Aims and objectives
This course offers students the opportunity to pursue their interests in contemporary social theory at an advanced level. The course encourages students to use social theory in order to think creatively, constructively and critically about the ways in which the social and political world is changing today. The course takes for granted an intermediate level of knowledge of classical and contemporary social theory; students are expected to develop and extend their knowledge of key thinkers by reading their work in greater depth. However, the course itself is organized around problems and issues, not around thinkers and texts. The emphasis is on encouraging students to practice social theory by thinking theoretically about particular problems and issues. The course seeks to bring social theory alive by getting students to draw on the resources of social theory in order to understand the world of the 21st century and how it is changing.

Course aims:
• To enable students to pursue their interests in social theory at an advanced level.
• To enable students to read a selection of theoretical texts in detail.
• To encourage students to use social theory to analyse particular aspects or characteristics of contemporary societies.
• To encourage students to think creatively, constructively and critically about how the social and political world is changing today.

Course organization
The course is organized in terms of discrete modules – i.e., clusters of lectures or seminars. Each module consists of around four hours of lectures or seminar-based teaching, often scheduled as two two-hour sessions. The modules are focused on particular problems or themes and are taught by leading practitioners of social theory today. The content of the modules will vary from year to year, depending on the availability of members of staff. In 2021-22 the modules listed below will be offered:

Michaelmas 2021
Prof Jennifer Gabrys, 'Introduction to Advanced Social Theory: Pluralizing Social Theory' (13 and 20 October)
Dr Filipe Carreira da Silva, ‘Rethinking Populism’ (27 October and 3 November)
Dr Michiel van Oudheusden ‘Citizens and Collectives’ (10 and 17 November)
Dr Max Ritts, ‘Indigeneity’ (24 November and 1 December)

Lent 2021
Dr Ali Meghji, ‘Critical Race Theory, Decoloniality, and Contemporary Nationalisms: Towards a Theoretical Synergy’ (26 January and 2 February)
Dr Mónica Moreno-Figueroa, ‘Domination, Resistance and Internalized Racism’ (9 and 16 February)
Dr Michelle Westerlaken, ‘Thinking With More-than-Human Entities’ (23 February and 2 March)
Dr Danilo Urzedo, 'Environmental Futures' (9 and 16 March)
Covid-19
Because we will be continuing to respond to Covid-19 during the 2021-22 academic year, we will typically be holding lectures online, with accompanying seminars that may be scheduled for in-person or online meetings depending upon conditions. The usual lecture format will include a presentation of approximately 1 hour in length that you will be able to view in advance of course discussion, and 1 hour of course discussion and related activities. All session formats will be recorded and made available on the course moodle on the VLE, along with slides and/or related material for each lecture.

When consulting these materials and recordings, please be sure to read the University of Cambridge’s policy on the ‘use of recordings for remote teaching and learning,’ which notes that the copyright for course materials including videos belong to its lecturer. Course videos are only to be used by the cohort of students enrolled in this course and only for the current academic year (2021-22). These materials may not be shared more widely. Please refer to the Department and University guidance on Covid-19 adaptations on a regular basis for updates.

Supervision
Supervision will be provided either by the individuals teaching the modules or by other supervisors who have agreed to supervise for this paper. One or two contacts are given for each module and they will either do the supervision or help arrange it. There is a central SOC 6 sign-up sheet for supervisions that you will be able to access from the course moodle. You can sign up for 6 total lectures, with 3 in Michaelmas and 3 in Lent terms. If students or Directors of Studies encounter difficulties with supervision arrangements they should contact the Course Organizer.

Revision
A one-hour revision class is scheduled at the beginning of Easter Term. You will have the option of signing up for 2 revision lectures in Easter term in preparation for your examination.

Assessment
The course will be assessed by means of a three-hour examination paper.
Brief description of modules and reading lists

MICHAELMAS TERM 2021

1. Introduction to Advanced Social Theory -- Prof Jennifer Gabrys

Session 1: Introduction to Social Theory and Social Problems
How does the study of social theory change when engaging with social problems, even more than distinct writers or theories? We will discuss how social problems are constituted, the ways in which social theory variously engages with the formation of social problems, and different ways in which theory can address social problems. Through an overview of the course contents, we will look at the multiple social problems and topics to be addressed in this course, and consider how this approach might reorient customary approaches to social theory.

