

Lecture 6: Political economy of knowledge production and decolonising research

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In this lecture...

- Political economy of knowledge production
- Decolonising research
- Q&A/Discussion
- Course wrap-up



Learning Objectives

- By the end of this lecture, you should be able to...
 - Recognise political economy issues related to knowledge production and the research process
 - Identify research methods that help to decolonise the research process

From Unit 1

Natural Sciences

Realism:
1 reality,
independent of us



Positivists:
Scientific method,
falsification



Ontology:
the nature and
existence of reality



Epistemology:
how to acquire
knowledge



Social Sciences

Relativism:
many realities from
human perspectives

Interpretivists:
different truths exists

Political Economy of Knowledge Production: Knowledge for who and knowledge for what?

Knowledge for who, knowledge for what

➤ Who...

- Plans the study
- Conducts the research
- Receives credit
- Is empowered/oppressed
- Is harmed/benefits
- Owns the data/outcomes

➤ Why...

- Personal curiosity
- Funding opportunities
- Capital accumulation
- Progress/development
- National interests

“While knowledge is produced under very different conditions than other commodities, concrete products (‘research’) are produced in a social milieu and in response to distinct forces.”

--William Friedland

Research is influenced by...

- Sources of funding
- Academic institutions
- Academic disciplines
- Journals
- Governments
- International governmental organisations (IGOs)

