Faculty of Human, Social and Political Sciences
PART II A
2020-21

SOC3, Modern Societies II
Global Social Problems and Dynamics of Resistance

Course Organiser

Dr Mónica Moreno Figueroa (mm2051@cam.ac.uk)

Lecturers in Order of Teaching

Dr Jeff Milley (tjm52@cam.ac.uk)
Prof Jennifer Gabrys (jg899@cam.ac.uk)
Dr Mónica Moreno Figueroa (mm2051@cam.ac.uk)
Dr Ella McPherson (em310@cam.ac.uk)

Aims and Objectives

- To introduce and explore a selection of global social problems and dynamics of resistance from a sociological perspective;
- To develop a critical understanding of key sociological concepts, approaches and analyses to social problems such as inequality, neoliberalism, development, nationalism, globalisation, social movements, protest, transnationalism, democracy, discourse, political economy, control and pluralism.
- To introduce the sociological notion and methodological tool of intersectionality – bringing gender, race and class to the fore – to understand social problems and dynamics of resistance in a critically imbricated way and not as one-dimensional struggles upheld by one-dimensional subjects (simply men, simply women, etc.)
- To think and raise questions about the current climate crisis across a range of social problems and dynamics of resistance.

Structure of the Paper

The paper starts with a one-hour Introduction (week 1), delivered by the course organiser and the lecturers. Following this, SOC3 has two sections. Each section has two modules, and each module consists of three two-hour lectures, for a total of 12 lectures over 24 hours as follows:

Section One:

1. Global Social Problems (Dr Jeff Miley)

   Lecture 1: Inequalities
Lecture 2: Borders
Lecture 3: The COVID-19 Pandemic

2. Environmental and Social Justice (Prof Jennifer Gabrys)

Lecture 4: Sociology of Environmental Crisis
Lecture 5: Environmental Justice and Social Justice
Lecture 6: Environmental Participation and Community Knowledge

Section Two

3. Global Body Projects (Dr Mónica Moreno Figueroa)

Lecture 7: Sex Tourism, and the Tensions of Development
Lecture 8: Bodies, Beauty Work and Cosmetic Surgeries in Neoliberal Times
Lecture 9: Inequalities and Fashion

4. Control and Resistance in Digital Societies (Dr Ella McPherson)

Lecture 10: Critical Approaches to the Information Society
Lecture 11: Social Media and Social Movements
Lecture 12: Representation and Resistance: The Problematics of Big Data and the Politics of the Selfie

Supervisions

Supervision will be organised centrally by the Teaching Associate for Soc3, Dr Rachell Sanchez (rs871@cam.ac.uk), in relation to student’s interests.

The course is taught by means of 12 two-hour lectures and eight supervision sessions. Students should plan to have three substantive supervisions in Michaelmas and three in Lent, and then two revision supervisions in Easter term.

In Michaelmas and Lent, students should choose one of the two parts of that term’s module and have all three supervisions on the three topics of that part. As a result, they will cover two of the four parts over the year in their supervision. One of the revision supervisions should be on their Michaelmas topics, and the other should be on the Lent topics.

Lecturers will give some supervisions on their modules, but due to the size of the student cohort, cannot give all of them. The teaching team therefore also consists of a selected group of supervisors whose expertise matches the supervision topics. Students will have one supervisor per part (topics and revision supervision), so two supervisors for the duration of the paper. This supervisor allocation policy aims to balance supervisor expertise and consistency of supervision for students.

Students will be expected to produce a minimum of four essays over the six substantive supervisions, according to Department of Sociology policy. Students may write essays for the
other two supervisions, but they also have the option to prepare for this supervision in other ways. Students taking the latter option should consult their supervisor in advance, who will assign an alternative preparation assignment, such as a short presentation, a case study or a book review.

In general, individual supervisors can decide to use some supervision sessions to read and discuss an article, ask students to present on a topic, or find other ways to address the topic in ways that are stimulating and provide a learning experience for students.

Lectures are central to this paper, and students are strongly advised to attend all of them. The reading lists below are meant to provide guidance for students and supervisors. In their supervision essays, students should answer the specified supervision question provided for each topic.

Students will receive instructions about how to sign up for supervisions at the start of the academic year, with the expectation to have this settled by the first week of Michaelmas.

**Mode of Assessment**

This paper will be examined by one three-hour examination paper, divided into two sections according to the two sections of the paper. You will be required to answer three questions, including at least one from each section.

