are: (a) households exclusively engaged in smallholder agriculture (the base category, not shown); (b) households that engage in some agriculture but also have non-farm activities (denoted 'ag. and non-farm household'); (c) non-farm household enterprises, who are exclusively engaged in non-farm activities but generally in the informal sector; and (d) households exclusively dependent on wage labour. Last, we include dummy variables for the province of residence and, where relevant, we add a location dummy (rural/urban) and a time trend. The latter captures the average rate of consumption growth not explained by changes in observed characteristics over time.

Results from this exercise are reported in Table 2. Column (1) represents a pooled regression, covering all households surveyed in Mozambique over the four rounds, including location (province) fixed effects and a time trend. The remaining columns represent sub-sample regressions: columns (2) and (3) continue to pool the survey rounds but allow separate estimates for rural and urban

[2] Specifically, the welfare-consistent poverty line is measured as the sum of the costs of: (i) a bundle of food that provides sufficient nutrition to maintain active bodily functioning and normal levels of work (e.g., around 2100 kcal per day for adult males); and (ii) a minimal allowance for non-food consumption, such as shelter and clothes.

Table 1
Metrics of poverty and inequality in Mozambique 1996/97–2014/15 (in percent, unless otherwise indicated).

	1996/97	2002/03	2008/09	2014/15	Growth
No. consumption baskets	0.7	1.0	1.0	1.1	2.1%
Poverty headcount	68.8	52.7	51.5	46.3	−2.2%
Poverty gap	28.7	19.3	19.0	16.7	−3.0%
Squared poverty gap	15.3	9.5	9.7	8.3	−3.4%
Gini (×100)	40.5	41.5	41.7	46.8	0.8%

Notes: 'No. consumption baskets' reports the number of baskets that the median household can purchase, which are equal in value to the Cost of Basic Needs poverty line; the poverty gap and its square are expressed as a proportion of the poverty line; growth is annualized over the full period.
Source: own calculations from household survey microdata.

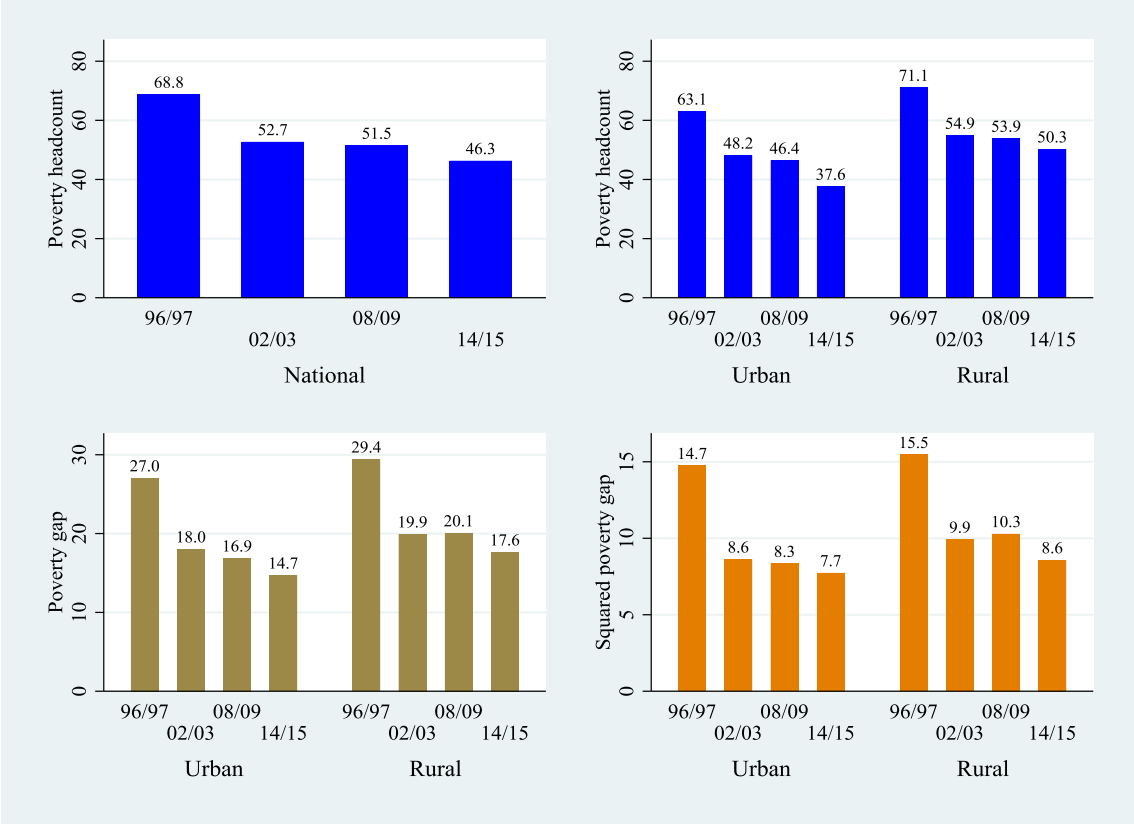

Fig. 1. Metrics of poverty in Mozambique 1996/97–2014/15, by rural and urban locations (in percent).
Source: own calculations from household survey microdata.

locations; and columns (4) to (7) report estimates for each survey separately (across all locations).

This analysis points to a number of generic factors that are robustly associated with lower levels of consumption (higher poverty). First, larger households with more dependents (young children and the old) have lower per capita consumption. In part, this may reflect the technical challenge of how to represent economies of scale within each household, addressed here by making no adjustments for adult equivalence (as per the country's official poverty analysis). Second, we note differential returns to male and female labour, as well as between 'youth' (aged 15–25) and 'adult' (aged 25–65) workers. The base demographic category, not shown, is young men who reside in exclusively agricultural households in the Niassa province. Thus, the positive and significant coefficients on the three reported categories of working age members (male adults, female adults, and young women), indicates young men contribute least to household consumption. Also, with the exception of the latest survey round (column 7), female adults contribute most to per capita consumption on average. Overall, these results show that the demographic structure of households matters for well-being.

Third, returns to education, measured here only for household members who are workers, are generally low and convex – i.e., education makes a substantial difference to consumption but primarily at comparatively high levels (also Jones, Sohnesen, & Trifković, 2018). The survey-specific results also suggest that the shape of returns to education has been shifting over time. In the latest round, for instance, the expected consumption increment associated with completing the first cycle of primary school (5 years of education) relative to no schooling equals just 18%, which is around half of the return obtained in 1996/97.

Fourth, the classification of households by primary activity is systematically related to their poverty status. Households who are not exclusively engaged in agriculture typically have per capita consumption that is at least 13% higher than those dependent on smallholder farming. While access to wage work is generally a consistent indicator of a relatively higher level of household consumption, non-farm household enterprises in fact appear to do

Table 2
Regression results explaining numbers of baskets of real consumption per household per capita.