- Non-governmental organisations (NGOs)
- Philanthropists
- Private industry

- *Other sources of influence?*

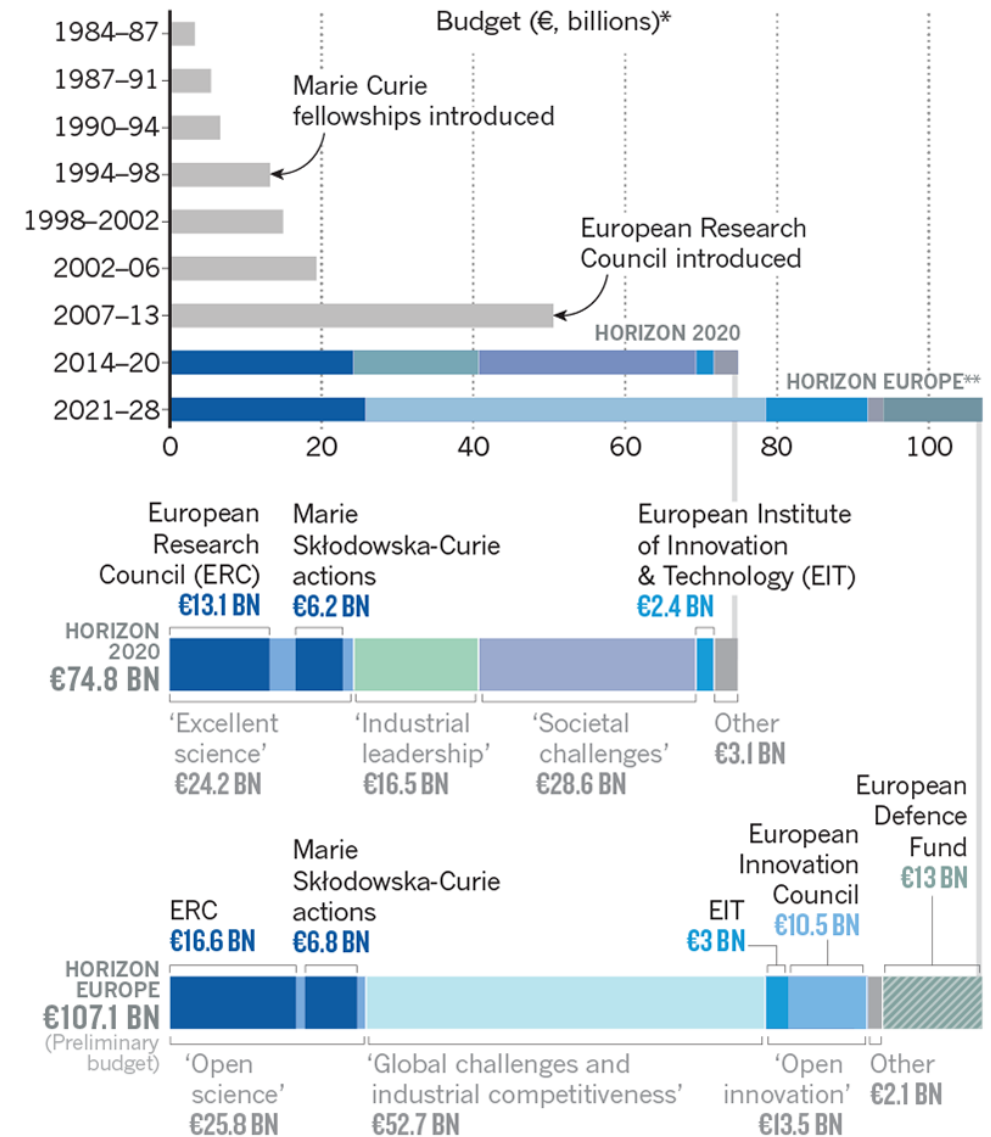
Funding

- Drives research interests
 - Places a literal value on knowledge

- Shapes the choice and implementation of methods
 - 100 vs 1,000 surveys; surveys vs interviews

RISING RESEARCH CASH

The European Union has steadily increased the value of its large framework research programmes.



* In current €.

**Horizon Europe budget yet to be finalized; assumes 27 member states after Brexit.

Academia

Higher Education Institutions

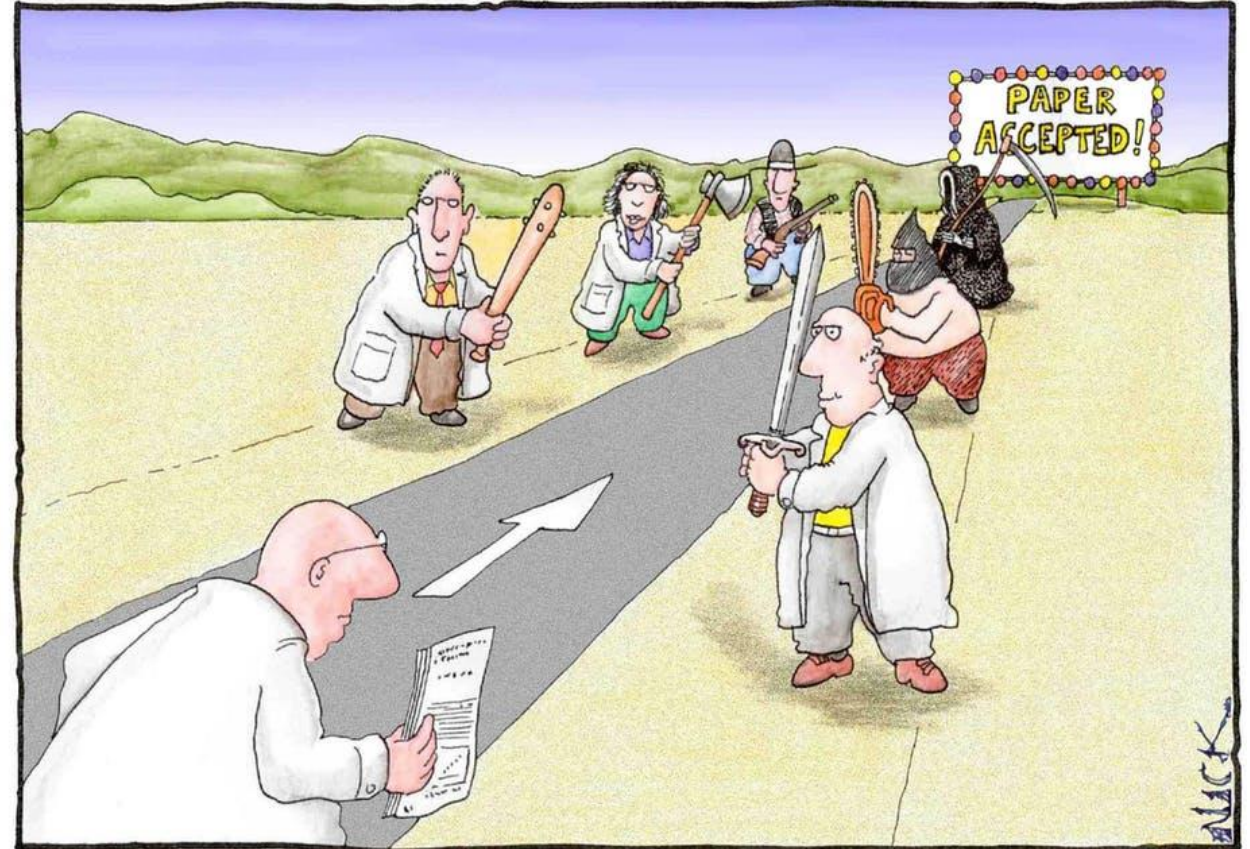
- Research Excellence Framework (REF)
- Publish or perish
- Institutional discrimination
 - Especially women, BAME, LGBTQ and indigenous peoples

Disciplines

- Orthodox vs. heterodox
 - Disagreements on ontology/epistemology
- Methodological favouritism
- Resistance to interdisciplinarity

Publishing

- Ranking of academic journals
- Editor's bias
- Open access publications
 - Who can access the knowledge generated from research?



