Aims and Objectives

To provide knowledge and understanding of a host of connected, pressing social problems in contemporary Britain.

To develop an understanding of the relations and intersections among (1) class domination and social exclusion, (2) nationalisms, racism, and xenophobia, and (3) gender and sexual inequalities in contemporary Britain.

Modes of Teaching and Supervision Arrangements

The course is taught by means of lectures and supervisions. Students are advised to write at least four essays over the year. Students will be expected to produce a **minimum of 4 essays**. They will be supported with 6 supervisions. Each supervision session will typically be used to read and discuss an article, and students may be asked to present on a topic, or find other ways to address the topic in ways that are stimulating and provide a learning experience for students. Students are expected to prepare for a supervision in advance and to actively engage in discussion.

In general, lecturers will give supervisions on their course; but students should consult their College Director of Studies and the Course Organizer.

Mode of Assessment

One three-hour examination paper from which three questions must be answered. Students are expected to prepare essays from at least two of the three modules offered in the course.
**Student Feedback:**

Your chance to put forward your opinions on the papers you take!

For Sociology Papers, student feedback is collected via hard-copy anonymous questionnaires distributed at various points in the academic year. It is crucial that you fill these out and give feedback on your papers. Getting good feedback from students makes the course better and shows the outside world how Cambridge degrees consider their students’ views.

Course organisers take students' concerns and suggestions into consideration each year when preparing their paper outlines and selecting supervisors for the year. So please remember to fill out a form either in hard-copy or on the undergraduate sociology website.

**Module One: Class Domination and Social Exclusion**

Dr Jeff Miley & Dr Matthew Sparkes

These lectures explore the dynamics of class domination and social exclusion in contemporary Britain. To do so we trace the major changes since 1945 in the ideologies, strategies and institutions for governing Britain. This includes: post war reconstruction and the settlement with labour; the Keynesian Welfare State and consensus politics; the ‘crises’ of the 1970s; the rise of the New Right; the politics of Thatcherism and the reconstruction of capitalism in Britain, 1979 – 1997; New labour; and the emergence of populism. The five lectures will trace the evolution of the class structure and trajectories of inequalities in view of these political and economic developments. We explore the theoretical and empirical developments in the sociology of class that has sought to make sense of these shifts. Attention is paid to the dynamics of intersectionality, social mobility, and social exclusion.


**Supervision essay Questions**

A) What is the relevance of Engels’ concept of “social murder” in contemporary Britain?
B) How have class politics been related to racism and/or patriarchy in Modern Britain?
C) In what ways is the recent Grenfell Tower tragedy illustrative of the deeper history of class domination in Britain?

**Readings:**


* Martin McKee, “Grenfell Tower fire: why we cannot ignore the political determinants of health *BMJ* 2017; 357 doi: [https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.j2966](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.j2966) (Published 20 June 2017).


* Joanna Whitehead, “Grenfell Tower Is About Race and Class,” June 2017. Accessible at: [https://www.thefword.org.uk/2017/06/grenfell_tower_race_and_class/](https://www.thefword.org.uk/2017/06/grenfell_tower_race_and_class/)


**Lecture Two – October 23. The Rise and Demise of Social Democracy in Britain (Dr. Miley)**

**Supervision essay Questions**

A) How was the contradiction between capitalism and democracy managed in the Social Democratic period?

B) Why did the Social-Democratic “Consensus” Collapse?

C) What Were the Causes and Content of Thatcherite Hegemony?

**Readings:**


* Geoffrey Ingham, *Capitalism Divided* (Schocken Books, 1984) Introduction, Chapters 1, 2, 9, Concluding Remarks.


* Ralph Miliband, *Capitalist Democracy in Britain* (Oxford University Press, 1982).


Hall, S. *The Politics of Thatcherism* (Lawrence and Wishart, 1983).


Tess Lanning, “Feminism and Democratic Renewal.” Accessible at: https://www.lwbooks.co.uk/sites/default/files/s52_02lanning.pdf


Supervision Essay Questions:
A) Is neoliberalism dying in Britain? OR
B) What effect has austerity had on class inequalities and class subjectivities in Britain?

Readings


“All that is Solid, “Jeremy Corbyn and the Working Class.” Accessible at: http://averypublicsociologist.blogspot.co.uk/2017/07/jeremy-corbyn-and-working-class.html


Kyle Geraghty, “Corbyn’s Emerging Class Coalition.” Accessible at: https://newsocialist.org.uk/corbyns-emerging-class-coalition/


Alex Hunt, “Does Jeremy Corbyn Have a Woman Problem?” Accessible at: http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-34258171

Rosanna Hutchinson, “A Victory for Labour’s Left-Wing Women.” Accessible at: http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/83189/1/Engenderings%20%E2%80%93%20Labour%E2%80%99s%20left-wing%20women.pdf


Lecture Four: – Nov. 27. Transformations of the Class Structure, Meritocracy and Social Mobility (Dr. Sparkes)

Supervision Essay Questions
A) Does cultural analysis add to our understanding of social class in contemporary Britain?
B) Is British society meritocratic?