Location →	National	By location (pooled)		By year			
Survey year →	All	Urban	Rural	1996/97	2002/03	2008/09	2014/15
Column →	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Age of household head	−0.3***	−0.2*	−0.2**	−0.2	−0.1	−0.4**	0.0
	(0.1)	(0.1)	(0.1)	(0.1)	(0.1)	(0.1)	(0.1)
Is household head female?	−8.9***	−9.3***	−9.7***	−11.2***	−10.5**	−6.8**	−12.0***
	(1.2)	(1.7)	(1.5)	(2.4)	(3.3)	(2.4)	(1.3)
Household size	−2.6***	0.1	−8.1***	−18.1***	−7.5***	−0.3	−7.4***
	(0.7)	(0.7)	(1.1)	(2.1)	(2.1)	(0.9)	(0.8)
Adult males (% household)	62.7***	73.1***	60.7***	16.4	47.5***	60.5***	64.8***
	(3.7)	(5.8)	(5.1)	(8.5)	(9.0)	(7.9)	(4.2)
Adult female members (%)	74.6***	90.9***	70.8***	30.6***	64.7***	68.9***	67.3***
	(4.3)	(6.1)	(6.3)	(8.9)	(9.3)	(9.8)	(4.4)
Young female members (%)	54.6***	51.8***	56.6***	49.9***	39.5***	46.1***	38.1***
	(4.8)	(8.0)	(6.6)	(9.7)	(11.3)	(10.3)	(5.4)
Household members <7 years (%)	−7.4***	−11.0***	−3.4***	−5.7***	−7.9***	−7.2***	−8.0***
	(0.8)	(1.1)	(1.0)	(1.4)	(1.7)	(1.6)	(0.7)
Household members 7–14 (%)	−6.9***	−9.6***	−2.1*	−5.5***	−7.1***	−6.8***	−5.1***
	(0.7)	(0.8)	(1.0)	(1.2)	(1.4)	(1.3)	(0.7)
Years of education (workers)	2.1***	4.5***	3.1***	7.1***	−0.5	1.0	0.4
	(0.4)	(0.7)	(0.6)	(1.0)	(1.2)	(1.0)	(0.4)
Years of education (workers) sqrd.	0.6***	0.5***	0.2**	0.3*	0.9***	0.7***	0.6***
	(0.0)	(0.0)	(0.1)	(0.1)	(0.1)	(0.1)	(0.0)
Ag. and non-farm household	19.4***	18.7***	20.6***	18.0***	19.9***	13.3***	22.0***
	(1.5)	(2.3)	(2.0)	(3.2)	(3.5)	(3.5)	(1.5)
Non-farm enterprise household	37.8***	35.1***	46.5***	31.1***	46.5***	39.4***	36.3***
	(1.9)	(2.3)	(4.4)	(5.2)	(4.7)	(4.6)	(1.8)
Household is wage earning	30.4***	27.0***	38.4***	12.8*	35.3***	21.0***	35.5***
	(2.1)	(2.4)	(5.6)	(5.7)	(5.1)	(4.3)	(2.1)
Province: Cabo Delgado	3.1	15.7***	−0.1	14.9**	−27.8***	−5.7	20.9***
	(2.0)	(4.1)	(2.2)	(4.9)	(4.1)	(4.2)	(2.4)
Province: Nampula	−6.8***	5.2	−9.3***	−4.5	−15.1***	−22.4***	5.2**
	(1.8)	(3.1)	(2.1)	(4.3)	(4.2)	(4.1)	(1.9)
Province: Zambézia	−8.0***	−4.8	−9.3***	5.4	−5.6	−38.2***	4.2*
	(1.8)	(3.2)	(2.1)	(4.0)	(4.4)	(4.0)	(2.0)
Province: Tete	−1.6	−13.1***	−0.9	−18.7***	−36.9***	−15.7**	35.5***
	(2.0)	(3.4)	(2.3)	(4.3)	(4.7)	(4.8)	(2.2)
Province: Manica	2.4	12.6***	0.9	26.4***	−9.3	−34.0***	26.8***
	(2.1)	(3.1)	(2.5)	(4.7)	(5.5)	(4.2)	(2.1)
Province: Sofala	−5.3*	14.6***	−12.7***	−34.3***	11.4*	−38.2***	27.3***
	(2.5)	(3.0)	(3.4)	(4.5)	(5.0)	(6.5)	(2.3)
Province: Inhambane	−20.5***	10.6**	−27.6***	−15.4***	−68.6***	−19.9***	14.6***
	(2.3)	(3.5)	(2.8)	(4.4)	(5.1)	(5.4)	(2.4)
Province: Gaza	−2.9	16.0***	−6.3*	20.2***	−9.8*	−40.7***	13.3***
	(2.3)	(3.7)	(2.8)	(4.9)	(4.7)	(5.6)	(2.6)
Province: Maputo	−6.9**	11.3***	−22.8***	8.4	−48.8***	−48.3***	45.4***
	(2.3)	(3.0)	(3.4)	(5.9)	(4.6)	(5.2)	(2.2)
Province: Maputo City	9.9***	18.2***	–	6.1	−26.7***	−18.0***	57.3***
	(2.4)	(2.9)		(7.1)	(5.2)	(5.3)	(2.4)
Rural location (dummy)	19.2***	–	–	13.0***	18.9***	15.1***	28.1***
	(1.2)			(3.3)	(2.7)	(2.5)	(1.3)
Time trend (in years)	1.4***	0.8***	1.5***	–	–	–	–
	(0.1)	(0.1)	(0.1)				
Observations	54,981	26,237	28,744	7645	8192	10,013	29,131
R-squared (adjusted)	0.30	0.41	0.22	0.34	0.32	0.26	0.41

Significance levels: *0.05, **0.1, ***0.01.
Note: the outcome is each household's log. number of consumption baskets that are equal to the poverty line; column (1) pools all surveys; columns (2) and (3) separate by location (rural/urban); columns (4)–(7) refer to individual surveys; baseline category, not shown, refers to young males (aged 15–24) in Niassa province (urban) exclusively engaged in smallholder agriculture; adults are defined as aged 25–64; only selected coefficients shown; robust standard errors are given in parentheses.
Source: own estimates from household survey microdata.

moderately better than wage-dependent households in all locations and periods. This confirms the potential for urban informal activities to generate reasonable economic returns, on average (see also Jones and Tarp, 2015). These results substantiate the official narrative that poverty in Mozambique is broadly associated with: low levels of education; larger numbers of dependent family members; and low returns to economic activities in (rural) agriculture versus (urban) manufacturing and services (DNEAP, 2010; MEF, 2016).

