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Poverty Research and its Discontents: Review and Discussion of Issues Raised in *Dimensions of Poverty. Measurement, Epistemic Injustices and Social Activism* (Beck, V., H. Hahn, and R. Lepenies eds., Springer, Cham, 2020)

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Edited volumes have low prestige in economics. Fortunately, the anthology *Dimensions of Poverty. Measurement, Epistemic Injustices and Social Activism*, compiled by Valentin Beck, Henning Hahn, and Robert Lepenies (2020), proves that edited volumes can be more than a loose collection of chapters unworthy of becoming journal articles. The editors have produced an important collection of 20 chapters around the conceptualization, understanding, and measurement of poverty, which brings together debates from economics, philosophy, political science, public policy, and sociology. The outcome is more than simply the sum of its parts: there is something to be learned both from individual chapters and, specially, from their cross-fertilization.

The volume is concerned with the conceptualization and measurement of poverty. Yet, this topic is placed within the context of two other important and timely debates (see Figure 1). First, the volume establishes a link between the quality of poverty research and the perspectives that feed into it. A central theme here is epistemic injustice following Fricker (2007): it is argued that Global South perspectives are often undervalued or outright ignored. This is at the detriment of research quality because, in the view proposed, poverty research must carefully consider particular societal contexts. Hence the inclusion of scholars from diverse backgrounds and with society-specific knowledge "is not only a question of fairness (…) but also highly instructive" (Beck *et al.*, 2020, p. 11). Various contributions also emphasize the importance of the views of those who live in poverty themselves, as well as of those who work in policy-making and poverty reduction outside academia. Second, the volume discusses how the way in which academics conceptualize, define, understand, and measure poverty has important implications for the actual lives of people living in poverty. In the words of one contributor, "[c]onceptual issues are not merely abstract and fringe discussions; they have an impact and influence on how reality is perceived, how it is shaped and how it should be changed. Concepts drive actions" (Schweiger, 2020, p. 163).

On the topic of poverty, the anthology brings good and bad news. The bad news first: there will never be a definitive answer to the question of how to conceptualize or measure poverty, and we will never be done researching poverty. There are too many dimensions to poverty, too many normative judgments to be

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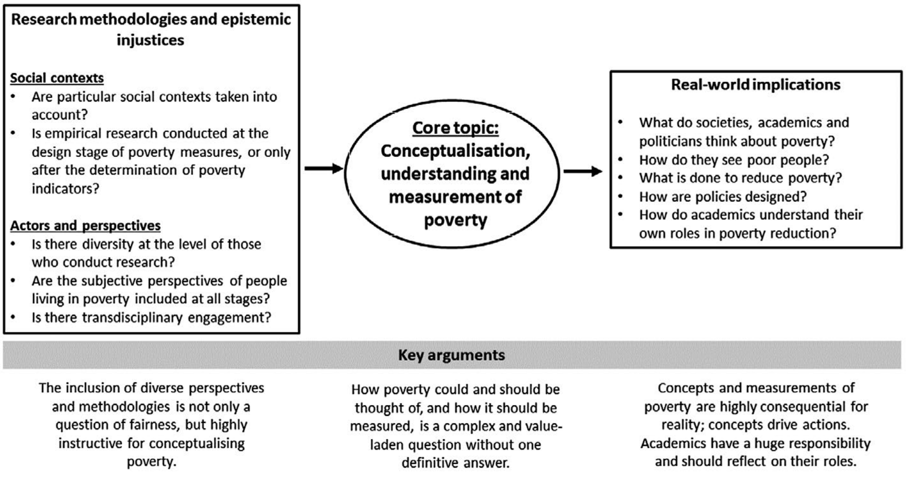

Figure 1. Overview

made, too many different goals to which different measures attend, and all of this in constantly changing social contexts. The good news is that this volume is an excellent contribution to guide the search for useful concepts and to reflect on their manifold implications. We learn that poverty research has both "backward" and "forward linkages", which expose the huge responsibilities of economists involved in poverty research.[1] The picture this volume paints, drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives, is clear: not only should we constantly reflect on how we shape our field in our daily work as academics, but also we must consider our role as academics in society (including in societies others than our own).

In the following, I discuss the volume's three core topics—the conceptualization and measurement of poverty, epistemic injustices, and real-world implications—in light of recent debates and literatures.