Session 2: Pluralizing Social Theory
Building on the introductory session to this course, we will engage in more depth with questions of how to pluralize social theory when studying and engaging with social problems. We will analyse how diverse and multiple formations of epistemology and ontology generate and inform different ways of engaging with social life. We will look at how social theory as developed within indigenous, Black, postcolonial, decolonial, feminist and queer scholarship provides alternative approaches to ways of knowing and being that also make the political implications of different ways of doing social theory more apparent. This second lecture will continue themes addressed in the introductory lecture while providing a map for the overall course, where lecture and discussion topics will engage with questions of truth and authority, community and political agency, inequality and social justice. How do more pluralistic approaches to social theory and social life enable researchers to create other ways of practicing theory and producing knowledge?

Required Reading

Recommended Reading
Global Social Theory, https://globalsocialtheory.org/
Chapter 5: "Postcolonial Science and Technology Studies: Are There Multiple Sciences?"


**Essay questions**

1. How do different approaches to social life create different social practices?
2. Explain how ‘situated knowledges’ could change approaches to objectivity.
3. Does global sociology contribute to more pluralistic social theory?

**Supervision**

Contact Prof Jennifer Gabrys at jg899@cam.ac.uk

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**2. Rethinking Populism – Dr Filipe Carreira da Silva**

Especially after the 2008 financial crisis, the term ‘populism’ has become one of the buzzwords of our time. Journalists, politicians, pundits and scholars alike have come to apply the term to a vast array of phenomena across the political spectrum: from anti-establishment political movements on both left and right (Greece’s Syriza, Spain’s Podemos, Italy’s Five Stars, the Tea Party and Occupy Wall Street movements in the United States), through political leaders (e.g., Erdogan in Turkey, and Orban in Hungary) and candidates (e.g., Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders in the US), to parties and currents within parties challenging the traditional political mainstream from the inside (e.g., the National Front in France). Yet, amongst socio-political concepts, populism has pride of place as one of the most contentious, being variously characterized as ideology, logic, discursive frame, strategy/organization, a mode of political practice, or, for those privileging its performative aspects, political style.

In this module, I take one step back, and call this labelling into question. What unites and disunites the above mentioned phenomena? Does the ‘populist’ theoretical/conceptual framework help us make sense and explain these phenomena, or, on the contrary, does such a framework inhibit our understanding of what these phenomena are and what they are about? Do the different understandings of populism itself, both conceptually and methodologically allow for significantly different levels of understanding and scientific analysis of the phenomena in question? In the first session, I discuss the rise of ‘populist politics’ in Europe and in the United States and examine different conceptualizations of ‘populism’ and their operationalization for the purpose of analysis. In the second session, I consider how populism has characteristics of utopian thinking: populist leaders use highly moralized images of the past to castigate the present and promise the eminent advent of a new future.
Session 1:
Required Reading

Recommended Reading

Session 2:
Required Reading

Recommended Reading

Essay questions
1. What factors led to the rise of populism in recent years?
2. Is populism an ideology?
3. “The utopia of the Populists was in the past, not the future.” (Hofstadter) Discuss.

Supervision
Contact Dr FC Silva at fcs23@cam.ac.uk

3. Citizens and Collectives – Dr Michiel van Oudheusden
This module will consist of two sessions that investigate theories and practices of citizens and collectives. The first session, ‘Making Citizens and “doing” Citizenship,’ will engage with citizenship in a broad theoretical and empirical sense. The session views citizenship as a set
of varied practices through which citizens set the terms of civic membership and define civic rights and duties – often through political contestation and struggle. In this way, it seeks to avoid a too static, legal or juridical definition of citizenship as a set of (individual) rights and obligations; instead drawing attention to its social construction in various cultures, its rich histories, and inviting inquiry into possible citizenship futures.

The second session, ‘Scientific Citizenship,’ will continue to explore how citizenship is articulated in practice, with a specific focus on how contemporary forms of citizenship are mediated and articulated through technosciences, new publics and new problems, science policies, data practices, and technological infrastructures. If citizenship always includes fellow citizens, as articulated by Balibar, then who are the fellow citizens and communities that emerge along with new sciences and technologies?

**Session 1: Making and Doing Citizenship**

*Required Reading*


https://policy.bristoluniversitypress.co.uk/disputing-citizenship


*Recommended Reading*


**Session 2: Scientific Citizenship**

*Required Reading*


Isin, Engin. 2009. “Citizenship in Flux: The Figure of the Activist Citizen.” Subjectivity 29, no. 1, 367-388.

**Recommended Reading**

Beraldo, D and Milan S. 2019. From data politics to the contentious politics of data. Big Data & Society, 6(2). DOI: [https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951719885967](https://doi.org/10.1177/2053951719885967)


**Essay questions**

1. What is a sociological approach to citizenship and why should it matter?
2. How does citizenship feel?
3. In what ways does citizenship change through technologies and technological practices?

