

MY410: Seminar Week 4

Chao-Yo Cheng

Seminar recap

- ▶ Week 2: Different types of research puzzles.
- ▶ Week 3: Epistemology/ontology in development studies.
- ▶ Week 4: Theory and data.

Seminar recap

- ▶ Week 2: Different types of research puzzles.
- ▶ Week 3: Epistemology/ontology in development studies.
- ▶ Week 4: Theory and data.
 - Types of theory: Explanatory/analytical (e.g., "how the world works" or "why and how the world works in this way") or descriptive/interpretative ("ways of seeing the world")?
 - Scope of theory: General or specific?
 - Relationship b/w theory and data: Deductive, inductive, or abductive?

WK3 seminar summary

- ▶ What is epistemology?
 - Epistemology is a subject that explores the nature of knowledge and knowledge production.
 - Epistemology is about how we perceive the world, what we seek to gain from our enquirers, and how we relate to the "researched."
 - The contrast between positivism and constructivism may not have much to do with the contrast between quantitative and qualitative.
 - We may not be able to find a common ground or "somewhere in between," but at least we can be empathetic.
- ▶ Epistemology matters for the question(s) you are asking, the evidence/data you are looking for, the methods you use for data collection and analysis, and the contributions/insights you aim to offer.
- ▶ How does epistemology help with "rigor?" Alignment, clarity, and transparency.

Epistemology in intl development studies

	Economics	Politics	Sociology	Social Anthropology
What is reality?	One reality exists; reality is <i>independent</i> of our thoughts; what is observable is real	One reality exists. Reality is <i>independent</i> of our thoughts	One reality exists; Reality is <i>independent</i> of our thoughts, but much of reality is unobservable	There are <i>different</i> realities associated with different standpoints and cultures
Goal of enquiry?	Acquisition of a <i>single</i> truth -- a universal, general law	We can establish truths or <i>generalizations</i> about human beings	Truth needs to be understood in terms of <i>practical adequacy</i>	<i>Interpretation</i> of local meanings; there is <i>no universal truth</i>
How are the researcher (you) and the "researched" related?	The researcher is <i>objective</i> and is <i>independent</i> of the "researched"	The researcher is <i>subjective</i> and is <i>not independent</i> of the "researched"	The researcher is <i>subjective</i> and is <i>not independent</i> of the "researched"	The researcher is <i>subjective</i> and is <i>not independent</i> of the "researched"



Sumner, A, and M Tribe. 2008. *International Development Studies*. London: Sage, p.72.

Lecture takeaway

- ▶ There are a number of ways to combine theory and empirics. While deductive approaches may seem the most obvious, inductive approaches are at the heart of many social sciences.
- ▶ Theory can provide a "way of seeing" that can add clarity and insight to empirical observations.
- ▶ As you read – note what theory is being engaged with, and what assumptions are inherent within it.
- ▶ As you write – aim for theory-question-method alignment, and see which theory gives you the greatest intellectual purchase.

Unpacking Nunn and Meyer

For each reading, answer the following questions in small groups/pairs.

- ▶ What is the main research question? What type of question is it? Do these two readings have a common topic?
- ▶ What is the relationship between theory and data – inductive, abductive, or deductive?
- ▶ What is the author's epistemological stance? What are the assumptions being made? How does that relate to the research design and the chosen methods?
- ▶ Why are the findings significant and/or relevant?
- ▶ What are the constraints of the chosen empirical approaches?

Unpacking Nunn and Meyer

	Nunn	Meyer
Research questions		
Epistemology and methods		
Relationship b/w theory and data		
Findings and relevance/significance		
Constraints		

Unpacking Nunn and Meyer: Research question

- ▶ Nunn: Do colonial missionaries in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries have a lasting impact on people's religious beliefs today?
- ▶ Meyer: How does the “local **appropriations** of Christian beliefs” take place among the Peki Ewe in Ghana through the (re)imagination of the notion of devil?

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What is the common topic of these two readings?

Unpacking Nunn and Meyer: Epistemology and methods

- ▶ Nunn: Positivist and quantitative – regression analysis (see **Sections II and III**).
- ▶ Meyer: Constructivist and qualitative – archival research (in Germany and the UK) and fieldwork/ethnowork (in Ghana) (see **THE RESEARCH** on pg. xxiii).

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Do they perceive the dynamics of religious conversion differently?

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Is abduction/deduction necessarily better or not?

Comparing Nunn and Meyer

Meyer states (pg. xix): "The point I wish to make is that Christianity at the grassroots level cannot be reduced to the intentions and actions of Western colonial missionaries. African Christianity is not merely an extension of the missionary impact, but a continuously developing product which is shaped by a great number of experiences."

- ▶ Does this mean that her findings refute Nunn's? Is Nunn wrong? Misguided?
- ▶ Is Meyer's evidence of the continued salience of Ewe gods and spirits to Christians evidence against Nunn's claims?



Nathan Nunn



Birgit Meyer

Looking ahead to the formative assignment

- ▶ Main task: Building a research question from a literature review.
- ▶ Format: 1 page (max 500 words), incorporating:
 - References for 3 related, **empirical** articles
 - 1 paragraph introducing the topic
 - 1 paragraph outlining and critiquing the research designs, setting the background for:
 - A research question
- ▶ Due: 4pm Thursday 4 November 2021 (MT week 6)
- ▶ Full instructions on Moodle (<https://moodle.lse.ac.uk/>)

Week 5 seminar preparation

- ▶ A draft plan for your formative assignment (see template on Moodle)
- ▶ 3 related articles on a topic of your interest
 - Must be empirical articles (i.e., they have a research design and data)
 - Matching the topic to your summative assignments and/or dissertation topic is optional
 - Do not worry about getting it perfect for now, just go through the exercise
- ▶ Try to articulate the topic of interest: What is at the intersection of the Venn diagram of those 3 articles?
- ▶ Pick out the research designs
 - Are they all very similar? Is there methodological diversity?
 - Are there big gaps or puzzles? Are there useful models to emulate?
- ▶ Can you articulate a research question that builds from these articles?