Additionally, some more thought-provoking findings emerge. First, while female headed households tend be to poorer than male-headed households, the conditional difference in consumption is fairly moderate (at 9%) and somewhat lower in urban versus rural areas. Second, as indicated by the coefficients on the provincial location effects, there is a huge variation in average consumption levels both *between* provinces and *within* provinces over time. For example, holding all other covariates fixed, average consumption was more than 45% lower in Maputo province as compared to

in Niassa (the reference province) in both 2002/03 and 2008/09, but was 45% higher in the latest survey round. This variation has sparked some controversy and, at least in part, may reflect quality issues in the consumption data (see the discussion in MEF, 2016). Even so, the extent of this variation – especially in rural areas – remains broadly consistent with low agricultural productivity and a high frequency of both positive and negative shocks, inducing large price variability (Arndt et al., 2012). Put simply, many households remain vulnerable to changes in external conditions; and, in the absence of liquid savings or substantial buffer stocks, their consumption levels vary accordingly.

2.3. A qualitative perspective

Parallel to the quantitative analysis, a series of six qualitative studies on poverty was carried out. These sought to consider development and poverty 'from below', taking the viewpoint of local populations, and were carried out in selected locations covering different social formations in different parts of the country. These include: the northern district of Murrupula in Nampula province, representing a rural social formation (Tvedten, Paulo, & Rosário, 2006; Tvedten, Paulo, & Rosário, 2010); the southern city of Maputo, representing an urban social formation (Paulo, Rosário, & Tvedten, 2007, Paulo, Rosário, & Tvedten, 2011); and the central district of Buzi in Sofala province, finding itself at the urban–rural interface (Rosário, Tvedten, & Paulo, 2008, Picardo, Tvedten, & Paulo, 2012). Each of the initial three studies (2006–2008) were followed up after three years (2009–2011) in order to ascertain changes in poverty and well-being over time – revisiting the same local administrations, communities and households as in the first round. A similar series of qualitative studies on poverty was also carried out in urban (Cuamba) and rural (Majune and Lago) areas in the northern province of Niassa, undertaken over a period of five years from 2011 to 2015 (for a summary see Tvedten, Tuominnen, & Rosário, 2016).

These studies, which we draw on here, explicitly took an anthropological approach to the study of poverty, which meant dispensing with a focus on a particular consumption threshold, below which households are classified as poor. This is not because analysts in this tradition necessarily reject the possibility that deficient consumption is a relevant aspect of poverty. Rather, the focus on a particular level of material welfare to *classify* individuals risks misdirecting attention from structural constraints and human agency/social relations, which the anthropology of poverty tends to view as more crucial (e.g., Green, 2007).

The anthropological approach takes its cue from various versions of a 'practise theory' framework (Bourdieu, 1990; Ortner, 2006; Mosse, 2010; Wacquant, 2013; Moore & Sanders, 2014; Ortner, 2016), in which individuals are viewed as being embedded in political, economic and cultural structures that have a powerful effect upon their actions, while also retaining scope for their own agency.[3] Historical and structural relations are 'deposited' in individual bodies in the form of mental and corporeal schemata of perception and action, while the room for agency rests on peoples' position on a scale of social (dis)advantage and the social relations in which they are engaged. Moreover, social positions – e.g., of 'the poor', 'the rich', 'men', 'women', 'old', 'young', 'employer', 'employee' – are seen as embedded in peoples' own (local) cultural logic that needs to be understood from their own perspective (see Small, Harding, & Lamont, 2010).

Following the above, the primary focus of the qualitative studies concerns how structural constraints become encoded in social relations that reproduce different types of oppression (exploitation), viewed as an absence of genuine opportunities for exerting agency in a specific locale. To perceive the complex ways in which these play out, the 'lived experiences' of social relations of exclusion and inclusion of the most vulnerable are placed in the foreground (Green, 2007; also Tvedten, 2011).

The methodological kernel of the qualitative studies in Mozambique was longitudinal ethnographic fieldwork. All team-members, except one, were Mozambicans and had extensive experience carrying-out anthropological studies in the selected communities. Field work for the particular studies in question lasted between two and three weeks and was undertaken at least twice, with three years between each visit. In line with standard anthropological practice, the fieldwork was initiated under the broad auspices of 'understanding poverty' but without predefined definitions of what precisely constitutes 'poverty' in each setting – i.e., work was based on following leads or 'snowballing' (Hesse-Biber & Burke Johnson, 2015) and using local perceptions of deprivation as the starting point.

Field and participant observation was complemented by a set of group participatory methodologies. These included: histograms (to identify the main processes and events that have led to the current situation of poverty and well-being); community mapping (to map institutions and people considered most powerful/influential by the community); force-field analysis (to capture perceptions about what conditions and relations inhibit or accelerate the type of change favoured by the community); and wealth ranking (to capture the community's own perceptions of different levels and categories of poverty and well-being). This was supplemented by 25 expanded case studies ('immersion') at household level, selected from across the different locally-defined categories of poverty in each study site (see below; Mikkelsen, 2005). Finally, a set of semi-structured interviews with local power-holders and decision-makers was used to gain an understanding of authority structures, as well as the perceptions of elites regarding poverty and development in each area.

Given the richness of the qualitative work and the diversity of lived experiences it revealed, making broad generalizations about 'poverty' is inherently problematic. Even so, four particularly distinctive themes stand out:

Local grammars. The focus groups were asked to define what 'poverty' means to them and how types/levels of well-being are differentiated according in their own vernacular. These 'emic' definitions of poverty are summarized in Table 3, revealing a twofold notion of what it means to be poor. On the one hand, perceptions of deprivation undoubtedly highlight material deficiencies, particularly a lack of what are considered basic assets, such as food, clothing and shelter. But on the other hand, and no less important, poverty also is perceived to reflect the strength and nature of social relationships. These relations are seen as vital to cope with vulnerability (shocks) and to facilitate social mobility. That is, being poor is intimately connected to one's perceived 'place' in a wider society and one's scope for (upward) movement.

As such, the focus group discussions, case studies and observations indicated that the essence of being completely 'destitute' (the lowest category of well-being) is not extreme material need *per se*, but social marginalization and exclusion, which makes people vulnerable, powerless and isolated. Long-term extreme poverty comes with stigmas: the destitute do not have resources (and often not the strength) to contribute to the community, such as in the form of cleaning campaigns or taking part in funerals, and they often come to violate cultural perceptions of a dignified life, which

[3] Ortner (2016) recently argued that while anthropology has been dominated by a focus on 'power, inequality, domination and exploitation as well as the subjective experiences of these dimensions' – largely in line with a practise theory framework – there has been a recent move towards 'anthropologies of the good' with a focus on 'value, morality, well-being, imagination, empathy, care, the gift, hope, time and change' – but there are, for good reason, few examples of this in the anthropology of poverty.

Table 3
Local categories of well-being.

