Paper Structure and Information

Course Organiser
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Lecturers in Order of Teaching
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Dr Matthew Sparkes (ms2268@cam.ac.uk)

Supervisions Coordinator
Dr Rachell Sanchez Rivera (rs871@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.

General Resources and Readings
Structure of the Paper

The teaching mode for this paper will be in-person. The paper starts with a one-hour Introduction (week 1), delivered by the course organiser and the lecturers. Following this, SOC3 has two sections: **Section One** in Michaelmas and **Section Two** in Lent. Each section has two modules, and each module consists of three two-hour sessions. The paper ends with a revision session in Easter term. The substantive topics are as follows:

**Section One (Michaelmas):**

1. **Global Social Problems (Dr Diana T. Kudaibergenova)**
   - Lecture 1: State, Border, and Inequality
   - Lecture 2: Protests and Social Movements
   - Lecture 3: Sociology of Climate Change

2. **Policing the Planet: Colonialism, Crisis and Resistance (Dr Scarlet Harris)**
   - Lecture 4: Policing, racism and colonial continuities
   - Lecture 5: Policing, racism and crisis
   - Lecture 6: The abolitionist imperative: Global resistance to prisons and policing

**Section Two (Lent):**

3. **Control and Resistance in Digital Societies (Dr Matt Mahmoudi)**
   - Lecture 7: Critical Approaches to the Information Society
   - Lecture 8: Social Media and Social Movements
   - Lecture 9: Representation and Resistance: The Problematics of Big Data and the Politics of the Selfie

4. **Credit and Debt in Unequal Societies (Dr Matthew Sparkes)**
   - Lecture 10: Critical approaches to social stratification in indebted societies
   - Lecture 11: Consuming credit – Housing, consumption, and culture
   - Lecture 12: The ideology of debt and its affects

**Supervisions**

Supervision will be organised centrally by the Teaching Associate for SOC3, Dr Rachell Sanchez Rivera (rs871@cam.ac.uk), in relation to student’s interests.

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

Lectures are central to this paper, and students are strongly advised to attend all lectures throughout Michaelmas, Lent, and Easter. Nonetheless, for supervision purposes students should choose one of the two modules of that term’s teaching and have all three supervisions on the three topics of that module. As a result, they will cover two of the four modules over the year in their supervision. One of the revision supervisions should be on their Michaelmas topics, and the other should be on their Lent topics.

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.
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.

To provide a stimulating and varied learning experience, students will receive one larger supervision (6-7 students per group) and two smaller essay-based supervisions (3 or 4 students per group) for each of their chosen modules. (This means that students will produce a minimum of four essays over the six substantive supervisions, as per Department of Sociology policy.)

Individual supervisors will decide on the teaching format of the larger supervision (e.g., they may be based on critical readings of core text(s) or group presentations). Your designated supervisor will communicate the format and order of the supervisions in the first week of each term.

The reading lists below are meant to provide guidance for students and supervisors. In the two smaller essay-based supervisions, students should answer one of the specified supervision questions provided for those topics.

**Mode of Assessment**

This paper will be examined by one five-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 Matthew Sparkes and all lectures</td>
<td>Dr Matt Mahmoudi</td>
<td>All lecturers</td>
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<tr>
<td><em>Introduction</em></td>
<td><em>Control and Resistance in Digital Societies</em></td>
<td><em>Revision Session</em></td>
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<tr>
<td>Wed. 1pm, week 1, 11 Oct</td>
<td>W. 4-6, weeks 1-3, beginning 24 Jan</td>
<td>W. 4-5, week 2, 8 May</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr Diana T. Kudaibergenova</td>
<td>Dr Matthew Sparkes</td>
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<td><em>Global Social Problems</em></td>
<td><em>Credit and Debt in Unequal Societies</em></td>
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<td>W. 4-6, weeks 1-3, beginning 11 Oct</td>
<td>W. 4-6, weeks 5-7, beginning 21 Feb</td>
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<td>Dr Scarlet Harris</td>
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<td><em>Policing the Planet: Colonialism, Crisis, and Resistance</em></td>
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<td>W. 4-6, weeks 5-7, beginning 8 Nov</td>
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SECTION ONE

Section One, Module One: Global Social Problems

Module Two Lecturer
Dr Diana Kudaibergenova

Module Overview
In this module we will focus on three major social problems and structures: 1) inequality, borders, citizenship and state; 2) protests and social movements; and 3) the sociology of climate change. In understanding these social problems, we will also focus on structures and realities that can both exacerbate them but also attempt to address them. We will critically evaluate the concepts of state, borders, citizenship (in Lecture 1), protests, collective identities, and social movements (in Lecture 2), and the climate change crisis (in Lecture 3) to focus on intersectionality and complexities of inequality.

