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. There will be twelve possible coursework essay titles, each corresponding to one of the SOC12 lecture topics. You *CANNOT* answer the same topic for your coursework and exam*. 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, 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, ask the students to write an op-ed or an author/concept biography, 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.

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). Supervisions for the coursework will be arranged by Ali Meghji, who will email you 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. Imperialism, Marxism, and anti-colonialism (Dr Meghji)
3. Pluriversality and the decolonial turn (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)

Weeks 7-8: Coursework workshops (Dr Meghji)

**Section B: Empirical Developments**
1. From the Haitian revolution to anti-colonial agency (Dr Meghji)
2. Eugenics and genocide (Simina Dragos)
3. Hindu nationalism (Dr Desai)
4. Sexualities and bodies in the peripheries (Dr Phillip)
5. Climate crisis (Dr Meghji)
6. Decolonizing Sociology and Academia (Everyone)

Weeks 7-8: Coursework workshops (Dr Meghji)

**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.

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Lecture 2. Imperialism, Marxism, and anti-colonialism


From Karl Marx to Kwame Nkrumah
Towards a decolonial political economy ByPaul Emiljanowicz [ordered by SPS library]

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 3. Pluriversality and the decolonial turn

1. What are the central differences, if there are any, between universalism and pluriversality?
2. Critically assess the application of pluriversalism in praxis.

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


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”? 
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

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 coloniality complicate understandings of sexuality and sexual rights?

Coloniality and the climate crisis

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?

From the Haitian revolution to anti-colonial agency


Bayyinah Bello The Haitian Revolution of 1791 Pt 1


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.

**Eugenics and genocide**


**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/](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’?

**Hindu Nationalism**


**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?