Category//Location	Murrupula	Maputo	Buzi
The Poor			
The destitute poor	opitanha	xiculungo	umbwa
The chronically poor	ohawa	xantumbuluku	mulombo
The transient poor	ohikalano	xangamo	kombo
The Better-Off			
The permanently rich	opwalatha	xantambuluku	muthende
The newly rich	ovela	xigogo	mucupuki
Language	*Macua*	*Shangana*	*Ndau*

Notes: Cells give the local word for each category of household/individual; final row is the language, which in each case is the dominant local language.
Source: Own compilation.

manifests itself in domains such as housing, access to food, child care, among others. In rural Niassa, for instance, two sons from a household categorised as *usuwedwa* ('destitute') were consistently turned down by young women and had not been able to establish their own families in accordance with expectations. And in Maputo, we met a young single mother with three children living in the middle of a large shantytown who told us she had nearly died of starvation before she was saved by Catholic nuns.

Furthermore, among the non-rich, a distinction is frequently made between people who are caught in material poverty and only manage on a day-to-day basis (the 'chronically poor') versus those who have some resources and social relations that make social mobility possible via hard work (the 'transient poor'). For both of these 'poor' categories, even small negative shocks – e.g., in agricultural production, informal sector income, school fees, medical expenses or support from extended family – may set them on a course of downward social mobility. In Murrupula, for example, we encountered a single mother who had lost large parts of her harvest to drought two years in a row. She had struggled hard to put all her three children to school, but with no crops to sell she could no longer pay the bribe (*gasosa*) necessary for her children to move up classes. Her biggest sorrow was that 'they will end up like me'.

Among the better-off, distinctions are made between people who are born 'permanently' rich, and people who have become rich by their own hard work or 'luck'. And everybody considered 'rich' needs to balance their external signs of success carefully (in land, housing, commodities etc.) with concomitant social responsibilities for sharing. Indeed, for all households experiencing improved circumstances, the challenge is to use this for their own investments and upward mobility, rather than for immediate consumption by the household and/or extended family. The social pressure for sharing seems strongest in rural Murrupula and Buzi, but the implications of failure are largest in Maputo where social safety networks appear more limited. An older entrepreneur in Niassa, who had been seen by people in his home village not to have maintained social relations and given sufficient support to the community, experienced the ultimate sign of social marginalisation when hardly anybody took part in his funeral.

The focus groups were also asked about the distribution of people in each category in their community, taking ten households in their immediate neighbourhood as a point of departure. The poorest category, the 'destitute', was usually seen to represent one or two out of ten, the 'chronically' and 'transitory poor' six-eight and the 'rich' categories one or two. Notably, there were similarities across the locations in these rough distributions, despite the fact that quantitative data reveal considerable differences in levels of consumption *and* inequality between rural and urban areas in particular (see Section 2.2). This suggests that poverty and well-being are understood in predominantly relative terms within each local context.

Units of analysis. In the quantitative surveys discussed in Section 2.2, the unit of analysis is the household, which is defined as those people 'eating from the same pot and living under the same roof' (INE, 2008: 26). While this definition does not really emerge from any special theoretical considerations, the demographic characteristics (and other attributes) of each household are essentially treated as exogenous from the point of view of measuring consumption and identifying who is poor.[4] Many qualitative (anthropological) studies also take the household as a basic social and analytical unit. However, these approaches tend to do away with a perception of the household as given or static. Instead, they stress the permeability of households in time and space, where changes occur to adapt to structural constraints, opportunities and shocks (Moore, 1994; O'Laughlin, 2007; Randall & Coast, 2015).

Anthropological studies also move away from an understanding of the household solely as a social unit mobilizing around common *economic* interests and emphasize the household as a locus of competing social interests and obligations, particularly around gender and age. As a consequence of the former, intra-household relations are seen as significantly affected by political, economic and social processes outside the household; and as a consequence of the latter, those processes are understood to affect individual household members in diverse ways. In sum, the relevant anthropological concept of the household is *emic* – it gives emphasis to people who 'eat from the same pot' (in an abstract social sense) but without necessarily living under the same roof or even physically eating together on a regular basis.

In line with this fluid notion of the household, the qualitative studies of poverty highlighted how households went through continuous changes in terms of *de jure* and *de facto* headship, as well as size and composition, during the study period. In Buzi, for example, a common strategy for social mobility/poverty alleviation among rich/better-off households is to split the household into a rural and an urban unit – with the former producing food, the latter earning money, and children continuously shifting locations depending on their age, education and labour requirements. Households in the most destitute category in Murrupula usually do not have this option because of the initial investments it requires. There, many poor older women in particular see their household size increase and themselves overburdened with grandchildren their mothers and fathers cannot take care of – with the latter still considering the children to be part of their household.

In Maputo, better-off households are under strong pressure to maintain relations with rural areas of origin by taking-in distant as well as non-family members, often on a semi-permanent basis. At the same time, many poorer households with minimal dwellings/shacks had members living with other relatives or neighbours while still 'eating from the same pot'. As a result, urban households were larger than the rural households we encountered (also Tvedten, 2018). Also, in all three settings, either *de jure* or *de facto* polygamy is common. The poorest families have no choice but to marry away daughters at a young age to have fewer mouths to feed and acquire bride wealth or '*lobolo*'. For their part, well-off male household heads marry (or relate to) more than one woman because it gives prestige and is a way to maintain vital social relations and hoard opportunities. In Niassa, we met an entrepreneur who had married a total of five wives during a period of 20 years – significantly expanding his extended family network. He used this to diversify his economic interests (commerce, transportation, construction and fishing), primarily employing extended family members with the explicit argument that "they can be trusted"

[4] Joint production of goods by the household can motivate analysis at this level. However, this does not preclude that levels of consumption (and poverty status) can vary across individuals within the household.

(but also, according to one of these relatives, to be able to pay lower wages).

Among the households in rural Murrupula and Buzi, but also in urban Maputo, having large families and many children is considered important – apparently at odds with the negative association between household size and poverty from Section 2.2. Having many children fulfils cultural/religious expectations, and is seen as an investment in the future (agricultural labour, bridewealth, and the dream of being taken care of by children with education and work). In Murrupula and Buzi people have largely given up education as a way out of poverty due to poor quality/relevance for employment and dearth of rural role-models, but in Maputo people see that education can lead to a better future and the use of contraceptives is more accepted and widespread. For the destitute/poor, many children does become a heavy burden but is weighed against the shame of not having children.

Mechanisms of social control. The relational nature of poverty suggests that constellations and practices of power, understood as forces that affect both the perceived and actual room for manoeuvre of households and individuals, are crucial (Mosse, 2010). In the Mozambican case, relations of power and authority are clearly fundamental. In general, it is highly unusual for anybody to directly challenge those in positions of authority – i.e., for the poor to challenge the rich, for the young to challenge the old, for the lay to challenge religious/traditional authorities, or for women to challenge men. Together this helps maintain a *status quo* and limits social mobility in many instances.