1. What Is So Difficult About Conceptualizing and Measuring Poverty?

1.1. *Where Does Poverty Begin?*

After decades of poverty research, one may wonder why debates around the definition and measurement of poverty have not long been settled. The present volume engages with two major issues of continued debate: the distinction between absolute and relative poverty, and the multidimensional measurement of poverty. The contributions and the dialogue among the volume contributors make transparent why many debates are hard to settle: the definition and measurement of poverty is not merely a technical issue. It is complex, especially when considered from different disciplinary perspectives, and definitions and measurements of poverty have manifold implications, many of them moral.

[1]The author, as an economist, is most comfortable discussing these arguments with reference to economics and less so to other disciplines involved in the interdisciplinary anthology.

The commonly used international threshold of absolute poverty is the World Bank's poverty line of currently $1.90 per day. Debates about this threshold are not new. One often-raised critique is that the level is simply too low for anyone to lead a decent life: "[i]t is wholly implausible that poverty can be said to have been surmounted while having resources plainly inadequate for minimal nutrition" (Reddy, 2020, p. 127) or other relevant needs. The chapter by Reddy accuses this poverty line of "obscurantism" because, in his view, it is shaped by methodological or evidential premises that are not made transparent (p. 215). Every poverty measure, he explains, implies difficult value judgments, and it is hard to justify that this judgment should be left to economists alone. With the present World Bank measure, this has been the case; it was based on the poverty lines of a group of low-income countries (Chen and Ravallion, 2001), even though these were not themselves based upon some consensus of what constitutes a sufficient amount of resources to fulfil some agreed-upon minimum living standard.

For rich countries, it is common to use relative instead of absolute poverty measures. Here, too, it is not straightforward to establish where poverty begins. Relative poverty is typically expressed in relation to some mean or median income, making the establishment of relative poverty lines a technical and apparently straightforward exercise. However, this practice has been criticized as all too simple: as Debraj Ray's widely-read textbook on development economics explains, "we must still think of [relative poverty lines] as fulfilling some absolute notion of the ability to function in a society. (…) For example, it would be foolish to define poverty by, say, the percentage of the population earning less than half the average income of society. Such a measure confuses poverty with inequality" (Ray, 1998, p. 250), as it could still be possible that more than half of the population is unable to fulfil their basic needs. As Schweiger (2020) puts it, poverty always describes a situation of "not having *enough*" (p. 165; own emphasis) (reflecting an idea that there is an absolute minimum of something that is needed) and not simply of "having less".

Since recently, the World Bank reports a "societal" poverty measure that is adjusted for the median income level in each country and addresses this concern to some degree. All individuals in absolute poverty automatically fall into the group of the poor because "individuals living in extreme poverty as measured by the [international poverty line] are also suffering from societal poverty" (World Bank, 2018, p. 74). Additionally, the societal poverty measure includes all those who live on less than $1 a day plus half of the value of median consumption per day in this country. In countries where this sum exceeds the absolute threshold of $1.90, its value becomes the societal poverty line. In 2015, the societal poverty line was at $5.80 a day for upper-middle income countries and at $21.20 a day for high-income countries (World Bank, 2018).

Still, this measure does not effectively address the critique that poverty lines must be meaningfully anchored. While it introduces a relative element, its calculation is mechanistic and simply derived from a country's median consumption level, without asking if what people can consume at the resulting level is sufficient for some socially acceptable minimum standard. The chapter by Dotter and Klasen (2020) makes a similar proposal; they develop a multidimensional poverty measure that is relative in that it adapts poverty cut-offs for dimensions such as education and living standards to prevailing standards in a region. This way, their poverty measure "can account for varying needs across countries due to different environments, customs and culture" (p. 227). But the adaptation to local standards still uses median achievements in the reference population, illustrating that the choice of society-specific meaningful anchors would be a very complex task.

While this discussion does not question the use of relative poverty measures *per se*, another concern debated in the anthology is more fundamental. The chapter by Schweiger (2020) expresses the view that poverty in rich countries should be thought of in terms of *absolute*, not relative poverty. Neuhäuser (2010) defined the difference between both as follows: relative poverty describes a situation where a person has not enough to live by the standards of a specific society, whereas in absolute poverty a person has not enough in any society, i.e., by universal standards. Drawing on this distinction, Schweiger argues that the most disadvantaged in rich European societies, such as homeless people or *sans-papiers*, may be better off than absolutely poor people in poor countries, but they are still absolutely poor if "they miss absolutely important goods" (p. 168). For example, he argues that homeless people suffer from such high degrees of vulnerability and invisibility that their basic needs of protection and social recognition cannot be considered satisfied in *any* societal context. Hence they must be considered absolutely poor.

