

Objectivity and Poverty

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Aims of this Paper

- **Introduce the objectivity debate**
- **Propose a relational form of objectivity and advocate bridging between researchers and the research scene**
- **Illustrate how statistical data support bridging**
- **Give empirical data from India to illustrate how myths can be propagated (and then debunked)**
- **Conclude**

1. Introduce the objectivity debate

- **“While quantitative researchers adhere to all the principles listed below, qualitative researchers adhere to only a few:**
 - Precision in measurement.
 - Replication.
 - Validity.
 - Reliability.
 - Objectivity.
 - Ethics.
 - Representativeness.

– (Sarantakos, 1993: 18-19; italics in original).

Introduce the objectivity debate

- “...Objectivity is generally employed to minimise personal prejudice and bias, and to guarantee that social reality will be presented as it is, rather than as it is interpreted or imagined by the investigator. ... sociology is value free, that is, its goal is to study *what is* and not *what ought to be* .
- ...the structure of theory and research should adhere to the inherent principle of value neutrality, and try to achieve the highest degree of objectivity.” (Sarantakos, 1993: 18-19; italics in original).

- **This typical presentation offers us dualisms:**

Quantitative	...	Qualitative
Good	...	Bad
Representative	...	Unrepresentative
Unemotive	...	Emotive
Factual	...	Normative

- **These dualisms are making research incoherent.**

2. Relational objectivity

- **Introduction – Two forms of epistemological objectivity**

- 1. **Value neutrality and the distanced observer**

- Struggles over the fact/value separability thesis
 - Not desirable in a policy context
 - Not coherent

- 2. **Standpoint Theory**

- **Positional Objectivity**
 - *Should avoid individualism*

- **Realism Presents Objectivity**

- objectivity requires about-ness, as does research
 - theory is not enough
 - data should not be conflated with reality
 - reality is complex, but data sets are simple closed systems of ‘facts’
 - data can be refined but still have huge fallibility
 - warranted claims are always corrigible

A relational form of objectivity

- **Conclusion:** replace epistemological version of objectivity with a more human-to-human approach to knowledge.
- **The observer has values**
- **These are open to scrutiny and change**
- **Beliefs should be grounded in evidence**
- **Evidence is couched in discourses, so hypothesis testing is unable to do all the work of refining theoretical frameworks (Duhem-Quine)**

Realists' View:

- **The distanced observer : NO.**
- **Impersonal observers: NO.**
- **The involved, engaged link person: YES.**
 - **A Relational Approach to Knowledge**
 - **A) social structures are relational and involve agents, including academics**
 - **B) human relations pervade social survey data collection and interpretation**
 - **1. Audiences are Important Reference Points**
 - **2. Respondents' Discourses are Worthy of Respect**
 - **Survey data alone cannot provide either 1. or 2.**

The Necessity of This Objectivity

- **The idea of necessity**
- **Necessity of the relational observer**
- **Necessity of the relational nature of our knowledge about poverty**
- **Objectivity as a second order concept**
 - **Epistemology of the 1st order: knowledge about the world**
 - **Epistemology of the 2nd order: knowledge about knowledge claims**
- **The necessity of valuing objectivity**

Implications for Methodology

- **Mixed methods are acceptable and desirable**
- **Quantitative methods cannot exist without qualitative research**
- **(but vice versa is not true)**
- **Qualitative research *benefits from* the types of knowledge available through interpreting survey data**
 - **Encompassing different positions**
 - **Linking fields (Bourdieu)**
 - **Separating out controllable factors**

Advocate bridging

- **Example of a research career**

- **Olsen**

- **Field visits 18 months India, 2 months Sri Lanka**
 - **Questionnaires and interviews 1984-87**
 - **Field visits 3 months 1994-5**
 - **Statistical research various stages 1988-90, 1993-4, 1996-8, 2003-7**
 - **Field visits 1 month each year 2003-7**

- **Morgan**

- **Field visits 2 years China etc.**
 - **Continued use of secondary data**
 - **Qualitative analysis of these as facts**

3. Statistical data support bridging

- **Encompassing different positions**
 - Bridging requires being able to understand the different positions such as marginalised peasant, hard-working woman casual labourer
 - Understanding (verstehen) requires...
- **Linking fields (Bourdieu)**
 - The academic field and the peasant field
 - The field of work and the field of land use
 - The field of gender and that of spending
- **Separating out controllable factors**
 - Uses of multiple regression
 - Uses of latent variable analysis (autonomy, commodification, human well-being)

Bridging Discourses

- **Pluralism of theory-**
 - Illustrated using neoclassical economics vs. feminist anthropology below
 - Also illustrated using transdisciplinarity, a pinnacle of achievement, in
 - Political economy (Harriss-White)
 - Social policy + economics (Kalpagam)
 - Demography + economics (Borooah)
- **Working within discourses**
 - Interviews using grassroots discourses
 - Writing-up linking acad + lay discourses