Lecture 1: State, Border, and Inequality

Essential Readings

Additional Readings

Supervision Questions
- How important (or unimportant) is the state for the eradication of inequality?
- Is a borderless world possible?
Lecture 2: Protests and Social Movements

**Essential Readings**


**Additional Readings**


**Supervision Questions**

- Why do certain major social grievances not lead to the formation of social movements?
- Is it possible to evaluate the “successes” of social and protest movements? Why or why not?
- How do social movements lead to social change? Discuss using examples.

Lecture 3: Sociology of Climate Change

**Essential Readings**


Additional Readings


Supervision Questions

- Critically assess the concept of sociology of climate change in dealing with the climate crisis.
- How can sociology help dealing with the climate crisis? What alternative practices and concepts can it offer?
- Climate refugee problem would have to soon rethink the political idea of borders. Discuss.

Section One, Module Two: Policing the Planet: Colonialism, Crisis, and Resistance

Module Two Lecturer

Dr Scarlet Harris

Module Overview

In this module, we will take a critical sociological approach to examining the role of the police and policing in different global contexts. Key to our analysis will be an understanding of the development of policing in the context of colonialism, and the subsequent ‘boomerang’ effect on the policing of the most marginalised in Britain. We will explore how an intersectional approach can enrich our understanding of how policing reproduces and relies on the construction of ‘dangerous’ others, as well as illuminate the dynamics of resistance to policing as it plays out in different (but interconnected) geographical and historical contexts.

Lecture 4: Policing, racism and colonial continuities

Lecture Overview

In the first lecture we will critically assess the relationship between policing and colonialism. We explore how, far from being a purely domestic phenomenon, the development of policing in Britain (often considered the birthplace of the modern police force) was intimately tied to the policing of its colonies. We will address the intersections of colonial policing and the management of populations within the ‘imperial core’, asking: what do these histories mean for how we understand the policing of racially minoritised populations today?

Essential Readings


**Additional Readings**


**Supervision Question**

- What does an analysis of the colonial history of policing reveal about police racism in the present?

**Lecture 5: Policing, racism and crisis**

**Lecture Overview**

In this lecture, we will consider the role of policing in the context of multiple contemporary and overlapping crises. We will focus on the seminal work of Stuart Hall and colleagues to examine the relationship between policing and political crisis, before exploring how the policing of particular populations both depends on and contributes to the construction of racialised and gendered threats to the nation. We will adopt an expansive understanding of policing to consider how discourses of ‘foreign criminals’, ‘terrorists’ and ‘gangs’ animate multiple forms of criminalisation, securitisation and state violence at the current conjuncture.

**Essential Readings**


**Additional Readings**


**Supervision Question**

- Explain the relationship between ‘moral panics’ and policing at the current conjuncture.
- In what ways are race and gender imbricated in the construction of ‘dangerous others’?
Lecture 6: The abolitionist imperative: global resistance to prisons and policing

Lecture Overview
In our final lecture, we will turn to the question of resistance and alternatives to policing. We begin by exploring the development of the North American prison abolition movement, before examining how the concept of abolition has been applied to questions of policing and criminal justice in various global contexts. In particular, we will focus on intersectional approaches to police and prison abolition, and the ways in which abolition calls not only for the dismantling of carceral systems, but the creation of new institutions and ways of relating to ourselves and each other.

Essential Readings

Additional Readings

**Supervision Question**

- Critically discuss the claim that police and prison abolition is as much about ‘presence’ as it is ‘absence’.
- How might an intersectional approach to abolition enrich our understandings of policing and prisons?

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**SECTION TWO**

**Section Two, Module Three: Control and Resistance in Digital Societies**

**Module Three Lecturer**

Dr Matt Mahmoudi

**Module Overview**

This module examines how global social problems and related modes of resistance play out in, or are increasingly born out of, 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. In particular, we will draw on critical race and digital studies (CRDS) to look beneath these discourses, to the dynamics of coloniality and inequality reproduced and augmented by technology production, use, and disposal. This will help us develop three lenses to combine and aid us in our analysis: an intersectional lens, critical political economy lens, and decolonial lens.