This perspective is interesting for at least two reasons. First, it challenges the latent consensus that absolute poverty does not exist in rich countries. For example, Ferreira and Ravallion (2009, p. 614) state that "[a]bove a GNP per capita of approximately $15,000 [per annum], this extreme kind of poverty essentially vanishes." This consensus has potentially troublesome implications: Schweiger (2020) argues that relative poverty is often understood as "not 'real' poverty or 'no' poverty at all" (p. 164), and Lepenies (2020) shares the impression that "it is often questioned whether the label poverty is adequate at all when talking about relative poverty" (p. 57). Second, it illustrates the need for interdisciplinary perspectives in poverty research. When only considering monetary poverty, the argument might be made that even homeless people have opportunities to obtain enough resources to feed and perhaps shelter themselves. But as soon as poverty is not only considered in strictly economic terms, unfulfilled social or emotional needs can hardly be ignored. While it is certainly true that social-emotional aspects of poverty are increasingly recognized among economists, economists alone are not equipped to study them.

The volume offers yet another radical critique of poverty lines which is, in effect, a critique of the entire field of poverty research. Wolff (2020) argues that there is a paternalistic element in the very definition of a poverty line. A poverty line establishes what is needed for some minimum living standard. In Wolff's view, this implies that people living in poverty should not spend on anything else than the essentials included in this basket. But once it is recognized that dimensions of deprivation have social and subjective elements, the existence of a poverty threshold so-defined may seem paternalistic and even unethical. The paternalistic attitude Wolff identifies is reflected, for example, in behavioral development economics; it has been observed over and again that people living in poverty refuse to prioritize those goods and items that are defined as their basic needs, and rather prefer to spend some of their resources for presumably less essential things. For example, Banerjee and Duflo (2007) report that "the poor" spend less money than expected on food, and more on alcohol, tobacco and festivities (see also Subramanian and Deaton, 1996). In the view of many behavioral development economists, such behaviors conflict with what is recognized as rational behavior, and incentives or nudges have been designed to correct them. In contrast, from a sociological or anthropological view, it is not so difficult to see why "many people put a high priority on what we can understand as their human needs" (Wolff, 2020, p. 29). In other words, people seek to "secure a reasonable social and family life" and to avoid social humiliation or shame, for example when a lower-budget funeral or wedding party would be considered inappropriate. Spending on "non-essentials" can be rational when considering that "the maintenance of cultural identity and social norms of solidarity helps poor people to continue to believe in their own humanity, despite inhuman conditions" (Narayan and Patel, 2000, pp. 4–5).

1.2. *Measures of Multidimensional Poverty*

Much has happened since the seminal contributions by Atkinson (2003) and Bourguignon and Chakravarty (2003) less than 20 years ago, with the multidimensionality of poverty and the need for multidimensional measures hardly contested nowadays. Yet there is much less consensus on how precisely to measure poverty multidimensionally. The contributions in this volume offer a glimpse into this debate.

One elementary point of contention is the usefulness of scalar multidimensional poverty indexes (MPI) that produce, as a final outcome, a single number. The United Nations Development Programme's (UNDP) Human Development Report as well as the World Bank report such MPIs produce single number MPIs. A primary goal of such single number MPIs is to allow international comparisons of poverty headcounts. An alternative is a "dashboard" approach (Ravallion, 2011) where different dimensions of poverty are considered separately. The chapter by Alkire (2020) argues that the broad information platform that MPIs offer through the possibility of disaggregation is valuable for policy-makers, who can fine-tune their policies. In her view, policy-makers can more easily work towards cross-sectoral solutions using counting-based multidimensional measures that visualize how people or groups are poor based on different indicators, and how different dimensions overlap. This is crucial because separate analyses of each dimension easily overlook relevant correlations and accumulated vulnerabilities (Ferreira and Lugo, 2013).