**Supervision**

Contact Dr M van Oudheusden at michiel.vanoudheusden@kuleuven.be

**4. Indigeneity – Dr Max Ritts**

Throughout the latter half of the 20th century, historically marginalized and disparate communities across the globe have found common association in an emergent and often elusive category: ‘Indigeneity’. But most scholars agree that the impetus for the development and internationalization of this concept came from not from these peoples, but rather from liberal democratic political elites in settler colonial societies. In western liberal societies, moreover, modernization discourses have tended to position indigenous peoples either as impediments to economic development, or as “natural guardians” of threatened
environments. With the rise of climate geopolitics and industrial technoscience over the last three decades, these appraisals have intensified with mixed results. Indigenous communities are increasingly cast as sites of salvation, hope, and economic opportunity -- even as they continue to bear the brunt of state-sanctioned surveillance, violence, and resource theft. Given these developments, how should we understand the meaning and political utility of the concept of Indigeneity today?

Session One provides a general survey of the concept of Indigeneity, and its lineages in the decolonization movements, techno-sciences, and multicultural liberalisms of the post-war period. Here, we will observe how figurations of race, nature, and place have been assigned to (and claimed by) Indigenous communities, with dramatically uneven results. Session Two will examine the conjunctural politics of Indigeneity during an era of global extractivism. It will assess some of the ways in which Indigenous contestations to differently configured colonialisms (such as "settler", "classical" and "European" variants) are both widespread and deeply felt across Indigenous territories but also identities, institutions, and creative practices. Both sessions look at how Indigeneity, and with it, distinct Indigenous communities, have been configured by and responded to Western theoretical (and practical) understandings of nature (human and non-human). Through these sessions, we will observe how the range of characteristics cited as relevant to “Indigeneity” often tell us much more about the fault-lines within Western nation states than they do the peoples (and places) in question.

Session 1: Configuring Indigeneity

Required reading

Recommended reading

Session 2: "Indigenous Interruptions"

Required reading


**Recommended reading**

de Sousa Santos, Boaventura (2016) "Epistemologies of the South and the Future", *From the European South: a transdisciplinary journal of postcolonial humanities* 1, 17-29.


**Questions**

1. Where in the world is 'Indigeneity' found (and where in the world is it not found)?
2. To what extent, if at all, are critical social theory and Indigenous thought complementary?
3. How does the concept of ‘nature’ enter into articulations of Indigeneity? Provide at least 3 examples and explain their connection to one another.

**Supervision**

Contact Dr Max Ritts at mjr223@cam.ac.uk

**LENT TERM 2021**

5. **Critical Race Theory, Decoloniality, and Contemporary Nationalisms: Towards a Theoretical Synergy – Dr Ali Meghji**

In this two-part module we will consider the central differences and overlaps between critical race theory (CRT) and decolonial thought. Rather than attempting to synthesise these two approaches, we will consider the possibility for a social theory built around synergy. In order to demonstrate how this synergy may work, we will then focus on the case studies of contemporary nationalisms, including Brexit, Trumpamerica, Modi’s populism in India, and Bolsanaro in Brazil. Students will have to decide whether, when addressed with such realities of contemporary nationalisms and political crises, they opt for CRT, decolonial thought, a synthesis, or a synergy.

**Sessions 1 and 2:**
Required Reading (On Decolonial Thought):

Required Reading (On Critical Race Theory):

Required Reading (Case Studies):

Recommended Reading (On Decolonial Thought):
TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World 1(1).

Recommended Reading (On Critical Race Theory):

Recommended Reading (Case Studies):


Masood A and Nisar MA (2019) Speaking out: A postcolonial critique of the academic discourse on far-right populism: Organization


Essay questions
1. Are critical race theory and decolonial thought inconsistent theoretical paradigms?
2. Is there any potential to use critical race theory and decolonial thought together in sociological analysis?
3. To what extent, if at all, are critical race theory and decolonial thought complementary social theories?

Supervision
Contact Dr Ali Meghji at am2059@cam.ac.uk

6. Domination, Resistance and Internalized Racism – Dr Mónica Moreno-Figueroa

The aim of this module is to explore the applicability of notions of ‘internal’, subjective, emotive, commonsensical, habitual, on the one hand, and resistance, confrontation and opposition, on the other hand, to social problems and notions of change. We will focus on the topic of racism but also touch on other oppressions such as classism, sexism, homophobia, ageism, fatphobia, ableism, to guide a discussion on how sociology, cultural studies, critical race studies, feminist theory, social psychology and related social sciences deal with the complexity of domination. By exploring the notion of internalized racism, we will consider what it takes to live through experiences of exclusion and privilege and also how those experiences develop logics to keep the systems of oppression in place.