Empirical data from India

- **1991 transformation of trade policy**
- **Pressure to relax government controls over industry**
- **Considerable policy change in banking, trade, gas, oil, steel, coal, electricity, and thus farming**
- **However water industry was already mostly private, and a huge private sector already existed**
- **This was a policy transformation and an ideological upheaval in 1991**

Poverty Rates in India

- **Kingdon et al argue that real wages have not even risen 1995 vs. 1990;**
- **Harriss-White (2001) show a paradox of higher wages but lower annual earnings in rural areas**
- **This is due to lower labour-intensity of the work available as paid work**
- **CGAER reports show very high caste inequality; this is also class inequality**
- **Tables 1 and 2 illustrate levels and inequality of expenditure per capita**

Table 1: Levels of Poverty

- The per capita expenditure using 30-day recall method was recorded in the National Sample Survey of India (NSS). The figures for 1989 were considered solid, but the ones for 1999 are contested due to recall issues. 2004 even more contested.
- The cons'n survey was simplified in 1999.
- The nominal exchange rate in 1999 was Rs. 70/£.

*(1999 exchange rate 70 Rs/£)	Rural	Urban	Workers, Casual	Farmers (small & middle)	Landlords and Employers, Respectively
1999 Expend/Year	Rs. 5640 (£80*)	9828 Rs. (£140)	6252 (£89)	5880 Rs. sic (£84)	7968 and 10,512 Rs. (£113, £150)

Table 2: Inequality

•One way to define poverty with a view to national large-scale comparisons is to use a poverty line and measure the percentage of households whose per capita expenditure is below 60% of median household per capita expenditure. Using NSS data:

Perce nt Poor	Rural 22% (mean 5640 Rs/Yr)	Urban 6% (mean 9828 Rs/Yr)	Worke rs 22% if casual; 6% if salaried	Farme rs Between 23% and 14%	Landl ords 5% poor
1999 Gini	.26	.33	.31	.24	.28

Table 3: Caste Inequality

•Using this method, we can compare by social class, or by caste group. Please note that some simplification has occurred here, with Muslims and other religious groupings included in 'other castes' (heuristic)

1999	Tribes	Scheduled Caste	Backward Castes	Other Castes	All
% Poor	34%	25%	18%	8%	17%
Average Expenditure	(5088 Rs/yr)	(5412)	(6156)	(8460)	(6780 Rs/yr)
Gini Coeffic.	.29	.26	.29	.34	.32

Table 4: Historical Data

- **India's Per Capita Income in US \$ 1995 real terms as recorded using National Income Accounting of Gross Domestic Product**
- **1972 \$206**
- **1982 \$241**
- **1992 \$332**
- **2002 \$493** (£330 per capita using 2002 0.67 £/\$ exchange rate)
- **These are the official figures held by the World Bank (World Development Indicators)**

Table 5: Historical Inequality

- **India's Gini Coefficient Has Risen**

	– RURAL	URBAN	ALL
• 1993	.28	.34	
• 1994	.30	.37	
• 1995	.28	.36	
• 1997	.31	.37	
• 1999	[.26]*	[.35]*	.36

These are the official figures held by the World Bank (WIID Indicators)

– ***Contested data. Sources: NSS via WIID.**

Poverty Rates – the Political Economy Story

- 1. agricultural degradation ; the continuing green revolution as an unsustainable strategy**
- 2. human inequality increasing; modernisation for a few**
Nike, Burgers, Cafés, and anti-Coke
- 3. suicide deaths rising**
Male and female rates both high in rural areas; reasons include *anomie* relative to the current social & televisual representations of a good life
- 4. globalisation vs. human good life**

4. Propagating Myths?

•Structuralist Critics of Modernisation:

- Globalisation has created new risks for farmers
- Monocropping concentrates risk and damages the land/water balance
- Specific dangers include cotton, silk, peanuts, and rice exposure
- Withdrawal of state is a contributory cause of poverty

•Neoclassical Advocates of Modernisation:

- Growth in agriculture is necessary and helpful
- Income growth is sufficient for poverty reduction
- Poverty reduction through higher real wages has occurred
- Consumption rose

Debunking Myths Via Relational Objectivity

•Structuralist Analysis:

- Globalisation and colonialism both created risks for farmers
- Monocropping has occurred since 1900
- Specific dangers crop-wise are not new

•Stronger Agency Focus

- What is new is a mental state of anomie and desire
- State is still present! EGS, food rations, cotton price support, zoning, and state water support
- Self-help groups, cows, fodder markets, and women's work in fields!

•Neoclassical Advocates of Modernisation:

- Growth in agriculture is unsustainable in some areas
- In others it requires a higher labour intensity and more skills, rather than less, but instead deskilling is occurring

•(Labour process theory derives insight from QUAL studies)

- Income growth is NOT sufficient for poverty reduction (RURAL; URBAN migrants)

•Higher real wages but less days of work!

•Cost of living rose!



Thank you for your attention.

Related papers on moral economy and pluralism are found in Publications (Working Papers) of the Global Poverty Research Group, www.gprg.org