**Timetable**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Michaelmas</th>
<th>Lent</th>
<th>Easter</th>
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<tr>
<td>Dr M Moreno Figueroa and all lecturers</td>
<td>Dr Mónica Moreno Figueroa</td>
<td>All lecturers</td>
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<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
<td><strong>Body Projects around the Globe</strong></td>
<td><strong>Revision Session</strong></td>
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<td>Wed. 1pm, week 1 (14 Oct)</td>
<td>W. 4-6, weeks 1-3, beginning 27 Jan</td>
<td>M. 2, week 2 (10 May)</td>
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<td>Dr Jeff Milley</td>
<td>Dr Ella McPherson</td>
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<td><strong>Global Social Problems</strong></td>
<td><strong>Control and Resistance in Digital Societies</strong></td>
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<td>W. 4-6, weeks 1-3, beginning 14 Oct</td>
<td>W. 4-6, weeks 4-6, beginning 17 Feb</td>
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<td>Prof J Gabrys</td>
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<td><strong>Environmental and Social Justice</strong></td>
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<td>Wed. 4-6, weeks 4-6, beginning 4 Nov</td>
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Online version of this paper for this academic year 2020-21

This year all lectures of this paper will be online, according to the paper’s timetable, as follows:

1. Students will first meet for an hour with the paper organiser, Dr Monica Moreno Figueroa, to go over the paper’s organisation.

2. All lectures will include an approximately 50-60 min pre-recorded lecture that will be available ahead of time (usually Friday before the lecture) and that you can watch in the first hour of the timetabled slot.

3. The second hour of the lectures slot will be synchronous and interactive, that is, an online live session using the Zoom platform, which might include Q&A and other online activities. Students can write their questions in the chat, and the lecturers will answer them live. These sessions will be recorded and available on the SOC3 Moodle sites.
SECTION ONE

Section One, Module One: Global Social Problems
Thomas Jeffrey Miley

Overview
This module will apply an intersectional approach to understand and analyse three major social problems that are global in scope: (1) poverty and inequality; (2) borders; and (3) pandemics. In the process, it will use the intersectional approach to each of these three major global social problems to illuminate debates about respective key contested concepts in contemporary social science. In this regard, the intersectional approach to the problem of poverty and inequality will be used to illuminate debates about the nature and dynamics of capitalism and neoliberalism. Likewise, the problem of borders will be related to debates about the nature and dynamics of nationalism; and the problem of pandemics will be related to debates about biopower and surveillance.

Lecture 1: Inequalities

Essential Readings


Additional Readings


Supplementary Videos


Supervision Questions:

- In what ways does “Occidentalism” pervade mainstream analyses of social inequalities?

- How is “primitive accumulation,” or “accumulation by dispossession,” implicated in the production and reproduction of global inequalities?
Lecture 2: Borders

Essential Readings


Additional Readings


**Supplementary Videos**


**Supervision Questions**

- Are border walls and fences but a last vestige of a dying system of territorially bounded sovereignty?

- Critically assess the concept of “border imperialism.”

**Lecture 3: The COVID-19 Pandemic**

**Essential Readings**


Additional Readings


Supplementary Videos

Davis, M. (March 2020). “Capitalism is the Disease: Mike Davis on the Coronavirus.”
Prashad, V. (July 2020). “The World after COVID.”

Supervision Questions

• How useful is the concept of “biopolitics” for understanding the social and political dynamics surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic?

• Critically evaluate the claim that COVID-19 is a plague of capitalism.
Section One, Module Two: Environmental and Social Justice
Jennifer Gabrys

Lecture 4: Sociology of Environmental Crisis

Lecture Overview

Environmental crises—whether in the form of climate breakdown, biodiversity collapse or pollution—are now events of considerable concern worldwide. The narration and experience of these crises occurs in different ways across social groups. At the same time, the resources for addressing environmental crises are unevenly distributed. This lecture will investigate the sociology of environmental crises. We will explore how sociological approaches address environmental breakdown as a problem of social and environmental justice. We will also examine texts that deal with the designation of the Anthropocene, and consider how or whether this concept is helpful for addressing climate breakdown.

Essential Readings


Additional Readings


Supervision Question

- How do different characterizations of environmental crises inform possibilities for addressing these problems through social practices?