Any MPI faces a number of decisions that look technical, but are charged with moral implications: which dimensions to include, how to measure, and how to aggregate and weigh them? Concerning the choice of dimensions, there is an academic disagreement as to whether it is possible or desirable to elaborate a list of basic capabilities (Nussbaum, 2003) or not (Sen, 2004). This dialogue has been fruitful but is unlikely to be settled for good—let alone by academics. More recently, it has been proposed to include non-academic views into the choice process, including a variety of methods (Kanbur, 2003; Burchi *et al.*, 2020). The chapter by Godinot and Walker (2020) uses a participatory method to study how people living in poverty in different countries characterize poverty. These authors report that the priority dimensions of people living in poverty diverge substantially from academic measures, even multidimensional ones. Specifically, social-relational and emotional dimensions, which are typically not included in existing MPIs, are given high weights by the poor. Burchi *et al.* (2020) show that different approaches prioritize different dimensions; for example, social-relational aspects figure prominently in surveys and participatory methods, but not in constitutions or international agreements.

The chapter by Brando and Fragoso (2020) illustrates how consequential all the different decisions are for the final MPI. They use three common MPIs to study the situation of fictional individuals and find that different indicators highlight or omit different dimensions of these individuals' deprivations, and reach different overall assessments of their living conditions. Contributing to a longer debate about aggregating and weighting (see e.g. Cavapozzi *et al.*, 2015; Rippin, 2017), the chapter by Hassoun *et al.* (2020) asks whether deficits in single dimensions should be allowed to be outweighed by others. They criticize that many measures trade-off life span or life expectancy against other dimensions. This resonates with Fischer (2018), who asks whether multidimensional poverty measures paint too rosy a picture of global poverty in situations where, for example, school enrollment increases while income poverty persists and long-term benefits of increased schooling are unclear.

Overall, the chapters in the volume illustrate many aspects of the broader debate around MPIs, allowing the reader to obtain an impression of the enormous difficulties that come along with the, in principle, convincing project of measuring poverty multidimensionally. The amount of decisions to be made may be seen as an asset: the "flexibility [of an MPI] makes it particularly useful for measurement efforts at the country level where these decisions can fit the purpose of the measure and embody normative judgements regardings what it means to be poor" (Alkire and Foster, 2011, p. 291). At the same time, it is crucial to bear all the implications of this flexibility in mind at all stages, and to understand that there cannot exist one best MPI.

2. Epistemic Injustices

Several contributions to the anthology raise concerns of epistemic injustice. In the view put forward by Dübgen (2020), academic discourses on poverty are characterized by power imbalances and the ignorance, silencing or marginalization of voices from the Global South. Likewise, Chimakonam (2020, p. 98) criticizes that the Global North "controls knowledge production and dissemination virtually in exclusion of perspectives from the Global South" (p. 100). Contrary to claims that economics is a non-hierarchical field where the quality of the argument matters (Rodrik, 2015), Dübgen argues that academic voices are considered more or less trustworthy depending on their gender, race, or class.

2.1. *What Do We Know About Epistemic Injustices in Poverty Research?*

If there are rather few studies about the marginalization of relatively large underrepresented groups in Western countries, such as women and non-white economists, there have been even fewer attempts to understand the marginalization of (non-elite) Global South scholars. Nevertheless, there is enough evidence, including that from personal accounts, to be convinced that epistemic injustices in poverty research are a problem of our times.

Let us first discuss the reception of academic contributions from the Global South. Top (five) publications are deemed so important for the recognition of economists that Heckman and Moktan (2020) speak of the "top five tyranny" (see also Akerlof, 2020). At the same time, publications in these journals have become more competitive; among accepted publications, there is a strong concentration of US- or Canada-based authors (Hamermesh, 2013; Card and DellaVigna, 2013). And, as noted by Colussi (2018), the probability of publishing in a top five journal increases significantly with institutional or personal links with editors, who are themselves located at a few top institutions. When author identity is known, acceptance recommendations by reviewers increase when authors are famous or from top institutions (Tomkins *et al*., 2017). The share of top publications falling into development economics has risen (Card and DellaVigna, 2013; Hamermesh, 2013), but this has mainly been driven by experimental studies by US and European scholars (Monga and Lin, 2015). Taken together, the characteristics of top publications in terms of author affiliation, geography and methodology imply that academic work from the Global South is rarely perceived as top research.