Next, we look at the role of social media in recent social movements, thinking in particular about the power and counter-power of networks. Finally, we will examine resistance through representation, focusing on the contested practice of selfies, reels, and other content focused on the self, and on the problematic that big data and artificial intelligence tools pose 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 7: 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 three approaches for studying technology critically: the political economy approach, the intersectional approach, and the decolonial approach.

**Essential Readings**


**Additional Readings**


**Supervision Question**

- How can we critically understand the concept of the information society?
Is the concept still relevant to the dynamics at play today?

Thinking and Talking Question

What is the connection between information society discourses and racial inequality and dispossession?

Lecture 8: 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, #YaMeCanse 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?
- Do social media platforms enable or foreclose the possibility for resistance and social movements?

**Thinking and Talking Question**

- What are the tensions arising from environmental and/or racial justice movements’ uses of social media?

**Lecture 9: 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. In particular, we'll also consider the implications of platform and infrastructure power, especially when these govern the main channels through which social movements engage in resistance – how is state and corporate power entangled or challenged through e.g. community standards, content moderation, and censorship? Or through enabling tools of policing and surveillance, e.g. predictive policing and facial recognition? We will then circle back to the political economy approach to reflect on the environmental consequences of the ‘cloud,’ in which such digital representations tend to be stored,
before returning to the decolonial approach and considering the emancipatory potential and challenges of ‘refusal’.

**Essential Readings**


**Additional Readings**


**Supervision Question**

- How is representation mediated and weaponised in an age of surveillance giants, AI, and Big Data?
- How are digital spaces reclaimed or instrumentalized towards resistance-oriented goals?

**Thinking and Talking Question**

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

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**Section Two, Module Four: Credit and Debt in Unequal Societies**

**Module Four Lecturer**

Dr Matthew Sparkes

**Module Overview**

This module introduces one of the most significant social, economic, and cultural developments of the neoliberal era: the unprecedented rise in personal debt. We will explore the underlying dynamics behind these changes, as well as the far-reaching implications for social (in)equality, identity, culture, and politics.

The module is focused on a sociologically informed critical exploration of personal debt outside of the dominant worldview of economists and bankers. We will start by examining how personal debt feeds into social inequalities (and the other way around) while contemplating entangled questions regarding marketisation, exploitation, domination, and extraction. We then shift to consider the cultural impacts of debt, and how unequal societies influence how and why people turn to credit. Finally, we will examine struggles over debt, including how experiences of debt may unfold as individualising compliance or a collectivising resistance to its logic.
Lecture 10: Critical approaches to social stratification in indebted societies

Lecture Overview
The first session deals with the structural impact of personal debt. We start with a brief historical analysis of personal debt, before examining the core factors driving its rise and significance in the neoliberal era. We will then shift our focus to three key approaches grappling with the stratifying consequences of personal debt: the stratification approach, the critical Marxist approach, and the classification situations approach. Throughout, we will consider how these processes intersect with questions of class, race, and gender.

Essential readings

Additional Readings
Supervision Question

- How can we critically understand the stratifying consequences of the rise in personal debt?

Lecture 11: Consuming credit – Housing, Consumption, and Culture

Lecture Overview

The second session deals with the cultural impact of credit. Drawing on case studies from Anglo-America, Latin-America, and Europe, we will explore why people turn to credit and explore how this alters places, spaces, and identities. The first part of the session examines unequal access to home ownership, including how the growth in access has had conservatising, individualising and insecuritising effects. In the second part, we will explore how consumer credit is used to both delineate and resist cultural and symbolic boundaries, and examine whether consumer credit is integral to the construction of social identity in increasingly unequal societies. We will end by discussing the consequences of these practices for understandings of social mobility.

Essential Reading


Additional Reading

Debt and Housing


**Consumer Credit and Consumption**


**Supervision Questions**

- To what extent is credit use cultural? Critically discuss with reference to housing and/or consumption.

**Lecture 12: The ideology of debt and its affects**

**Lecture Overview**

The final session moves on to examine the problem of debt and the related experience of indebtedness, including the ideologies and materialities that sustain it. We will look specifically at how recent sociological approaches spotlight the role of politicians, the media, creditors, and credit reference agencies in propagating and upholding a stigmatising discourse of moral obligation to repay, often unpayable, debts. We will also consider the paradoxical duality between individualising compliance to this debt logic as well as instances of collectivising resistance to its seemingly unstoppable rise and how these are (and should be) increasingly intertwined with environmental justice.

**Essential Reading**


**Additional Reading**

Supervision Questions

- Resistance to and compliance with debt co-exist. Critically discuss.
- How useful is the concept of stigma as a classificatory form of power for understanding the ideology of debt?