By way of example, the national District Development Fund in Niassa was seen as a main source of money for investment in (rural) economic activities (also Orre & Rønning, 2017). Formally, in allocating the funds, priority was to be given to agriculture rather than businesses, women rather than men, and associations rather than individuals. However, we saw that the funds had been systematically co-opted by local *influentes*, including traditional authorities, (male) entrepreneurs and the Frelimo party elite through an intricate system of informal regulations and bribes. Thus, the local elite had effectively hoarded the opportunities for social mobility afforded by these funds (also Tvedten & Picardo, 2019; Tilly, 1998).

Traditional notions of authority are less pronounced in urban Maputo, but are largely substituted by political and economic powers of oppression and marginalization. For instance, the poorest *bairros* remain systematically excluded from municipal goods and services such as clean water or solid waste collection. While this has devastating implications for people's well-being and dignity, local authorities (*bairro* administrators, heads of quarters) remain largely passive. In large part this seems to be because these authorities are loyal members of the ruling political party and, to protect their positions, are quick to close down any signs of protest or local action (also Tvedten & Candiracci, 2018).

Kinship systems are a further mechanism through which social power and economic resources are organized and channelled. But, again, the relative importance of these systems of kinship differ between the rural and urban settings. In matrilineal Murrupula, the mother's extended family matters most, her children 'belong' to her family, and mother's oldest brother remains the most important person for a young person growing up. According to one interlocutor, the really poor are those who do not have a maternal uncle (*tio*) to support them. In Buzi, the patrilineal kinship system has been largely dismantled, except for the tradition of bride wealth (*lobolo*), which ties many women to marriages they would like to get out of and prohibits them from accumulating their own money to become independent of their husbands. In Maputo, urban life has led to a 'commodification' of social relationships (Comaroff & Comaroff, 1997) where kinship has lost much of its content and an increasing number of exchanges are with neighbours, friends and work-related social relationships (including participation in rotating savings clubs, *xitiques*). The poorest usually do not have relations with colleagues or others with economic means, and primarily relate to people in the same situation as themselves, which can perpetuate or even worsen their situation.

Gender norms and positions further act to cement specific relationships and ways of being not least in household provisioning. While men dominate formal employment, women are largely responsible for agriculture. Formal employment may not always yield the highest income (c.f., Section 2.2), but it has the highest status since it fulfils cultural expectations of 'modernity', is predictable in terms of income, and makes it possible for men to control the household income. For most of our interlocutors, the main alternative is the informal economy. Here we find clear gender-based differences in the activities of men (transport, trade in commodities) and women (services, trade in foodstuffs). In Murrupula, socio-cultural and religious constraints inhibit women from taking an active part in informal economic activities – evidenced by the strong dominance of men in informal markets. However, in Maputo and Buzi, where the socio-cultural constraints are less pronounced, women are generally more effective than men in terms of establishing viable/effective social networks through e.g. associations and churches. More economic independence makes it possible for women to control larger parts of the household income, which our focus groups and observations show has clear implications for enhanced household expenditures on children's welfare (also Tvedten, Uate, & Mangueleze, 2019).

The series of qualitative studies also exposed the importance of what may be called spiritual control mechanisms, such as witchcraft (Moore & Sanders, 2001; Geschiere, 2013). Witchcraft has a strong impact on economic position and social relationships particularly in rural areas in Mozambique, whereby individual seen as 'non-productive', such as the elderly, are further marginalised through witchcraft accusations. It is also an effective measure applied against households and individuals who are seen to improve themselves at the expense of others, such as successful farmers who increase their land holdings and use (often minimally paid) local labour. Accusations of witchcraft can halt their opportunities for further expansion. In Murrupula, a family from the neighbouring district of Gurue had established itself and secured land for a larger commercial farm. However, they eventually had to give up due to witchcraft accusations following from the combination of being a foreigner (*estrangeiro*) in the community and producing more than others. These accusations made it impossible to recruit the necessary labour.

Capacity to aspire. The subjectivities or 'inner life' of the poor (Ortner, 2005) is not generally considered within quantitative approaches to poverty measurement, since it is not seen as relevant to the problem of identifying who has deficient consumption.[5] However, the qualitative studies revealed that many of the destitute (and chronically poor) come to exhibit a sense of hopelessness and despair – or what Appadurai (2004) has called the 'capacity to aspire' – having effectively given-up on making more of their lives and invest in their future.

We met destitute people in both rural Murrupula/Buzi and Maputo who resorted to short-term or *ad hoc* actions that seemed to perpetuate or even worsen their situation and who also seemed unable to respond to opportunities emerging through structural changes. In Murrupula, this included people who cut vital relations with people they depended on (such as maternal uncles) in order not to expose themselves to the embarrassment of having failed and people who drank alcohol in Muslim communities even

[5] We recognize that psychologists and behavioural economists are increasingly interested in the 'mindset' associated with poverty, such as the negative affective states it may produce (Haushofer & Fehr, 2014).

though they knew it would mean further marginalisation. In Maputo, with more tangible gaps between the poorest and the better-off, as well as more restricted and commodified social networks, the sense of hopelessness and defeat among the most destitute was particularly evident. Some men remain in peripheral city areas (*bairros*) all day, instead of going to central areas where work may be found; women stop insisting that their children go to school because it is 'no use'; and some young people engage in sexual and other relations that they know may be detrimental to their health or future, but yield short-run advantages (e.g., Groes-Green, 2013).

These findings suggest that processes of social marginalization can become self-reinforcing – i.e., individuals come to know what to expect or is expected from them in their social interactions; they then adapt their life plans to this restrictive ecology, in some cases seeing the particular set of material circumstances and social relations as 'normal' to them. In turn, this can aggravate their own destitution (Wacquant, 2013; Tvedten, 2011). For example, a destitute and socially isolated household in Niassa, consisting of four generations of women, chose to invest an unusual but meagre contribution from a relative in a fence around their reed hut, which had been trespassed by the villagers. The reason given by them was: 'in order not to be ashamed any more'.

3. Contested philosophical positions

The previous section offered two different perspectives on poverty in Mozambique. The quantitative view highlighted command over basic goods as the object of enquiry and identified a variety of factors associated with differences in real consumption between households. The qualitative view emphasized how individuals (and families) are positioned in webs of social relations, conceiving of poverty as a process of social marginalization whereby opportunities for upward mobility are limited by structural oppression and a range of social control mechanisms.

We now reflect on whether these two views are reconcilable, in the sense of whether they might be (usefully) integrated into a single conceptualization of poverty. Certainly, there are various complementary aspects. Both perspectives acknowledge a connection between poverty and material privation; and one might reasonably envisage methodological innovations in quantitative data collection practices to capture some of the additional nuances revealed by the qualitative research. For instance, the distinction between transitory and permanent forms of poverty might be captured by longitudinal data on the same households, allowing one to distinguish between those who remain consumption poor versus those who move in and out of poverty (e.g., Morduch, 2012). One might also contend that the socio-cultural dimensions of poverty highlighted by the qualitative research could be addressed by survey-based measures of 'social capital', which could be included as a relevant domain of deprivation within an explicitly multidimensional approach (e.g., Cleaver, 2005; Alkire & Santos, 2013), or added to the set of factors used to explain variation in consumption power (e.g., Maluccio, Haddad, & May, 2000) and/or poverty durations (e.g., Zhang, Zhou, & Lei, 2017).