Readings (A):

**Reading (B)**

10
Lecture Five (Dec. 4)– Classificatory Struggles and Classification Situations: the Underclass Debate and the Dynamics of Exclusion (Dr. Sparkes)

Supervision Essay Questions
A) In what ways does classification affect the lives of British citizens?
B) What is the “underclass” and is the concept useful for understanding contemporary class politics in Britain?

Readings (A)


**Readings (B)**


Module Two: Gender and Sexual Inequalities in Britain

Dr. Robert Pralat and Dr Charlotte Proudman

Sessions 1 and 2 – Jan. 22 and Jan. 29: Sexual Inequalities and the Lived Experience of LGBT People in Britain (Dr. Pralat)

Lecture 1. Sexual Minorities and Legal Inequalities (2 hours)

Lecture Outline

This lecture will discuss social inequalities in Britain in relation to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, paying particular attention to legal reform. With a specific focus on the past half a century, we will examine what political priorities have shaped LGBT social movements. Drawing on historical sociology and socio-legal studies, we will ask about motivations for, and consequences of, different legislative changes, and various ways of achieving them. We will also ask who is most likely to benefit from particular reforms, which groups remain disadvantaged and what is ‘progress’ in LGBT politics.

Supervision Essay Questions

Why have people disagreed about the focus of lesbian/gay politics?
To what extent have sexual minorities in Britain achieved equality?

**Background Reading**


Key readings and an extended reading list, including journal articles and book chapters, will be provided in Michaelmas 2019.

**Lecture 2. Health Inequalities and LGBT Identities (2 hours)**

**Lecture Outline**

This lecture will focus on how the experience of health and illness is mediated by sexuality or gender that is not normative, and on the relationship between LGBT people and medicine. Drawing on medical sociology and critical public health, we will examine how, historically, LGBT people have been pathologised and how, at the same time, their experiences have been marginalised, with particular effects on the provision of healthcare. We will also explore how medicine has shaped contemporary understandings of LGBT identities, paying particular attention to recent challenges facing both LGBT people and healthcare providers.

**Supervision Essay Questions**

How are LGBT people’s experiences of health and illness marked by inequalities?
In what areas of medicine are LGBT people disproportionately affected and why?

**Background Reading**


Key readings and an extended reading list, including journal articles and book chapters, will be provided in Michaelmas 2019.

**Sessions Three and Four – Feminist thinking in society and in the law, Dr Charlotte Proudman**

**Session 3 – MONDAY Feb 3, 4pm-6pm: The law is male, pale and stale**

This session will explore how the law can be used as a tool to further women’s equality in society and how it can be used to reinforce gender inequality. From the design and implementation of the law, to the institutional biases within the legal profession, we will examine the different intersecting layers and patterns of inequality and oppression that disenfranchised groups experience. Second wave feminist, Professor Catherine MacKinnon’s exposition of the state and the law being primarily from the perspective of a white, privileged, heterosexual male provides a lens for analysing the discrete biases that play out in the construction and implementation of the law. We shall take various issues of gender and sexuality that relate to ‘the body’ and consider how the law conceptualises them and attempts to regulate them. The issues under consideration include: rape, abortion, pornography and female genital mutilation.

**Background reading**


Smart, C. *Feminism and the Power of Law*: Routledge, 1989
Supervision Questions

1. How much weight can be placed on a woman’s consent in an inherently unequal context and how could free choice be defined better?

2. How does the institutional structure of the law perpetuate gender inequality in the law and society?

3. What changes would you make to one law, to advance equality, and why?

4. Why does the law seek to regulate women’s sexuality and bodies, when the same cannot be said for me, and what is the impact upon this for women?

Session 4 – MONDAY Feb. 17, 4pm-6pm: A feminist revolution or reform?

This session will explore the different approaches taken to reform the law to advance gender equality. A constant theme is the collaborations and conflicts between feminist and social movements for the liberation of disenfranchised groups in society. The central goal is to distinguish between different strands of feminist thought and apply them to contemporary issues in modern day society. These inequalities might be difficult to see, explain and resist because of the normalisation of unequal power relations. However, we will explore examples of the manifestation of patriarchal power in the public and the private sphere.

We shall consider the two, often opposing, feminist positions in supporting legal reform or the re-structuring of society. Reform often means transforming the current structure from within whereas revolutionary action calls for the breakdown and re-ordering of society. The recent MeToo movement was revolutionary in its breadth and the exposure to intersectional inequalities. However, what structural changes have resulted? And are there examples of regression as a backlash to the MeToo movement? We will then move onto consider the structural changes in policy and law that have been adopted to further gender equality, such as: quotas for women in the workplace, mandatory parental leave, universal childcare, the publishing of pay to reduce the gender gap and so on. But we still live in a society where over 80,000 women are raped each year, institutional gender segregation remains a norm in the echelons of society, women occupy the majority of care roles which are low paid and women are a minority on the boards of FTSE 500 companies – how do we achieve equality across all sectors?
Background reading


Okin, Susan Moller. Is multiculturalism bad for women?. Princeton University Press, 1999


Supervision Questions

1. Can feminist reforms truly revolutionise an inherently unequal society?

2. What were the gains and losses for the MeToo movement? Why has there been a backlash to the MeToo movement? Why was the MeToo movement successful in contrast to others movements (consider who is represented and marginalised)?

