Soc 12 – Empire, colonialism, imperialism

Course organiser
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Brief description

This paper is especially concerned with three topics. Firstly, the paper encourages us to think about the processes of empire, colonialism and imperialism from a sociological viewpoint. In doing so, we will consider Marxist and the modernity/coloniality approaches to the world system. Secondly, the paper seeks to investigate how empire, colonialism, and imperialism structure knowledge production – both in the past and the present. In doing so, we will consider debates over the ‘decolonial option’ in sociology and the social sciences, considering how we can work against the ‘imperial episteme’. Lastly, this paper outlines so-called ‘hidden figures’ of sociology, highlighting the critical sociological work and traditions being done at the borders of the modern, colonial world system.

While each of these topics has a suggested reading list, you are also advised to make use of digital archives and online resources should you be interested in doing so. These include, but are not limited to, the Du Bois papers (University of Massachusetts Amherst Libraries), Global Social Theory, and The Internet Archive.

You will also see that most of the readings have recommended videos too; please do send any more videos my way if you think they will be useful (am2059@cam.ac.uk).

Aims and objectives

Upon taking this paper, students are intended to:

- Have a critical understanding of the epistemic consequences of empire, colonialism, and imperialism.
- Be capable of producing sociological critiques of empire, colonialism, and imperialism.
- Be able to critically assess the work of thinkers who have been erased by colonial epistemicide, and to show how these thinkers’ work deepens the critical capabilities of sociology.
- Be able to cogently link the processes of modernity and coloniality.
- Have a critical understanding of the concept of decoloniality.

Assessment

This paper will be examined by a substantive piece of coursework, and a two-question exam. The coursework will involve a 5,000 word written essay; possible titles for the coursework will be provided by the course organiser and uploaded to Moodle. The exam will be three-hours long, and you will be asked to choose one question from Section A and one from Section B.
Teaching team

The lectures on this course are provided by Dr Ali Meghji, Dr Jeff Miley, and Dr Shannon Phillip. A list of supervisors for this paper is uploaded onto Moodle and will be emailed to everyone at the beginning of Michaelmas and Lent term. It is your responsibility to contact your supervisor, and you are welcome to contact different supervisors for different topics (if you would like to). Please direct questions about the paper to the course organiser, Dr Meghji (am2059@cam.ac.uk).

Mode of Teaching

The paper is taught through a combination of lectures, supervisions, and workshops. Students will be expected to have six supervisions on the Section A and Section B topics, and up to two supervisions dedicated to the coursework essay. Individual supervisors can decide to use some supervision sessions to assess essay plans, read and discuss an article, or ask students to present on a topic. Four workshops will be held across Michaelmas and Lent terms for students to receive feedback from the class on their coursework topic. A separate document is uploaded onto Moodle describing the coursework and workshops.

Topic list

**Section A: key concepts (Michaelmas)**
- Sociology and the imperial episteme
- Modernity/coloniality
- Imperialism, Marxism, and anti-colonialism
- Struggles for self-determination in the 20th century
- Autonomous and indigenous sociology
- Coloniality, humanism, and the climate crisis

**Section B: thinkers behind the colonial veil**
- Du Bois and racialised modernity
- Lugones and the coloniality of gender
- Shari’ati and religious sociology
- C.L.R. James and anticlonal agency
- Patel, Sarkar, and Indian sociology
- Indigenous methodologies

**Required course reading**


Reading list

Section A

Week 1. Sociology and the imperial episteme (Dr Meghji)


Decolonising Europe #1: Decentering Europe
Connected Sociologies
Postcolonial thought and social theory.

1. Is the history of sociology important for understanding its logic today?
2. Does sociology continue to reproduce an imperial episteme?
3. Can decolonial thought transform sociology?

Week 2. Modernity/coloniality (Dr Meghji)
1. Critically assess the concept of modernity/coloniality.
2. Critically assess the relation between the coloniality of power, being, and knowledge.
3. ‘One of the most powerful myths of the twentieth century was the notion that the elimination of colonial administrations amounted to the decolonization of the world’. Discuss.

**Week 3. Imperialism, Marxism, and anti-colonialism (Dr Miley)**


Marx, K. “The British Rule in India” (1853). [https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1853/06/25.htm](https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1853/06/25.htm)


Kiernan, V. *Marxism and Imperialism* (Edward Arnold, 1974).

Week 4. Struggles for self-determination in the 21st century (Dr Miley)


Week 5. Autonomous and indigenous sociology (Dr Meghji)


A conversation between Syed Farid Alatas and Boaventura de Sousa Santos


Alatas SF Like coffee, sociology too has multicultural origins, says Farid Alatas

Syed Farid Alatas on Contemporary Significance of Ibn Khaldun


1. Critically assess why various authors have called for indigenous and autonomous sociologies.
2. Can we have indigenous and autonomous sociologies without having epistemic relativism?
3. Do you find the call for indigenous and autonomous sociologies convincing?
**Week 6. Coloniality and the climate crisis (Dr Meghji)**


**Climate Change, Decolonization, and Ways of Seeing**


Klein, N. (2015). This changes everything: Capitalism vs. the climate, Simon and Schuster.


1. Is the climate crisis an expression of coloniality?
2. Critically assess the relationship between environmental catastrophe and coloniality.
3. Is Western sociology equipped to deal with the climate crisis?

**Week 7-8: Long essay workshops (Dr Meghji)**

**Section B**

**Week 1. Du Bois and racialised modernity (Dr Meghji)**

1. The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the colour line. Discuss.
2. Are you convinced by Du Bois' argument that Black Labour is 'the foundation stone not only of the Southern social structure, but of Northern manufacture and commerce, of the English factory system, of European commerce, of buying and selling on a worldwide scale.'

Week 2. *Lugones and the coloniality of gender (Dr Phillip)*


Connell, R. Decolonizing Gender.


1. Do you find the idea of the ‘invention of women’ convincing?
2. ‘Patriarchal heterosexuality is central to the reproduction of modern gender regimes’ – critically discuss.
3. Is there a need for Southern perspectives in gender analysis within sociology?

Week 3. Shari’ati and religious sociology (Dr Meghji)


Ali Shariati on Role of Leadership in West vs. Role of Leadership in Shi’ism


1. How convincing is Shari’ati’s critique of Marxism?
2. Critically assess the possibility of a religious sociology.

**Week 4. C.L.R James and anticolonial agency (Dr Meghji)**


Bayyinah Bello The Haitian Revolution of 1791 Pt 1


Gopal P Insurgent Empire | Priyamvada Gopal in conversation with Verso Books


Laurent Dubois: The Haitian Revolution


1. Critically assess the importance of anticolonial agency to the making of the modern world.
2. How has subaltern agency shaped the modern world?
3. Critically assess the relationship between anticolonial agency and Western humanism.

**Week 5. Between anti-colonialism and nationalism: the tradition of Indian sociology (Dr Meghji)**


1. To what extent has the tradition of Indian sociology escaped Eurocentrism?
2. What is methodological nationalism, and to what extent has it influenced Indian sociology?
3. Is it useful to have national traditions of sociology?

**Week 6. Indigenous methodologies (Dr Meghji)**


Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Eve Tuck - "Decolonizing Methodologies"


Smith LT. (2019) *Decolonizing Methodologies, 20 years on*.


1. Critically assess the calls for indigenous statistics.
2. Is the concept of indigenous methodologies sociologically useful?
3. In what ways would embracing indigenous methodologies transform sociological research?

**Week 7-8: Long essay workshops (Dr Meghji)**