Key questions will be: how can we think about social transformation at a point where the figure of protest and resistance has become predictable? How can we then grapple with the moments of compliance, habit, difficulty and at times inability to resist? What do we lose when we romanticize resistance and do not consider how the contention of dominance operates? What do we gain when we keep the possibility of radical social transformation as a guiding force in our investigations? We will consider the concepts of domination, hegemony,
ideology, common sense, habit, internalized oppression and resistance in relation to racism. We will look at how racism continues to renew its systematic and structural power, forms and pervasiveness and what the challenges are when exploring the roles people play in this.

**Session 1: The internalised side of oppression**

*Required Reading*


*Recommended Reading*


**Session 2. Domination, Ideology, Habit and Resistance**

**Required Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


Essay questions
1. What is the role of internalized oppression in the reproduction of inequality and injustice?
2. To what extent a focus on the notion of habit can help us tackle oppression and imagine social transformation?

Supervision
Contact Dr Monica Moreno Figueroa at mm2051@cam.ac.uk

7. Thinking With More-than-Human Entities – Dr Michelle Westerlaken
This module aims to bring our understanding of social theory into the realms of thinking with more-than-human entities. Anna Tsing writes on the importance of cultivating “the arts of noticing” (Tsing 2015), and Haraway’s slogan advocates for a “Staying with the Trouble” (Haraway 2016). But what could this mean in a more-than-human world? How can the inclusion of more-than-human entities in social theory rework social collectives? In the first session we will introduce and challenge the notion of the more-than-human by unpacking this term, discussing alternatives, and questioning if we are even human individuals ourselves. Central to this discussion is how more-than-human social theory may have different implications across marginalized groups and Indigenous worldviews.

To further explore how more-than-human entities impact the Anthropocene, in the second session, we will be guided by the Feral Atlas to discuss specific examples of entities and multispecies entanglements that have ‘gone feral’. The heterogeneity of this compendium facilitates a conversation in which different scales, temporalities, and modes of representation exist and help to understand relations beyond anthropocentric modes of thinking. By attending to more-than-human entanglements, and bringing in different examples, we will investigate a social theory that is more inclusive of the relations that other entities propose.

Session 1: More-Than-Human? Less-Than-Human?
Required Reading

Recommended Reading


### Session 2: Feral Stories & Multispecies Entanglements

**Required Reading**


Read at least three entries in the Feral Atlas and choose one to bring to class for discussion.

**Recommended Reading**


**Essay questions**

1. What could it mean to *think-with* more-than-human entities in sociology?
2. How can more-than-human approaches to sociology offer different understandings of the Anthropocene?
3. How do ‘feral’ entities reproduce social inequalities for both human- and multispecies communities?

**Supervision**

Contact Dr Michelle Westerlaken at mw833@cam.ac.uk
8. **Environmental Futures -- Dr Danilo Urzeda**

In this module, we consider how different social practices imagine, model and act upon environmental futures. Large-scale tropical deforestation, forest fire intensification, loss of biodiversity, and diverse climate change events are constraining the possible plurality of environmental futures. Over the last few decades, scientific analyses of natural (rather than social) systems have led a global sustainable agenda, including ambitious green development strategies, to tackle devastating environmental challenges. However, social practices and worlds are an important part of how environmental futures are identified, practiced, and generated. For instance, Indigenous peoples, traditional communities and social movements raise plural forms of imagining and performing the futures through deep collective histories and diverse cultural values to strengthen their own environmental planning and acting.

In the first session, we discuss key concepts from futures studies to explore how futures are identified. We will consider how techniques of anticipation, as well as modelling systems, have influenced power dynamics and led to political decision-making processes that implement specific governance procedures typically focused on market-based solutions. The second session will examine how Indigenous peoples, local communities and social movements become agents in building alternative ways to claim environmental autonomy and self-determination, which further highlights distinctive possibilities for human and nonhuman relationships. We will question the tensions and opportunities for embracing creative and participatory practices that recalibrate environmental relations and futures.

**Session 1: The end of the worlds: anticipation and governance of the environmental futures**

*Required reading*


*Recommended reading*


Session 2: Dreaming of possible worlds: plural environmental futures and governance

**Required reading**


**Recommended reading**


**Media**


**Essay questions**

1. How do worldviews and predictions manufacture possible, probable, and preferred environmental futures? Discuss the respective role of the state, corporations, science, and inter-governmental organisations in closing the environmental futures on the planet.

2. How do Indigenous and traditional knowledge practices amplify or create possibilities for other environmental futures?

3. Are there opportunities for remaking environmental governance through participatory, plural, and creative systems?

**Supervision**

Contact Dr Danilo Urzedo at did24@cam.ac.uk