

Ontology and Epistemology | Interviews

Doing Political Research

Ontology and Epistemology

- What is your ontology? Is there are social reality independent of observation?
- What is your epistemology? Can we observe 'objective' relationships between social phenomena?
- Are you a positivist, interpretist or realist?
- Should we be able to change our research philosophy depending on the research question being asked?

Jones and Tvedten

- How was poverty understood in the quantitative and qualitative studies?
- Can the two perspectives be successfully integrated? Why, or why not?
- What other methods could be used to understand poverty in Mozambique?

World Development 117 (2019) 153-166



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

World Development





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



Sam Jones a,*, Inge Tvedten

*UNU-WIDER, Mazambique

^b Or. Michelson Institute, Bergen, Norway

ARTICLE INFO

Article Mistory: Accepted 16 January 2019 Available online 28 January 2019

Keywords: Poverty Qualitative Anthropology Quantitative Q-squand Mozambique

ABSTRACT

Motivated by the siliced 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 Motambique, we highlight fundamental philosophical resisions 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) actiology (how is poverty produced?). We argue the quantitative tradition is roorded in an atomistic view of the social words, which is allied to an eric epistemology in which causes and effects are treated as analytically separable. Anthropological work in Mozambique is anchored in an erric perspective, where the diverse forms of poverty are revealed through in usefagation of their generative mechanisms. This provides a view of poverty are neveraled through in usefagation of their generative mechanisms. This provides a view of poverty are as well as structural factors that limit individuals? agency, in charlying their distorte philosophical commitments, we contend that a forced empirical marriage of the two approaches may be unhelipful. Instead, we recommend the virtues of each approach are levened to the order.

© 2019 UNU-WIDER, Published by Elsevier Ltd. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

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 (SDCs) is to 'end poverty in all its forms everywhere' (United Nations, 2015). Despite this wides pread commitment to reducing poverty, debates around its proper measurement remain lively. The formulation of the first SDC suggests poverty may take different forms in different contexts; and Target 1.2 of the SDCs 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 widersocial and subjective components of wellbeing (e.g., Laderchi, Saith, &

Stewart, 2003). Multidimensional indexes have grown in popular-

In this paper we contrast two empirical perspectives on poverty, namely that oming 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

0805-750X/o 2019 UNU-WIDER, Published by Elsevier Ltd.

This is an open access article under the CCBY-NC-ND license (http://cmativecommons.org/licenses/by-no-nd/4.0/),

ity, 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 powerty assessments, such as the Voices of the Poor' project (Narayan, Patel, & Shafft, 1999; Narayan, Chambers, & Shaft, 2000) that was explicitly framed as an attempt to humanize' existing quantitative measures.

^{*} Corresponding author.

E-mail addresse: jones@widec.unu.edu (S. Jones), inge.tve.dae.n@cmi.no (L. Tvedten).

ps://doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2019.01.005

Designing an Interview Study

- Choose a research question to investigate a political process or phenomenon and design an interview-based study to answer it.
- Who will you interview?
- Where will the interviews take place?
- How will you conduct the interviews? What questions will you ask?
- How might your positionality affect the answers to your questions?
- How will you analyse the data?

Pearlman

- Who were the interviewees? How were they chosen? How might the method of recruitment have affected the results?
- What effect might the identity of the interviewer have had on the results? Might different interviewers have received different answers to their questions?
- What ontology and epistemology underpinned Pearlman's research project?
- How reliable are the results? How would you improve the study? What other methods could have been used?

Narratives of Fear in Syria

Wendy Pearlman

Scholaship on Syria has traditionally been limited by measurbens' difficulty in accessing the reflections of ordinary citizens due to their educance to speak about politics. The 2011 revito opened exciding opportunities by producing an outpointing of new forms of sef-equivestion, as well as encouraging millions to reliable stories for the first time. I explore what we can learn from greater attention to studded, based on thick descriptive analysis of original interviews with 200 Syrian refuges. I find that individuals' narratives coalesce into a collective narrative emphasizing shifts in political feat. Before the uprising, fear was a pillar of the state's occurred authority. Popular demonstrations generated a new experience of fear as a personal barrier to be summounted. As rebellion militarized into was fear became a semi-normalized way of life. Pinally, protracted violence has produced nebulous fears of an uncertain future. Study of these testimonishs aids understanding of Syria and other cases of destabilited authoristarianism by elucidating lived experiences obscured during a repressive pare, providing a fresh window into the construction and evolution of national identity, and demonstrating how the act of narration is an esercice in meaning making within a revolution and itself a revolutionary practice.

March 2015 United Nations report on the war in Syria found that six percent of the population of 22 million had been lilled or injured, some 80 percent lived in poverty, and the majority of children no longer attended school. Satellite images show a country literally "plunged into darkness" with 83 percent of lights gone out, and some 200 cultural heritage sites damaged or destroyed. While the Islamic State (ISIS)'s crimes gain notoriety, the regime of Bashar al-Assad remains responsible for the lion's share of civilian deaths. Escaping atrocities from imposed stavation to indiscriminate barrd

bombs, more than 7.6 million have become internally displaced and 4.1 million externally displaced, as of this writing. While Europe struggles to resettle a fraction of refugees, the resource-strapped counties on Syria's borders buckle under a deluge whose political implications remain undetermined.

Observing these horrors, dignitaries denounce "senseless" tragedy. Seeking to make sense of it, political scientists often turn to general concepts such as authoritarian survival and subtypes of civil war. Theories derived from these and other categories elucidate complex conflict

A list of supplementary materials provided by the author precedes the references section.

Wendy Pearlman is Associate Professor of Political Science at Northwestern University (pearlman@northwestern.edu). She is the author of two books, Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement (Cambridge University Press, 2011) and Occupied Voices: Stories of Everyday Life from the Second Intifada (Nation Books, 2003). The author would like to thank Rang Sweis. Suha Ma'ayeh, Salma al-Shami, Cherin Hamdoche, the Awida family, Ghadban family, Sarhan family, Darwazah family, Masalma family, Alobid family, and Radio Shebab team for their invaluable help during fieldwork. She is very grateful for funding support for this research from the Program on Middle East Political Science and several programs at Northwestern University, namely the Equality Development and Globalization Studies Program and the Keyman Modern Turkish Studies Program, both at the Buffett Institute for Global Studies, as well as the Crown Family Fund for Middle Eastern Studies and the Alice Kaplan Institute for the Humanities. She gratefully acknowledges feedback on drafts of this work from Salma al-Shami, Shama Silverstein, Mandy Terc, Ellen Lust, Marc Lynch, Sarah Parkinson, Laia Balcells, Christian Davenport, and panel members or participants at conferences sponsored by the University of Michigan, International Studies Association, American Historical Association, Middle East Studies Association, Midwest Political Science Association, and Project on Middle East Political Science. For assistance with translating and transcribing interviews, she thanks Lina Abdelasiz, Jamal Abuzant, Maher Al-Haj, Ameer Al-Khudari, Dania Atallah, Nouha Boundaoui, Serene Darwish, Nada Sneige Fuleihan, Mohammed Kadalah, Maroua Sallami, and Zakaria Soudani. Most of all, the author is indebted to the hundreds of Syrians who selflexly welcomed her into their lives, shared their stories, and tirelexly introduced her to others who did the same. Though she does not name them out of concern for their safety and that of their families, she will be forever humbled by their generosity, without which this work would not have been possible.

doi: 10.1017/S1537592715003205 © American Political Science Association 2016

March 2016 | Vol. 14/No. 1 21