The visibility of Global South scholars, especially African authors, is also rather low in middle- and lower-ranked journals. Relatively few Global South journals are listed in international indices such as the Web of Science ISI (Tijssen, 2007; Mouton, 2010). Obeng-Odoom (2019) reports that over the period 1987 to 2007, only 13 Sub-Saharan African countries produced ISI-indexed research papers. African research output accounted for less than 1 percent of global output from 2003 to 2012 (Blom *et al*., 2016), and is highly concentrated in South Africa (Mngomezulu and Maposa, 2017). A large share of African authors publishes in unlisted local journals, which are largely invisible in terms of international citations (Tijssen *et al*., 2006). In economics, such journals have very low reputation and are usually not read or cited, not even by scholars working on the respective country.

One may argue that these patterns simply reflect lower quality of research produced in the Global South. However there are several reasons why this would be too easy an interpretation. First of all, to assess research quality, journal rankings and impact factors are bad starting points. The practice to infer from them the quality of individual papers has been rejected by several academic communities (Adler *et al*., 2009; San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment from 2012; see also D'Ippoliti, 2017). To assess the quality of academic work, there is one way: read it.

Second, there is a growing body of evidence that the work of women and Black economists is undercited and evaluated more critically (Price, 2008; Hengel, 2017; Sarsons, 2017). If this is so, it is plausible to assume that this is the case for work from the Global South too. A third reason for the low reception and recognition of academic work from the Global South may be low appreciation of context-specific work. African social science researchers report a trade-off between academic work studying local conditions and work that is deemed academically relevant but which they feel is not applicable to their local contexts (Wagner, 2016). Mouton (2010) argues that many African researchers rather produce applied consultancy work. This choice can be the conscious decision of researchers who prioritize their roles as policy advisers—even when there is an awareness of low academic recognition (Borland *et al*., 2018). The lack of recognition of local knowledge is also reflected in the unethical practice of employing locals as research assistants or informants without properly acknowledging their academic contributions (Cronin-Furman and Lake, 2018; Kaplan *et al*., 2020).

Fourth, another obstacle to the recognition of academic work from the Global South could be due to theoretical approaches. Monga and Lin (2015) criticize that presumably universal approaches have too long been accepted by Western and African economists alike. They observe that scholars who have attempted to "break that hegemony [of Western knowledge and models] and carried out research that reflected the specific conditions of the continent and yielded new theoretical insights" (p. 9) saw themselves marginalized, and their work rarely accepted by mainstream economists. Obeng-Odoom (2019) claims that new journals concerned especially with development or African economies have come into existence, but suffer from low ranking positions quickly if they become too critical. Connell (2014) sees a latent understanding that the South produces data—but not theory, new models, or research agendas.

Marginalization of Global South scholars can also be expressed through the professional climate more generally. The economics profession is in the middle of an intensive debate about how it treats its non-white members (Allgood *et al*., 2019; Cook and Opoku-Agyeman, 2019; Bayer *et al*., 2020). With particular reference to development economics or to Global South scholars, there have been no studies or surveys comparable to the *AEA Professional Climate Survey*, but there are a few narrative accounts of personal experiences. For example, a student in a German doctoral program recounts the difficult position she found herself in when she was "the only student [in the program] who came from the 'developing' world, and the only one to have direct experience of the social and symbolic violence that is imposed on subaltern peoples" (de Castro Leal 2020, p. 94). Scholars for whom the "historical trauma of colonisation in the world" is in some way part of their personal biography may feel marginalized when questions of poverty reduction or economic development are approached merely from a Western perspective. For example, as de Castro Leal puts it, "I am often frustrated by the difficulty of explaining what I do and why it matters beyond mere academic interest." While these experiences are subtle, they may contribute to sustained feelings of marginalization.

Experiences of this kind do not only take place within academia in a narrow sense, but in the field of development cooperation more broadly. An example of openly expressed racism comes from Monga (2020), who recounts how his Cameroonian citizenship has been used to question his qualification as a development economist on numerous occasions. On the more subtle side, he remembers how his younger, light-skinned assistant was assumed incorrectly to be Dr. Monga. In general, he observes a

> … superiority complex or even racist attitudes exhibited by some [non-Southern] development experts. In the African context in

> particular, they often fall into the trap of self-righteousness, which prevents them from really engaging with stakeholders and enriching their understanding. Armed with strong beliefs in their academic credentials, they fail to recognise their ignorance of the terrain, the people, or the suitability of their proposed policies in places where they spend little time and interact with minuscule, nonrepresentative samples of politicians.

