SOC12 Paper Guide

Soc12 – Empire, colonialism, imperialism

Course organiser
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Teaching team
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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, The Internet Archive, and Marxists 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. A list of the possible coursework questions is provided in a separate document. The exam will require you to answer *two questions*, you will be asked to choose one question from Section A and one from Section B.
Mode of Teaching

The paper is taught through a combination of lectures and supervisions. Students will be expected to have six supervisions across Michaelmas and Lent, one revision supervisions in Easter term, and one supervision for their coursework in Lent term.

Supervisions will be arranged by the course co-ordinator, along with the supervision co-ordinator (Dr Rachell Sánchez-Rivera). After contacting you by week 0 to submit your supervision topic choices, your supervisor(s) will be allocated to you by week 1. Your supervisor will then contact you to arrange dates and times. Individual supervisors can decide to use some supervision sessions to assess essay plans, read and discuss an article, ask the students to write an op-ed or an author/concept biography, or ask students to present on a topic.

Supervision for the coursework is organised by Dr Meghji, who will email you directly about this at the beginning of Michaelmas.

Please direct questions about the paper to the course organiser, Dr Meghji (am2059@cam.ac.uk).

Topic list

Section A: Foundations
1. Modernity/coloniality (Dr Meghji)
2. The postcolonial versus the decolonial (Dr Meghji)
3. Imperialism, Marxism, and anti-colonialism (Dr Meghji)
4. Struggles for self-determination in the 21st century (Dr Kudaibergenova)
5. Indigenous methodologies (Dr Kudaibergenova)
6. The coloniality of gender (Dr Phillip)

Section B: Empirical Developments
1. From the Haitian revolution to anti-colonial agency (Dr Meghji)
2. Eugenics and genocide (Simina Dragos)
3. Pluriversal politics: from the Black Panthers to the Zapatistas (Dr Meghji)
4. Sexualities and bodies in the peripheries (Dr Phillip)
5. Climate crises (Dr Meghji)
6. Decolonizing Sociology and Academia (Everyone)
SECTION A. FOUNDATIONS

Lecture 1. Modernity/Coloniality


An Evening With Ramon Grosfoguel - Postcolonial or Decolonial?


Symposium: Walter Mignolo on Coloniality and Western Modernity


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.

Lecture 2. The postcolonial versus the decolonial (Dr Meghji)


1. Are postcolonial and decolonial contradictory with one another?
2. To what extent are postcolonial and decolonial approaches similar to one another?
3. Is the difference between the postcolonial and decolonial simply one of geographical scope?
Lecture 3. Imperialism, Marxism, and anti-colonialism


Useful Videos

1. What does it mean to ‘stretch’ Marxism, and why did anti-colonial figures find this appealing?
2. Critically evaluate the claim that Marxism constitutes “the fundamental framework of postcolonial thinking.”

### Lecture 4. Struggles for Self-Determination in the 21st Century


Fanon, F. (1963). The Wretched of the Earth(Grove Press).

1. "The principle of self-determination must be excavated through careful attention to the contexts in which it emerges and the uses for which it is mobilized" (Getachew 2019:40). Discuss.
2. Why did the Leninist self-determination project fail?
3. How did "anti-colonial worldmaking” influence contemporary world politics?

### Lecture 5. Indigenous Methodologies

Lecture 6. The coloniality of gender


1. Do you find the idea of the ‘invention of women’ convincing?
2. Is there a need for Southern perspectives in gender analysis within sociology?
3. Is ‘Gender’ a colonial construct? Explain with examples

**SECTION B. EMPIRICAL DEVELOPMENTS**

1. **Bodies and sexualities in the peripheries**


Aniruddha Dutta, ‘An Epistemology of Collusion: Hijras, Kothis and the Historical (Dis)continuity of Gender/Sexual Identities in Eastern India’


1. ‘Patriarchal heterosexuality is central to the reproduction of modern gender regimes’ – critically discuss.
2. Is LGBTQI+ a colonial construct? Discuss with examples
3. How does the analytic of colonially complicate understandings of sexuality and sexual rights?

2. Climate crises


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 social thought equipped to deal with the climate crisis?

3. **From the Haitian revolution to anti-colonial agency**


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. Has subaltern agency shaped the modern world?
3. Critically assess the argument that the Haitian revolution was about much more than Haiti.

4. **Eugenics and genocide**


https://doi.org/10.1215/9781478007227 (ch 2 The Society of Enmity; ch 3 Necropolitics)


**Podcasts**


**Videos**

*The Eugenics Podcast* (Series, 12 short videos) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7_O-MWERJ4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7_O-MWERJ4) (episode 1)

*A Virtual Conversation: ‘Race Science’ and Eugenics in Historical and Contemporary Context* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f54_kk9ChIs](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f54_kk9ChIs)

*A History of Eugenics* [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeSM9vz6ylg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jeSM9vz6ylg)
Other resources
The Eugenics Archive [https://eugenicsarchive.ca/] (useful resource for concepts, events, archival evidence & more; particularly Encyclopaedia page)

Supervision questions:
1. Discuss the role of ‘race science’ and/or eugenics in the nation-state. Draw on a historical or contemporary case study to build your argument.

2. In what ways, if at all, does ‘race science’ and/or eugenics impact the social world? Discuss in relation to a historical or contemporary case study.

3. Some historians claim that eugenicists cannot be blamed for genocide (see discussions in Levine & Bashford, 2010). To what extent do you agree with this argument?

4. To what extent can we understand eugenics as a manifestation of ‘modernity/coloniality’?

5. Pluriversality and the decolonial turn


1. Is ‘intercommunalism’ an example of pluriversalism?
2. Critically assess the application of pluriversalism in praxis.

6. Decolonizing Sociology and Academia


1. If decolonization is not a metaphor, what does it mean to ‘decolonize universities’?
2. What roles can universities play in the decolonization of knowledge?
3. Why decolonize knowledge?