Methodological moves to embrace qualitative insights are not new and have deepened our understanding of poverty in many contexts (e.g., Howe & McKay, 2007; Camfield, Crivello, & Woodhead, 2009; Addison, Hulme, & Kanbur, 2009; Camfield & Roelen, 2013). However, and notwithstanding the presence of productive complementarities, even when these moves modify the definition of who is poor, such as by broadening the domains encompassed, such studies often retain an ultimate interest in counting and profiling with reference to a given yardstick of well-being (e.g., Pradhan & Ravallion, 2000; Laderchi et al., 2003; McGregor et al., 2007). In our view, a downside of these kinds of methodological extensions is that they tend to downplay the contrasting philosophical commitments that inform the focus of analysis and the type of knowledge about poverty that is produced. And since philosophical commitments are fundamental, technical or methodological 'fixes' are unlikely to resolve such deeper tensions.

Our argument – that different disciplinary approaches tend to encode contrasting philosophies of science and, therefore, are not easily reconcilable – echoes philosophical tensions identified elsewhere. For instance, Dasgupta (1990) highlights a tension between a focus on humans as *doing* things versus residing in states of *being*; and Ray (2006) contrasts the predominant focus of economics on (predicting) *outcomes* versus the interest of anthropology in the unfolding of *processes* (also McGregor et al., 2007). Drawing on and extending these insights, we suggest there are critical tensions in at least three philosophical domains, each of which relates to particular ways in which 'poverty' is understood. By way of summary, the three domains are described in Table 4; and, in the remainder of this section, we elaborate on tensions in each domain, relating back to the evidence from Mozambique for illustration (Sections 2.2 and 2.3) and adding further examples where relevant.

3.1. Social ontology (what is the form of social reality?)

The first domain concerns social ontology, or the underlying form of the social world.[6] Specifically in relation to poverty, we are interested in the principal features of the social world and the ways in which these provide a framework for viewing/investigating presumed differences in well-being. The ontological stance of mainstream economics is rarely considered explicitly. Nonetheless, in a series of papers, Lawson (2005, 2013) provides a critical sketch of the implicit social ontology of neoclassical economics, within which the Cost of Basic Needs approach can be situated. Here, a salient feature is a sharp focus on the utility-maximizing individual, who constitutes the start and end point of analysis (also Helgesson, 2005). This is important because the approach invokes a particular rationality assumption, namely that individuals seek an optimal allocation of goods (food and non-food) and do so on the basis of *given* preferences and endowments, which are revealed through their choices. In turn, since these observed microeconomic choices are sufficient to identify an individual's poverty status, there is no need for explicit consideration of structures or processes beyond the individual-level. While it is debateable whether such methodological individualism entails an ontological assumption that social structures do not exist (see Hodgson, 2007), the neo-classical view nonetheless aligns with an 'atomistic' and flat social ontology, in which society is viewed first and foremost as comprised of individuals who transact freely amongst each other. A further consequence of these assumptions is that neoclassical economics typically treats the economy as a stable and closed system, which tends to a steady-state in the absence of exogenous shocks.

A large body of social science takes exception to this kind of naturalistic social ontology. While anthropological (qualitative) approaches do not necessarily share a unified ontology, various elements are commonplace. Primary among these is a view of the social world as pre-structured and stratified: "agents are always acting in a world of structural constraints and possibilities that they did not produce" (Bhaskar, 2006: 55; see also Noret, 2019). This means that individuals encounter each other, not in a free-form market space, but in asymmetric social positions that have a strong effect on their scope for agency. From this, it follows that the particular historical, economic and sociocultural processes

[6] For a review of the concept of social ontology see Epstein (2018).

Table 4
Summary of contrasting philosophical positions, by general domain.

Domain	Focus question	"Quantitative"	"Qualitative"
1. Social ontology	In what kind of social world is poverty found?	Atomistic, closed system	Stratified, open system
2. Epistemology	What can be known about poverty?	Inter-subjectively observable	Lived experiences
3. Aetiology	How is poverty (re)produced?	Probabilistic regularities at individual/household levels	Mechanisms of social power at multiple levels

through which such relational structures emerge are of paramount importance. At the same time, these structures are not seen as fixed or independent of human agency – people are involved in the "strategic interpretation and reinterpretation of the cultural meanings that inform the organization of their worlds" (Moore, 1994: 76). Thus, while people "actively produce social reality through their mundane activities of sense-making" (Wacquant, 2013: 277), the social space is typically greater for the non-poor than for the poor.

Differing social ontologies have profound implications for how poverty is studied from the outset. The individualism of the CBN approach defines poverty precisely in terms of realized individual command over economic resources, and this definition remains relevant regardless of the kinds of social relations the individual might maintain or be excluded from. Put crudely, the focus is on *who* is poor not *how* they came to be there. This analytical focus remains present in conventional econometric poverty analyses (e.g., Section 2.2), in which broader social or structural constraints are at best only partially included to the extent they can be proxied by some observable quantities or characteristics (e.g., ethnic or religious group, urban or rural setting). In contrast, and as illustrated for Mozambique by the local vernaculars of poverty as well as the variety of structural constraints that ensnare people in destitution (Section 2.3), an ontological assumption of the anthropological approach is that poverty is intertwined with social relations of inclusion and exclusion, which are varied and local. Moreover, both the complexity of such social relations and their diversity across contexts suggests they often defy meaningful or consistent quantification (especially on an *ex ante* basis).

Two examples underline the distinctive experiences of poverty across Mozambique. In rural Murrupula, we found that many young people wanted to move out of their village and agriculture to 'modern' towns and cities, but very few managed to do so. They had to work in the fields from an early age and became 'socialised' into agriculture; many young girls were married and/or pregnant; families did not want their children to go to school, having lost faith in education as a way out of poverty; and few young people had relations and/or resources to make it possible to start to seek work elsewhere. So most of them stay and continued a life in poverty. In small-town Buzi, socio-cultural constraints (kinship, religion) were less pronounced; sources of employment and income existed and were more varied; the economic value of education was more evident; and social networks with the nearby city of Beira gave more opportunities. Still, while particularly young men were in a position to exploit such opportunities often by moving to Beira, many young women were still constrained by socio-cultural expectations of marrying (often older) local men to secure bride wealth (*lobolo*) for their family. Many of these marriages were polygamous, with the women often ending up in *de facto* female-headed households and ongoing poverty.