While the development sector is not identical with academia, most development professionals are academic graduates, often from the field of economics. Such experiences suggest, at the very least, that academic education does not go far enough in terms of anti-racist education.

2.2. *Epistemic Injustices and Research Quality*

It is increasingly recognized that (the lack of) diversity, inclusion and representation in the economics profession matter beyond questions of fairness. Who runs the research matters for its outcomes. Hence diverse representation and inclusion have instrumental value for the quality of research.

Subjective judgment influences research from the early stage of defining research topics and questions (e.g. Nelson, 1996). Individual knowledge, perspectives and experiences influence which topics or research questions appeal to us. For example, gender relations and the role of women in the economy received more attention with more women coming into the field (Agenjo-Calderón and Gálvez-Muñoz, 2019; Becchio, 2019). US-American economics was "virtually devoid of topics relevant to black Americans/economists" (Price and Allen, 2014) in the 1960s. To this day, research falling into the political economy of race is primarily researched by black scholars (Mason *et al.*, 2005; Peoples, 2009; Price and Sharpe, 2020).

For poverty research, this implies that researchers from diverse personal and regional backgrounds can shed light on facets of poverty that would otherwise remain poorly understood, or entirely overlooked. For example, non-Western feminist perspectives have considerably advanced the understanding of how poverty is entrenched with gender inequalities (Kabeer, 1994, 2015). Engaging in the debate about property rights and economic development, Musembi (2007) draws on her knowledge of local legal institutions and practices in Kenya to question the causal link between formal property rights and development. Joireman (2008) even questions that property rights can be defined in such contexts at all, as they interfere with traditional institutions. In Rao (2019), the author studies behavioral effects of classrooms that integrate students from poor and rich families in India and finds, among other effects, that cursing among students increased. When asked how he came up with this hypothesis, he responds: "I grew up in India, I knew this would be a thing" (Evans, 2019, minutes 33:35-33:55). These are but examples, but they illustrate how invaluable local and biographical knowledge is.

Western or Eurocentric bias has long been criticized by postcolonial scholars, and recently increasingly so by economists as well. For example, Hewitson (2013) argues that Western family ideals—of a patriarchal family with a male breadwinner—

are deeply reflected in neoclassical models of the household, which have long been employed to study households of other world regions for which the premises are, however, inadequate. Obeng-Odoom (2018) criticizes that production on a subsistence basis is regarded as inefficient by most Western development economists, for whom efficiency is a major concern (e.g. Duflo *et al.*, 2011; Kremer *et al.*, 2019). However, in his view, people's "quality of life (…) can be enhanced by these so-called inefficiencies" (p. 66), for example, when subsistence farming is more compatible with worldviews and socio-economic practices. It is important though to note that de-colonization cannot be achieved by more diversity alone. As noted by Heleta (2016) and Yusif (2018), when Southern scholars are educated using global resources, they may exhibit the same Western biases.

Finally, there is compelling evidence that economists make policy assessments and give policy advice in accordance with their own ideological positions. When the profession is rather uniform in its worldviews, perspectives, and understandings of poverty, this means that policy advice and public engagement are likely one-sided and biased (Horowitz and Hughes, 2018; Beyer and Pühringer, 2019). In particular, a recent study by Banuri *et al.* (2019) brought to light cognitive biases of development professionals (see also World Bank, 2015). They analyzed survey data to detect biased decision-making among UK and World Bank development professionals and found evidence of biases, including confirmation bias—that is, the selective uptake of information that confirms one's beliefs—and the alignment of decision-making with ideological priors. Specifically, it was found that development professionals selectively sought, retained, and preferred information in ways that confirmed their priors.

2.3. *Marginalization of Non-Expert Voices*

Knowledge formation and a deep understanding of poverty may not only benefit from a diverse academy, but also from the inclusion of non-expert voices. In the view of Dübgen (2020, p. 83), "[a]cademics often ignore indigenous knowledges, assuming that they cannot make significant contributions to the late modern world." Such biases likely involve all of us: "[w]e, as people holding multiple university degrees, probably [have] trouble fully recognizing the agency of poor people. (…) Those of us who are brought up and educated in the West tend to respect knowledge only when it is communicated in a certain way" (Sengupta, 2020, p. 141). This situation is undesirable because "the profound disconnect between external expert and ground reality has meant that expert-led initiatives do not work" (Sengupta, 2020, p. 135).