Most scientists regarded the new streamlined peer-review process as "quite an improvement."

Governments and IGOs

- Large source of funding
- Research priorities and funding show national (allied international) interests
 - See recent cuts proposed by the UK to global research initiatives (<https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-56460154>)
- Set rules and regulations for research
 - Protection of intellectual property
- Censorship
 - <https://climate.law.columbia.edu/Silencing-Science-Tracker>

NGOs and Philanthropists

- Funding requirements can be treated as ‘box ticking’ exercises
- Influence policy
 - Philanthro-policymaking and philanthrocapitalism (Rogers 2011)
- Accountability

Private Industry

- Research with a profit motive
- IPR and trade secrets
- Ongoing debates around the ownership of genetics

- Cargill, Inc. and Nestle SA
 - Partnerships with NGOs and ethical production
 - <https://www.reuters.com/article/usa-court-slavery/u-s-supreme-court-justices-question-human-rights-claims-against-nestle-and-cargill-idUSL1N2IH17K>

So what?

➤ Research as inherently political

- Implications for how:
 - Research is conducted
 - Knowledge is produced and disseminated

➤ Policy implications

- ‘lead by’ the science vs. ‘guided by’ the science (see Torjesen 2020)

What are some political economy issues of knowledge production for your research?

Decolonising Research

Coloniality in research

➤ Knowledge as a resource

- Global South → North flow

➤ Extractive knowledge:

- Global South as sites of field-experimentation (RCTs in particular)
- Who is benefiting from the generation, analysis and publication of the data?
- What tangible impact will the research have on the researched?

Coloniality in research

- Dominance of Global North academics in literature/systematic reviews
 - See 'Decolonising' movements at SOAS, Cambridge, Oxford, etc.
- Dominance of 'top' journals in Global North
- Dominance of English as the publication language

Decolonising research

➤ Requires critical reflections on:

- You as a researcher
 - What are your motives?
 - What is your positionality?
- The academic system and institutions
 - What is prioritised? Given value? Why?
 - Power of the passport/ease of travel or access