3.2. Epistemology (what can be known about poverty?)

In their discussion of philosophical tensions in poverty research, Kanbur and Shaffer (2007) highlight differences in epistemological theory. Broadly, this concerns what can be known about poverty and, particularly, what is taken as admissible data. As the authors argue, conventional economic approaches (as per the CBN) are rooted in an empiricist tradition where the validity of data depends on intersubjective observability, which in turn directs attention to 'hard' data, such as that concerning external/physical characteristics (e.g., quantities of food consumed) that can be directly compared across time and space. This approach reflects an underlying etic epistemology, wherein the categories of analytical interest are defined (by third-party observers), without recourse to the specific meanings or values of those being observed. Of course, this has its merits. As we demonstrated in Section 2.2, the CBN approach allows the magnitude of poverty (*qua* deficient consumption) to be compared on a like-for-like basis across time and space, (in principle) yielding meaningful statistics that can be used to track progress (e.g., under the SDGs).

In contrast, the anthropological approach is aligned to a hermeneutical tradition in which intersubjective meanings, including beliefs and values, are of fundamental importance. This position is emic, prioritizing the lived experiences and perceptions of the poor, not pre-given or universal categories. The contrast between emic and etic views of poverty is hardly new, but it is important because the emic impetus is explicitly *not* to flatten and distil lived-experiences into abstract quantities (e.g., the percent poor). Rather, it remains intentionally open to the complex, uncertain, and inherently asymmetric conditions under which social and economic processes unfold. Thus, rather than seeking to achieve a representative or sufficiently large sample, the emic drive is toward 'thick description' (Geertz, 1973) or a rich understanding of worldviews, situated in their particular contexts, that in turn provides a basis for individual agency.

The relative and local conceptualization of poverty in the qualitative tradition was highlighted by the local grammars of poverty (Section 3.3), which indicated substantive variations in peoples' broad categorisations, perceptions and experiences of what poverty means. Here, differences were most obvious between more rural (Murrupula and Buzi) and urban (Maputo) areas, reflecting differences in the relative importance of money. In Maputo, a commodification of social relations connects the level of poverty and well-being more explicitly to income compared to both Murrupula and Buzi, where social relations with the extended family, neighbours and the community are considered generally more essential (see Table 3). Also, likely reflecting the more deprived context in general, having a tin roof and a bicycle were taken as signs of wealth in Murrupula and Buzi. But in a shantytown context of Maputo, the capital city, wealth was associated with large brick houses and cars, as many people are constantly and visibly reminded of the affluence found in the formal/rich parts of the city (also Bertelsen, Roque, & Tvedten, 2014).

3.3. Aetiology (how is poverty produced?)

The third domain, which relates closely to both the first and second, concerns the kinds of explanations given for poverty – i.e., the form of answers to the question: how is poverty (re)produced? Both the atomistic social ontology and etic epistemology underlying the quantitative tradition find common ground with

variants of a notion of causation as probabilistic regularity (see also Thygesen, Andersen, & Andersen, 2005; Shaffer, 2015).[7] Admittedly, poverty is strictly defined as an outcome under the Cost of Basic Needs approach, leaving its underlying causes open to separate analysis. Nonetheless, the very specification of poverty as an observable effect is itself important since it allows the analyst to pursue an intersubjectively-verifiable 'count' of the poor, without needing to explicitly consider determining factors.[8] The econometric results of Table 2, go a step further and highlight variables that are systematically associated with differences in household consumption (poverty). While this might be treated as a descriptive exercise, regression models of this sort also can be theoretically motivated as (reduced-form) representations of household production or expenditure functions (e.g., Michael, 1975), in which poverty is accounted for in terms of deficient inputs (e.g., low human or physical capital) that in turn may be traced back to external shocks or exogenously-given conditions. As such, the underlying explanations for poverty are thus couched in terms of probabilistic regularities (see also Erola, 2010). And this characterization clarifies a primary goal of the econometric exercise, which is to predict poverty outcomes on the basis of differences in preceding conditions.

The stratified social ontology and emic epistemology underlying the anthropological approach is allied to explanations in terms of mechanisms and capacities (see Bourdieu, 1990; Brady, 2011). This can be seen in our earlier emphasis on structural oppression, opportunity hoarding (c.f., Tilly, 1998) and other exercises of power as central aspects of what it means to be poor (Section 2.3). Furthermore, and perhaps more fundamentally, the anthropological approach does not enforce a clean analytical separation of causes from effects. In contrast to the CBN tradition, the poor only become visible through investigation of the constellation of forces or mechanisms that tend underpin social differences. Thus, causes and effects are not easily disentangled.

A related tension in the domain of aetiology concerns the level at which explanations for poverty are located. Consistent with methodological individualism, the economic approach directs attention to explanations in terms of the behaviour of individuals or households. In emphasising the stratified nature of social reality, the anthropological approach allows for explanations in terms of broader social structures and, particularly, the asymmetric power relations with which they are associated. That is, the mechanisms behind marginalization and oppression, such as social relations of inequality, gender and age, can be seen as embodiments of sociocultural structures and need not be traceable to individual behaviours *per se* (Bourdieu, 1990; Wacquant, 2013).

Lastly, the interplay between structure and agency recognised by the anthropological approach underpinning our own analysis, whereby social structures/relations are both deliberately and unintentionally refashioned through practice, provides distinctive insights on the processes through which changes in poverty can emerge. Under the qualitative perspective, significant social change is often driven by what Miranne et al. (1999) have called 'structural conjunctures' or changes in the structural environment – such as in 'modernisation' of the political economy, climate change or urbanisation. These do not merely produce new social positions and economic opportunities/constraints, but they also provide a stimulus to contest existing positions and relations. In Mozambique we noted these processes in various ways. In rural, matrilineal and Muslim Murrupula, men continue to be vested with the responsibility for provisioning as well as the authority and decision making power within the household – to the extent of men always being given food before his wife(s) and children. However, male dominance is changing. Particularly in Maputo, but also in small-town Buzi, household headship and authority is gradually becoming an issue of employment, income and house/dwelling ownership rather than gender. We followed several households with a living male spouse that came to be seen as female-headed when the latter became the main income provider. There is also a high proportion of female-headed households in the communities in question. While such households in Murrupula/Buzi still tend to be stigmatised and marginalised, many of the female-headed households in Maputo have made a deliberate choice to live alone with their children, thereby achieving greater financial and social autonomy.

4. Implications

The previous section discussed key domains in which social scientists take contrasting positions in the analysis of poverty. We are not arguing that different research traditions should automatically be separated or they have no common ground. Rather more simply, our position is that philosophical commitments are ever-present in poverty research and not easily reconcilable. At the outset, this goes some way to elucidating the challenges that researchers face when moving from a theory of poverty to its practical measurement. Take, for instance, Sen's capability approach (Sen, 2004). As Robeyns (2006) notes, the latter may be considered 'post-disci plinary' in the sense it is of sufficient generality to anchor both quantitative and qualitative implementations. However, while the framework may indeed provide a common theory and language for research, embracing views of poverty as both resource-deficiency and limited agency (oppression), it is also "radically underspecified and every application requires additional specifications ... [so] there are always a number of different ways in which a particular question can be answered using the capability approach." (Robeyns, 2006: 371). In the argument of this paper, the 'specifications' that must be added necessarily invoke specific philosophical commitments, and it is these that go on to yield fundamentally different perspectives on poverty.

