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.
Coursework:

As mentioned, this paper involves a 5,000 word piece of coursework. Coursework titles are taken from the paper guide, across the 12 topics listed below in the ‘Topic List’. Should you wish to edit one of the paper guide questions for your coursework, please discuss this with the course organiser, Dr Diana Kudaibergenova (dk406@cam.ac.uk). Please remember, you cannot answer an exam question on the same topic as your coursework (e.g. if you pick ‘modernity/coloniality’ for your coursework, you cannot answer the question on this in the exam). It is advised that you join a supervision on the topic of your coursework, which may fall therefore either in Michaelmas or Lent. In Week 7 of Michaelmas and Lent, we will run compulsory coursework workshops, in which you will receive feedback on your work from peers and course instructors.

Mode of Teaching

The paper is taught through a combination of lectures and supervisions. Students will be expected to have four supervisions across Michaelmas and Lent, one revision supervision in Easter term, and one supervision for their coursework (either in Michaelmas or Lent, as written above in the ‘coursework’ section of the paper guide).

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.

Please direct questions about the paper to the course organiser, Dr Diana Kudaibergenova (dk406@cam.ac.uk)

Topic list

Section A: Foundations
1. Modernity/coloniality (Dr Navid Yousefian)
2. Postcolonial theory and subaltern studies (Dr Parul Bhandari)
3. Imperialism, Marxism, and anti-colonialism (Dr Navid Yousefian)
4. Struggles for self-determination in the 21st century (Dr Miley)
5. Indigenous methodologies (Dr Kudaibergenova)
6. The coloniality of gender (Dr Parul Bhandari)
7. Week 7 coursework workshop

Section B: Empirical Developments
1. The Economy of Neocolonialism: Underdevelopment and Dependency (Dr Navid Yousefian)
2. (Internal) Colonialism, Resistance, and Self-Determination (Dr Navid Yousefian)
3. Climate Crises, Liberation Ecologies, and Radical Environmentalism (Dr Navid Yousefian)
4. Coloniality and Europe’s East (Simina Dragos)
5. Eugenics and genocide (Simina Dragos)
6. Decolonizing Sociology and Academia (Dr Kudaibergenova)
7. Week 7 coursework workshop

SECTION A. FOUNDATIONS

Lecture 1. Modernity/Coloniality


Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth (1963), trans. Richard Philcox. New York: Grove Press, 2005. Foreword by Homi K. Bhabha; Ch. 1 (Concerning Violence), Ch. III (The Trials and Tribulations of National Consciousness); Conclusion.
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

In the backdrop of investigating colonialism and imperialism as a global system of exploitation and subordination, this lecture studies the emergence and importance of the postcolonial. In particular, the focus is on the rise of subaltern studies, its place in postcolonial studies, and its critique to colonialism as well as to national cultures. Specific attention is placed on knowledge-production, politics of language, culture (religion, spirituality), and intellectual thought.


Dabashi, Hamid and Walter Mignolo. (2022) Can Non-Europeans Think?. Bloomsbury. (Chapters 1, 5 and Conclusion).

Ambedkar, B R. Waiting for a visa. (an essay).

Essay Questions:
1) What is the aim of subaltern studies?
2) Can the subaltern always speak?
3) Discuss a figure of subaltern in your own context.

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**


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

Books.

1. Can indigenous methodologies 'survive' academic 'universalism’?
2. Why the call for indigenous and autonomous sociologies is so crucial now?
3. What is the best way to overcome "epistemic frontiers”?

6. Gender and Colonialism (Parul Bhandari)

This lecture will study the impact of colonialism and imperialism on gender categories and practices. Specific focus will be on how gender and sexuality identities were asserted by disciplining emotions, practices of care, and moralising responsibilities towards body and families, and the role of law in inscribing these identities. Additionally, there will be an in-depth discussion on the historical and cultural traditions of transgender identities in South Asia.


Essay Questions:
1) How were categories of gender (re)constructed under colonial rule?
2) Why were colonial governments concerned with sex and intimacy?

SECTION B. EMPIRICAL DEVELOPMENTS

1. The Economy of Neocolonialism: Underdevelopment and Dependency


1: How does the concept of neocolonialism interact with dependency theory in influencing underdevelopment?
2: Trace the historical evolution and ongoing relevance of theories addressing global inequalities.
3: Evaluate the effects of decentralization on state power and development dynamics.

2. (Internal) Colonialism, Resistance, and Self-Determination


Olesen T (2004) Globalising the Zapatistas: from Third World solidarity to global solidarity?


1: How do internal colonialism and resistance concepts shed light on marginalized communities' dynamics and struggles?
2: Analyze the role of self-determination in post-colonial contexts and its impact on colonizer-colonized relations.
3: Explore how post-colonial thought and global solidarity reshape power dynamics and challenge dominant narratives.
3. Climate Crises, Liberation Ecologies, and Radical Environmentalism


Perry, K.K., n.d. From the plantation to the deep blue sea: Naturalising debt, ordinary disasters, and postplantation ecologies in the Caribbean. The Geographical Journal n/a. https://doi.org/10.1111/geoj.12470


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?

4. Colonality and Europe’s East

**Essential readings:**

Behr, H. & Stivachtis, Y. (Eds.) (2016). Revisiting the European Union as Empire. Routledge ( chapters 1,3,4,7)


Further readings and resources:

Readings


**Supervision questions:**

1. Critically discuss the merits and limitations of applying a decolonial perspective to studying Europe East.
2. Critically discuss the European Union from a decolonial perspective with reference to a particular policy, institution or event.
3. Can we discuss postsocialism as postcolonialism?
4. What would a decolonial Europe look like? Discuss in relation to political, epistemological, ontological or aesthetic aspects.

5. **Eugenics and genocide**

**Essential readings:**


**Further readings and resources:**

**Readings**


Podcasts


Videos

The Eugenics Podcast (Series, 12 short videos) https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7_OMWERJ4 (episode 1)

A Virtual Conversation: 'Race Science' and Eugenics in Historical and Contemporary Context https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f54_kk9ChIs

A History of Eugenics 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)


https://www.genocidewatch.com/tenstages

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. 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?
3. To what extent can we understand eugenics as a manifestation of ‘modernity/coloniality’?
4. Discuss the legacies of eugenics and/or ‘race science’ in relation to a contemporary case study. Draw on social theory to make your case.

6. Decolonizing Sociology and Academia


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?