Decolonising (democratising) research

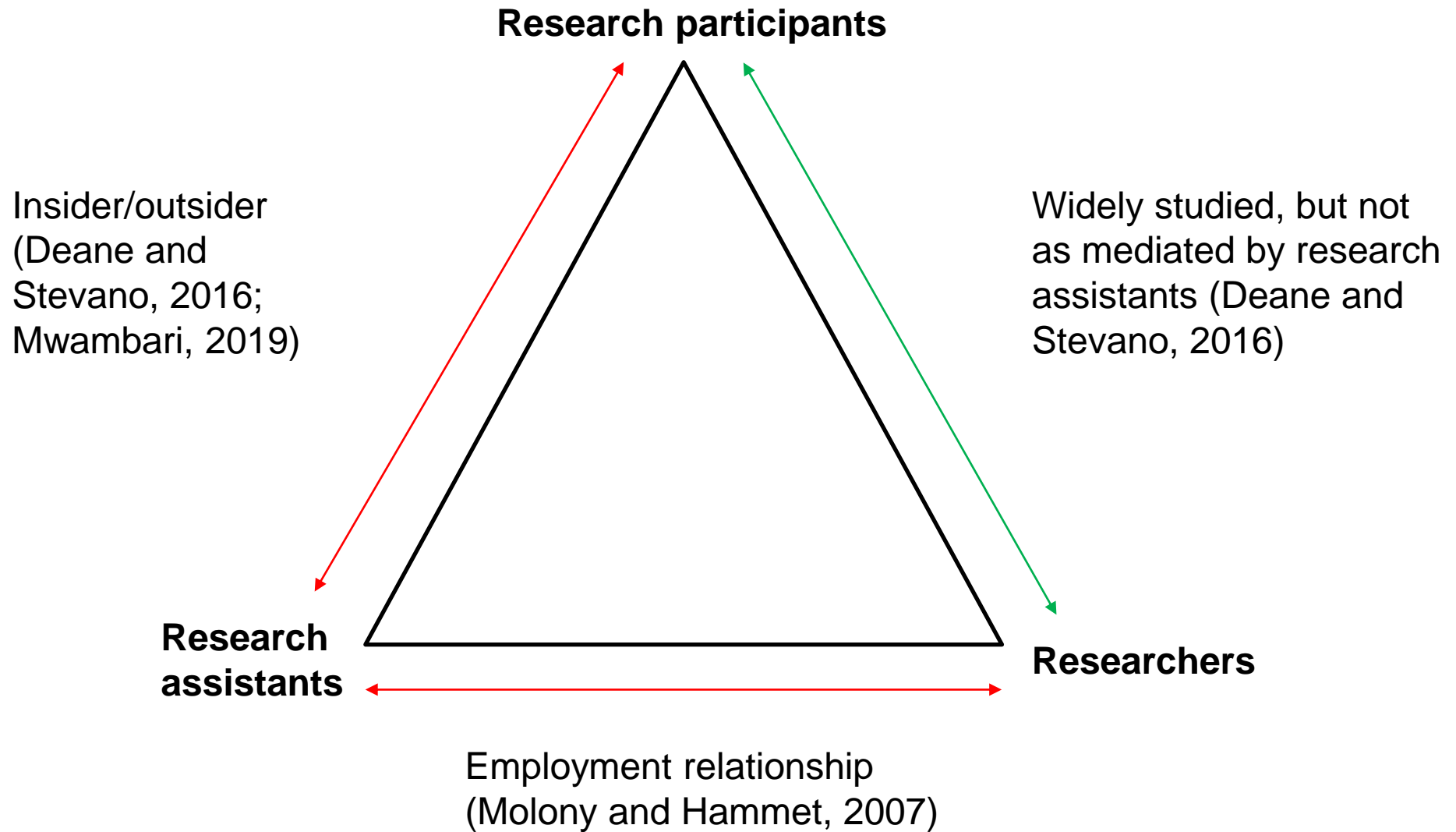
- Less about specific methods, more about considerations throughout the research process
- Integration of local, indigenous and traditional knowledge/beliefs
- Overall goal should be to improve the lives of the researched
- Knowledge generated should be easily accessible to the researched
 - Written in an understandable language, open-access journal publication

Decolonising (democratising) research

- 5 'central tensions and structures' in decolonising research methodologies (Keikelame & Swartz 2019)
 - Power
 - Trust
 - Culture and cultural competence
 - Respectful and legitimate research practice
 - Recognition of individual and communities' assets

5 Tensions example: research assistants

- Some literature on enumerators (large surveys), mostly focused on training and ensuring comparability across data
- With some exceptions, a neglected issue in qualitative research
- Important because research assistants:
 - Introduce third dimension in power relations between researcher and research participants (Temple and Edwards, 2002; Deane and Stevano, 2016)
 - Have their own positionality (Mwambari, 2019)
 - These relations have tangible implications for research processes and outcomes + feed into hierarchies of knowledge production



5 Tensions example: research assistants

- Power
 - Employer/employee relationship
- Trust
 - Access and researcher responsibility
- Culture and cultural competence
 - ‘outsider’-’insider’, positionality
- Respectful and legitimate research practice
 - Research *with* rather than *on*
- Recognition of individual and communities’ assets
 - Credit, remuneration, who’s narrative?

Decolonising (democratising) research

➤ Participatory research

- Locals help to:
 - **Identify research needs/priorities**
 - Design the research process
 - Select/create research methods
 - Collect and analyse data
 - Decide what happens with the generated knowledge

Decolonising (democratising) research

➤ Participatory research

- How could you make the following methods more participatory?
 - Surveys
 - Mapping
 - Interviews
 - Group
 - Individual

Decolonising (democratising) research

➤ Citizen science

- Not well defined (see Heigl et al. 2019)
- Main focus:
 - Researchers need not have PhD
 - Open access data and results
 - Collaborative
 - Widely communicated
- Issues with:
 - Ethics, data management, rigor

Summary

- Knowledge for who, knowledge for what?
- Decolonial and participatory research not just based on methodology

Discussion: How can you decolonise your own research?



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Questions?