Recognition of contrasting positions in the social sciences can also help indicate which empirical methods may have most traction. Different conceptions of social justice (well-being) often vary according to their specification of which human needs or functionings are 'basic' (Doyal & Gough, 1991; Nussbaum, 2006). Some of these are amenable to relatively straightforward operationalization via direct observation. For instance, Nussbaum (2006) lists ten central human functional capabilities which include a number of 'objective' capabilities such as: life, bodily health and bodily integrity. Similarly, various indicators used by the United Nations to monitor progress on the SDGs in relation to hunger, health and education may be verified through hard 'external' data (but for critical discussion see Costanza, Daly, & Fioramonti, 2016).

In contrast, other aspects of well-being, including various capabilities in Nussbaum's list, refer to subjective experiences of the world and one's perceived social position within it, which demand hermeneutic knowledge. A similar distinction between objective-subjective aspects of well-being is evident in Doyal and Gough (1991) emphasis on both physical survival and personal autonomy as basic human needs. The issue here is that where such needs are defined exclusively in objectively-verifiable terms, then empiricist forms of knowledge are likely to be most apposite. But where

[7] See Schaffer (2013b: chapter 5) for a more detailed discussion of alternative notions of causation and how these map to alternative empirical and conceptual types of poverty analysis (e.g., econometrics versus mechanism-based).

[8] The rise of experimental and quasi-experimental methods within (development) economics is often associated with a specific focus on causality, particularly framed as analyses of the 'effects of causes', and is connected to a theory of causality as manipulation. This moves beyond the most simple regularity theory of causality, but nonetheless maintains a clean separation between so-called causes and effects and predominantly uses probabilistic (statistical) techniques. As such, this may be viewed as a refinement of the probabilistic regularity or robust dependence theory (see Goldthorpe, 2001).

agency and subjectivity come into play, including in the very definition of which needs are basic, then qualitative approaches (and associated philosophical positions) are difficult to avoid. Having said that, 'objective' and 'subjective' aspects of well-being are not always easy to separate. For example, in rural Murrupula, the most important sign of – or proxy for – extreme poverty is not being able to offer visitors a straw mat (*esteira*) to sit on. It reveals a complete lack of economic means, violates the very essence of being a community member, and itself may lead to further marginalization and poverty

What might all this mean for Mozambique's poverty reduction policies and interventions? First, in order to promote greater engagement and debate, explicit and formal space needs to be given to *both* quantitative and qualitative accounts of poverty, including within official analyses. Economic/quantitative analysis remains vital since it highlights progress in consumption-based poverty reduction over time, as well as variations in well-being between different regions/provinces and rural/urban social formations. From this, it is possible to identify social categories or groups that are particularly vulnerable to material poverty and their associated characteristics, which can be used for social policy targeting purposes. Furthermore, this is necessary to alert anthropologists to broad trends in poverty reduction over time and gives a basis for understanding the extent to which tangible aspects of local dynamics and experiences of poverty may be relevant in larger populations.

For economists, engagement with anthropological analysis would alert them to the complexities and 'connectivities' of some of the phenomena they study (e.g., the nature of the household and different types of provisioning), counteract 'wrong imaginings' (for example of an undifferentiated rural peasantry and the impact of sociocultural conditions), and give a voice to the poor through a systematic 'bottom up' perspective and greater decentralisation of knowledge.

The anthropological perspective is also critical because it can uncover underlying bases of oppression and marginalisation, which condition experiences and opportunities for change. Based on our own analysis, these bases are varied and may relate to: the public sector (exclusion of the poor from democratic institutions, petty corruption, unequal access to education, health, physical infrastructure etc.); the private sector (discriminatory terms of employment, low minimum wages, exploitative prices for agricultural products, illegalisation of informal economic activities etc.); communities (marginalisation of the poor by traditional authorities and community based organisations, unequal distribution of agricultural land, evictions in shantytowns etc.); and sociocultural norms (unequal gender relations, witchcraft accusations, discrimination against elders etc.).

Thus, in addition to standard economic policy priorities, the anthropological insights point to a need for development policies that confront counter-productive relations of power and authority. It is beyond the present paper to recommend specific actions here. But, broadly, this might be achieved by supporting greater opportunities for local political and popular voice that challenge oppressive social practices, as well as carefully targeting support to the most marginalised groups who are either unexposed to new structural opportunities or remain in weak positions to respond to them. Furthermore, greater attention must be given to how standard economic policy interventions are themselves reconfigured by elites to their own benefit, rendering them ineffective.

5. Conclusion

Using Mozambique as a focal case, this paper reflected on two different approaches to poverty analysis. Juxtaposing the (economic) Cost of Basic Needs approach with a qualitative (anthropological) approach, we explored whether different insights these approaches provide might be usefully integrated. Our answer was "no". To substantiate this argument we identified three domains in which social scientists take contrasting philosophical positions in the analysis of poverty. Tensions in these domains suggest that different disciplines do not simply see the same thing (i.e., poverty) from different angles; rather, they see quite different things, and that the forms of knowledge they generate are distinct.

Consequently, while research that seeks to yield an integrated understanding of poverty is valuable, we argued that innovations to quantitative methods do not immediately resolve fundamental philosophical tensions. In many cases, 'tweaked' empirical approaches retain a flat (non-stratified) ontology, an etic epistemology and a probabilistic regularity aetiology, which ultimately aims to count and then predict who is poor. Such philosophical commitments also permit an analytical separation to be made between poverty as an outcome and its potential causes. In contrast, the anthropological approach does not serve a particular classificatory function, but rather aims to illuminate oppressive power structures, social relations of exclusion, and give a voice to the marginalized. In doing so, causes and effects are investigated in conjunction, which is often a more *explicitly* political activity that embodies an inherent critical dimension.

We suggested that an implication for the analysis of poverty, relevant for both academics and policymakers, is that cherishing different methodological approaches (voices) is vital precisely because of their diversity and distinct goals. Quantitative approaches provide a description of material conditions and estimates of the distribution of consumption across different aggregates (regions, types of households etc.). This is useful. But such evidence cannot easily shed light on, let alone help contest, the increasingly unequal processes of development taking place in Mozambique. A unique reliance on anthropological studies, however, would miss the broader sweep of changes in material conditions over time and provide little concrete guidance on where policy-makers might start looking to find the poorest groups.

In sum, while quantitative and qualitative approaches overlap somewhat in their recognition of the material aspect to poverty, their understandings of what poverty is and the mechanisms that produce it are distinct. Consequently, a forced marriage of qualitative and quantitative approaches into an integrated analysis, risks losing the inherent diversity of perspectives and types of knowledge that comes from different ways of seeing poverty.

Conflicts of interest

None.

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