3. How does society ensure gender and race parity and is this important?

4. There is much debate about a woman’s quotas in male dominated spheres, are there any advantages and disadvantages in introducing a quota for men in women dominated spheres?

5. Why is the gender pay gap a manifestation of gender equality and how can the gap be reduced?

6. What subtle forms of inequality along class, gender, race and sexuality axes still exist in the law?

Module Three: Nationalisms, Racism and Xenophobia in Britain
Dr. Mark Ramsden & Dr Jeff Miley

The aim of these lectures is to study nationalisms, racism and xenophobia in contemporary Britain. The lectures include an exploration of the relations among Empire, nation and state in the British context. We examine the “troubles” in Northern Ireland, with a special focus on the attempt to forge a “consociational” solution to the violence there. We analyse the causes and consequences of the process of devolution in Scotland (and Wales), with special attention paid to the 2014 referendum. We also include a focus on patterns of racialized, religious and xenophobic exclusions at work in Britain, as they play themselves in the politics of the ongoing “war on terror,” as well as the politics of migration. We look at the politics of racism and racialisation through the lens of immigration and citizenship. And we analyse contending interpretations of the social forces and political significance of Brexit. Throughout, we will pay attention to intersections with gender and class hierarchies.

Lecture One – Nov.6: Racism, Xenophobia, and the Politics of the War on Terror in Britain. (Dr. Miley).


Meer, N. & Modood, T. ‘The Multicultural State We Are In: Muslims, 'Multiculture' and the 'Civic re-balancing' of British Multiculturalism', Political Studies, 57 (3), (pp. 473-497), 2009.


Supervision Questions:

In what ways do racism and xenophobia influence the politics of the “War on Terror”?

In what ways do racism and xenophobia intersect with class and/or gender hierarchies in contemporary Britain?

Lecture Two – Nov. 13: Accommodation and Conflict in Northern Ireland (Dr. Miley)


*Whyte, J. (1991) *Interpreting Northern Ireland*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. [Ch6 (The Traditional Nationalist Interpretation; Ch7 (The Traditional Unionist Interpretation); and Ch8 (Marxist Interpretations).


Millar, A. *Socio-Ideological Fantasy and the Northern Ireland Conflict. The Other Side* (Manchester University Press, 2006).


**Supervision Questions:**

Does the current “consociational” arrangement in Northern Ireland constitute a fair and stable solution?

In what ways is the “traditional Marxist interpretation” of the conflict in Northern Ireland plausible?

**Lecture Three – Nov. 20: Self-Determination for Scotland? (And what about Wales?) (Dr. Miley).**


Vernon Bogdanor, *Devolution in the United Kingdom* (Oxford University Press, 1999)


Tom Nairn, *After Britain: New Labour and the Return of Scotland* (Granta, 2001)


**Supervision Questions:**

What are the most important causes and consequences of devolution in Great Britain?

What were the most important social factors at work in the referendum in Scotland?
Lecture Four – Feb. 19: The United Kingdom, Great Britain, Greater Britain. Empire, State and Nation in England, Wales, Scotland, Ireland and Beyond. (Dr. Ramsden)


Richard Gott, Britain’s Empire. Resistance, Repression and Revolt (Verso, 2011).


**Supervision Questions:**

What is the relation among Empire, nation and state in the British context?

In what ways do Imperial prejudices and exclusions continue to condition dominant national imaginaries in contemporary Britain?

**Lecture Five – Feb. 26: Migration Politics in Britain (Dr. Ramsden)**


**Supervision Question:**

What are the main characteristics of attitudes and policy towards immigration in contemporary Great Britain, and what are their main determinants?

**Lecture 6 – March 4: Institutional racism: turning citizens into immigrants**

This topic will look at the politics of racism and racialisation through the lens of immigration and citizenship. We will consider the three horses of Thatcherism, New Labour, and neoliberal imperialism to analyse how institutional racism shapes Britain’s immigration policies and criteria for citizenship. We will consider a range of examples from virginity tests in the 20th century through to the recent Windrush scandal.


Supervision Questions:

1. How does Britain distinguish between citizens and immigrants?
2. How does the ‘Windrush scandal’ relate to the politics of race, immigration, and citizenship?
3. Is the British immigration system institutionally racist?
Lecture 7 – March 11: The Politics and Sociology of Brexit (Dr. Meghji and Dr. Ramsden)


*Nadine El-Adny, “Brexit Is Not Only an Expression of Nostalgia for Empire, It Is Also the Fruit of Empire,” http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2017/05/11/brexit-is-not-only-an-expression-of-nostalgia-for-empire-it-is-also-the-fruit-of-empire/


Supervision question:

How did class, racial, and gender dynamics intersect in and affect the outcome of the Brexit referendum?