Break



History as method

- A view that considers history as core to economic and social development of society
- Question: how did we get here? The long view...
- Reveals insights into how society has been different in the past and therefore could be different in the future
- Purpose is practical and strategic: to overcome inequalities etc.
 - Linking reality to prospects for change
 - History from below

Imperialist approaches

- Understanding relations between the West and LMICs and how capital accumulation takes place through these relations
- Imperialist rivalry
- Oppression of those subjected to the rule of capital
- Framework that understands geopolitics, international relations etc. in historical materialist terms e.g. modes of production
- Makes aspects of unpredictability predictable
 - Useful for developing appropriate responses

Context

- Importance of starting with reality
- Context: global, national, local, household etc.
- Analysing the connections between them
- Reveals insights into the development of social and economic relations at different scales
 - Paying particular attention to inequalities i.e. class, gender, race etc.
 - Binaries can be productive

How to take a feminist approach to research?

- Feminist epistemologies
- Mixing methods to overcome male-bias in data collection
- Importance of time and time use data

Feminist epistemologies

- Concern about forms of knowledge and ways of knowing – research for whom and for what?
- For feminists, methods are ‘empty containers’, it all depends on how they are deployed (Harding, 1987; Berik, 1997)
- Similar epistemologies can apply to other research driven by social justice motives

- Reflexive research practice:

‘[...] reflexivity is self-critical sympathetic introspection and the self-conscious analytical scrutiny of the self as researcher. Indeed reflexivity is critical to the conduct of fieldwork; it induces self-discovery and can lead to insights and new hypotheses about the research questions. A more reflexive and flexible approach to fieldwork allows the researcher to be more open to any challenges to their theoretical position that fieldwork almost inevitably raises.’ England (1994: 244)

Mixing methods

- Pragmatist/political approach to mixing methods
- Feminist epistemologies and use of qualitative or mixed methods to counter male-biased account and capture experiences of subordination and marginalisation, to assert marginalized people as agents of knowledge (see Berik, 1997)
 - Problems with household surveys
 - Importance of qualitative interviews

Time as a methodological approach

Time important for two main reasons:

- To capture economic activities excluded from economic statistics (e.g. unpaid reproductive work, informal work)
- To capture time constraints emerging from double burden and associated outcomes
- ❖ Beware of seasonality, simultaneous activities, household socio-economic status and composition

How do farmers make decisions about ABU?

Mainstream vs Political Economy

➤ Mainstream Economics

- Rational choice theory
 - Individuals always make decisions that provide them with the highest amount of utility
- Free market and Adam Smith's invisible hand
 - Market failure - Inefficient distribution of goods and services in the free market
- Δ income or assets
 - How much do the farmers invest and rate of return on investment? How much profit impacted?
 - Opportunity cost of diseases on farm
- Information asymmetries
 - Farmers/producers are irrational due to lack of information
- Technological intervention
 - Reduce disease prevalence

➤ Political Economy

- Rationality cannot be assumed
- Markets
 - Inherent power dynamics shape the market
- Δ income or assets
 - Who makes profit across value chain?
 - Who is included and excluded from economic/profit making activities?
 - Underlying factors for inclusion/exclusion
- Incentives (market and non-market)
 - Power dynamics—who's making decisions? Who benefits most from this? How is patronage being used?
 - Inherent social dynamics that govern decision making such as class and caste relations
- Agrarian question of land and food

Agrarian Political Economy

➤ Key assumptions

- Non-homogeneous peasantries → importance of stratification and differentiation
- Relationships of exploitation rather than mutuality
- Asymmetry
- Power and Politics

➤ Policy Solutions

- Role of state is key but diverse (not deterministic) in supporting agriculture and spearheading agrarian transitions
- 'One size fits all' does NOT work

➤ Purposive action by the state – target policy interventions for differing needs

- Landed poor → integration within market structures?
- Landless poor → employment and wage generation policies
- Female farmers (not counted as farmers, property rights)