Lecture 5: Environmental Justice and Social Justice

Lecture Overview

Environment is a topic that is often studied in the sciences, but its relevance within sociological study is just as significant and essential. This lecture will look specifically at how sociological approaches attend to important questions of environmental justice and social justice. We will explore how pollution, climate breakdown, and land use changes emerge as critical events that inform possibilities for collective and social life. We will also look at examples of grassroots projects that attempt to realize environmental and social justice for communities, and consider how justice emerges as social discourse and social practice.

Essential Readings


Additional Readings


Supervision Question

- How does attention to environmental justice and social justice inform or change the way in which environmental problems are addressed?

Lecture 6: Environmental Participation and Community Knowledge

Lecture Overview

Environmental problems are increasingly now documented and addressed not just by scientific ‘experts’ but also by diverse communities undertaking different environmental participation practices. This lecture will investigate the multiple forms of participation that are now becoming more established, from citizen science and citizen sensing to community knowledge and decolonized research methods. We will consider how or whether these different practices of environmental participation offer potential strategies for addressing environmental crises through more democratic and equitable forms of social organization.

Essential Readings


Additional Readings


Supervision Question

- How do citizen engagement and community participation generate different approaches to environmental problems?
SECTION TWO

Section Two, Module One. Global Body Projects
Monica Moreno Figueroa

Module Overview

This module interrogates the body as a site of production of inequalities. Through the critical exploration of instances of cosmetic surgery, beauty pageants and sex tourism, the module will consider the ways intersectionality, as a methodological strategy, can help us develop our sociological imagination. Inequality, embodiment, sexism, racism, class distinctions and nation building will be key concepts.

Section Two

Lecture 7: Sex Tourism and The Tensions of Development

Lecture overview

After an introduction to the module, we will discuss the dilemmas of sex tourism from a transnational perspective. We start by a historical analysis that allow us to consider how colonialism and the racist and sexist logics that developed thereafter have had major consequences to how bodies are understood and occupy space. We will look at the idea of ‘pornotropics’ to then explore, using examples of Latin America and the Caribbean, how the representations of the colonized have impacted the experience and practice of sex tourism. We then explore the political economy of the shifting distinction between sex and romance tourism. We will also experiment thinking together about the issue of the climate crisis and sex tourism, and more broadly about the issue of sustainability, travel and tourism and how these are gendered and racialised enquiries crossed by neoliberal logics of inequality.

Essential Readings


Additional Readings

Bishop, R. (2008) 'The Tele-Technics of Agency, the Net, the Urban and Sex Tourism', *Social Identities*, 14 (3); 349-361.


Gregory S (2014) The devil behind the mirror: Globalization and politics in the Dominican Republic. Univ of California Press. (Chapters 4 and 5)


Supervision question

- According to Rivers Moore, sex tourism can be understood as a strategy for ‘getting ahead’. What are the contradictions and complexities that this argument pose? Discuss in relation to at least two other authors.

Thinking and Talking Question

- What are the implications for sex tourism if tourism is not environmentally sustainable?

Lecture 8: Colorism, Beauty Work and Cosmetic Surgeries in Neoliberal Times

Lecture overview

In this lecture we explore the issue of colorism and cosmetic surgeries in relation to the concerns with issues of beauty and normality. We will reconsider the use of skin as a supposed biological marker that delineates difference along lines of race, class and gender. We will also explore the racialisation of the cosmetic procedures as well as the arguments for the decolonisation of beauty studies. We will link the concern for surveillance and control over our bodies as a logic of neoliberalism, the entrenchment of post-feminism alongside the urge for renewed forms of aesthetic work. Through this discussion we will seek to understand conceptions of skin that are framed by neoliberal discourse concerning self-help and self-responsibility. We will think through issues related to branding, racial and social passing, trauma and labour in order to understand how skin informs ways of seeing, and we will then consider how ways of seeing inform ways of being for people who are, because of their skin, marginalised and demonised by dominant groups.

Essential Readings


**Additional Readings**


**On Colorism**


Ahmed, S. (1999) “‘She’ll Wake Up One of These Days and Find She’s Turned into a Nigger” Passing through Hybridity’ Theory, Culture & Society, 16(2); 87-106.


### On Cosmetic Surgery


### Supervision question

- Resistance to and compliance with racialised beauty work co-exist. Discuss this tension in relation to intersectionality.

### Thinking and Talking Question
• To what extent does cosmetic surgery and/or beauty work relate to the belief that crude nature can and should be improved through human technology, chemicals, and tools (Taussig 2012: 53)?