The ignorance of non-expert voices has been criticized before. For Selwyn (2016), "[w]hile development thinking aims to contribute to the uplifting of the world's poor, many of the major traditions within development theory are founded upon assumptions about 'the poor' that contribute to their (re)subjection to debilitating hierarchical social relations. This is because the development of 'the poor' is dependent upon elite guidance. The poor are required to subject themselves to, or be subjected to, elite-devised and -led development" (p. 782). Where present, such views are closely related to paternalistic attitudes as discussed above, and the field of behavioral development economics provides an insightful example. While scholars in this field often use complex experiments to approach explanations of observed behavior, poor people who "misbehave" are treated as the object of study, but rarely are asked about their motives. One may object that it is the whole point of behavioral economics: that people may be mistaken about the motives and ends of their behavior. However, researchers may be mistaken in their interpretations too. At the very least, qualitative research, with interpretative approaches, may be able to elicit people's subjective understandings and to include them in academic interpretations in appropriate ways (as e.g. in Kabeer, 2019). The additional opportunities to understand and explain behavior coming with the integration of such approaches highlight, again, the importance of interdisciplinarity and methodological variety.

3. Real-World Impacts and the Responsibility of Poverty Scholars

The conceptualization and measurement of poverty has immediate policy implications: different understandings and measures lead policy-makers to tackle different groups (Laderchi *et al.*, 2003). According to Alkire and Foster (2011), policy relevance of poverty measures was a major motivation for the creation of MPIs. At the same time, this "inherently political" (Fischer, 2018, p. 9) nature of poverty measures is a constant challenge for academics.

Poverty measures can highlight or hide certain dimensions of poverty. Kabeer (1994) recalls how in the 1970s, women were largely absent from policy or media reports—at a time when "less than 1 per cent of standard textbooks on development referred specifically to women" (p. xi). As a consequence, she argues, policy-makers had no knowledge base to include or address women in poverty reduction strategies. Another example relates to the debate about absolute and relative poverty: Lepenies (2020) argues that a strong academic focus on relative poverty in rich countries allows politicians there to downplay or ignore poverty.

But the importance of academic work for policy goes far beyond simply identifying whom to address. Understandings of poverty can influence, for example, who or what is considered responsible for poverty, and who is considered able to provoke change. The chapter by Mahlert (2020) argues that current poverty discourses have a strong deficit orientation; "the poor" are thought of in terms of deficiencies and deprivations, while their capacities and resources are ignored. This way of thinking makes policy-makers forget that people living in poverty may have the wish and capacity for agency. Academic analysis can be complicit in reproducing invisibilities of certain groups or perspectives.

Further, conceptions of poverty may have impacts on students and graduates. For example, Monga (2020) brings up that many development professionals are recent graduates without specific knowledge or experiences. While this is the fate of any beginner, these graduates "do not lack supreme confidence in their diagnostics of the problems or in the pertinence of their prescriptions." This lack of humility is specially problematic as their policy advice is "often of poor quality, irrelevant, and harmful," but nevertheless prevails when it comes from a development professional representing an international organization, development agency or donor organization. While power asymmetries in the development sector are not for academia to solve, it would certainly help to include problems such as superiority complexes and racism in its varied forms in development studies curricula, and to teach university students humility and respect.

These manifold real-life implications imply a huge responsibility of academics, which warrants reflection. As one contributor writes, we must "question more fundamentally, (sic!) how our conceptions of poverty are a result of present power relations and how the knowledge we produce might be complicit with systemic forms of domination" Dübgen (2020, p. 91).

4. Conclusion

As this review and discussion have attempted to reflect, the volume covers three vast topics: the state of poverty conceptualization and measurement, epistemic injustice in poverty research, and the important real-world implications of the academic work done in this field. Each topic is, or rather should be, a major topic of debate in and of itself, as each significantly influences how we view what poverty is. A joint review could hardly do full justice to all three. Notwithstanding, the main merit of the volume is in bringing to light the connections among them.

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