Agrarian Question of Land

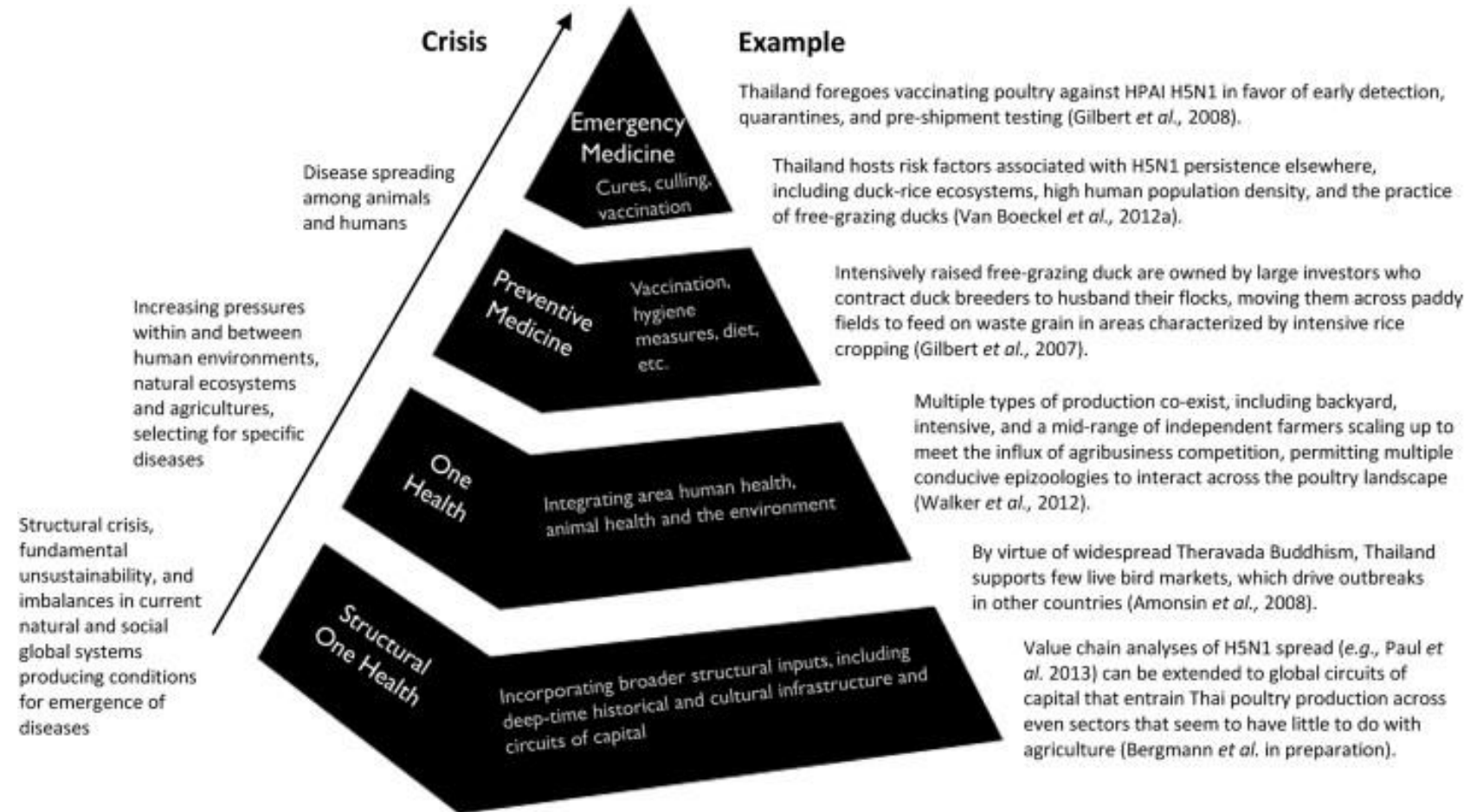
- How market led agrarian reforms sought to commodify and privatise land rights?
- Neoliberal agrarian restructuring has resulted in ‘bifurcated’ agriculture
 - Export-oriented capital intensive sub-sector
 - Commoditised, profit-oriented and subjected to market imperatives
 - Circuits of capital
 - Labour intensive peasant sector
 - Differentiated in terms of technological utilisation, scale economies and possibility of a surplus above household consumption lead to differentiation among peasants.
 - Production → subsistence and/or for markets
 - Land access is crucial for farmers who are less integrated with the market
 - **POLICY SOLUTIONS WILL BE DIFFERENT!**

Agrarian Question of Food

- Question - What is the role of financialisation, neoliberalism and corporate food regime?
 - Role of global peasant struggles over the terms and conditions of access and control over food
 - People may have their own solutions!
- Political analysis of global capitalist agriculture to highlight the role of food regimes in poverty and dispossession due to privatisation and commodification, environmental degradation, increased migration

Structural One Health

- Better understand how global capital in animal husbandry and land use produce interconnections that are related to disease emergence by
- Empirically formalising connections between capital-led changes in the landscape and shifts in wildlife, agricultural, and human health
- Identifying sovereign wealth funds, state owned enterprises, govt, private equity, pension funds etc finance the development and deforestation contributing to disease emergence



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- How do you *do* science? How is that the same/different from political economy?
- What 3 words or phrases come to mind when you think of political economy?

Workshop: 22 and 23 April