Lecture 9: Inequalities and Fashion

In this lecture we will explore how economic, environmental and social inequalities intersect with clothing and fashion. We will focus on everyday garments, the materiality of clothing, and forms of appropriation and exploitation.

Essential Readings:

Additional Readings:

**Newspaper or magazine’s articles**

*The Kimono, The Catwalk & The Great Cultural Appropriation Debate*

https://www.vogue.co.uk/arts-and-lifestyle/article/kimono-kyoto-to-catwalk-v-and-a


https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8mn5k1m1


https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8nz498zt

**Fashion and environmental crisis**

*Fashion for Global Climate Action*

*‘It's finding something new in the old’: how fashion can confront the climate crisis*

*The price of fast fashion*

*Sustain your Style*

**Cosmetics and environmental crisis**

The beauty industry generates a lot of plastic waste. Can it change?  
12 years to change: what can the beauty industry do to stop climate change catastrophe?  
Beauty industry giant vows to have zero net emissions by 2050  
Earth Day 2018: The Environmental Impact of the Cosmetics Industry  
The truth about beauty packaging and the environment

**Supervision question:**

- To what extent do ordinary garments reproduce oppression? Discuss with reference to the production, consumption OR use of clothing.

**Thinking and Talking Question**

- To what extent is fashion an environmental problem?
Section Two, Module Two: Control and Resistance in Digital Societies
Ella McPherson

Module Overview

This module examines how global social problems and related modes of resistance play out in digital societies. We underpin this examination by first looking at talk about technology, namely how technologies are often discursively equated with progress, and how and why these discourses travel and have impact across the globe. We will learn how to take an intersectional critical political economy approach to look beneath these discourses to the dynamics of inequality inherent to technologies’ production, use and disposal. Next, we look at the role of social media in recent social movements, thinking in particular about the power and counter-power of networks and in networks. Finally, we will examine resistance through representation, focusing on the contested practice of taking selfies and on the problematics that big data poses for representation. Throughout, we will be attuned to continuity versus change in digital societies, as well as implications for equality, pluralism, accountability and the environment. We will also keep a critical eye on the methods used to research phenomena in digital societies, and specifically the relationship between these methods and the claims made.

Lecture 10: Critical Approaches to the Information Society

Lecture Overview

This lecture introduces students to the discourse of the information society, in which technology is understood as driving progress. We will critically assess this claim, using examples like the mining of minerals for mobile phones, the content moderation of social media posts, the gender imbalance on Wikipedia and the disposal of e-waste. We will investigate two approaches for studying technology critically: the political economy approach and the intersectional approach.

Lecture Overview

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Essential Readings


Noble, S. U. and Tynes, B. M. (eds) (2016) The Intersectional Internet: Race, Sex, Class, and Culture Online

Additional Readings


Supervision Question

- How can we critically understand the concept of the information society?

Thinking and Talking Question

- What is the connection between information society discourses and world’s rising levels of e-waste?

Lecture 11: Social Media and Social Movements

Lecture Overview

This lecture both builds on the previous lecture’s concept of discourse and introduces the metaphor of the network to interrogate the use of social media by social movements. We will first examine how this relatively recent adoption of social media follows a long tradition of social movements’ use of media for symbolic counter-power, including the anti-globalisation Zapatista movement, a very early adopter of online mobilization tactics. We will go on to look at several more contemporary examples, including the ‘Twitter Revolution’ in Iran, the #BlackLivesMatter movement in the United States, #YaMeCansé in Mexico, and Extinction Rebellion in the UK. In each case, we will focus on how technology intersects with the power relations within and around these movements, including those related to race, gender and sexuality as well as to corporate and state power.

Essential Readings


Additional Readings


Supervision Question:

- Do social media revolutions exist?

Thinking and Talking Question

- What are the tensions arising from environmental movements’ uses of social media?
Lecture 12: Representation and Resistance: The Problematics of Big Data and the Politics of the Selfie

Lecture Overview

This lecture will introduce the concept of representation and examine how the power relations around representation have (or have not) changed in the digital age. We will use the examples of selfies and of big data as case studies, examining the differences in the claims to representation made by these types of information, as well as in the ways these types of information are represented. We will finish the lecture by circling back to the political economy approach to reflect on the environmental consequences of the ‘cloud,’ in which such digital representations tend to be stored.

Essential Readings


Additional Readings


Supervision Questions

• What is the relationship between representation and power in the digital age?

Thinking and Talking Question

• What shapes the representation of the climate crisis in the digital age?