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 practise 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 analyze 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 2017-18 the following modules will be offered:

Michaelmas 2017
Prof John Thompson, ‘The Public and the Private’
Dr Véronique Mottier, ‘Gender and Sexual Nationalism’
Dr Josh Booth, ‘Cultural Trauma’

Lent 2018
Dr Lucy van de Wiel, ‘Remaking Life’
Dr Filipe Carreira da Silva and Dr Monica Brito Vieira, ‘Rethinking Populism’
Dr Monica Moreno Figueroa, ‘Internalized Racism’

Easter 2018
Prof Michael Mann, ‘War and Militarism’
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. If students or Directors of Studies encounter difficulties they should contact the Course Organizer.

Revision
A one-hour revision class will be scheduled at the beginning of Easter Term.

Assessment
The course will be assessed by means of a three-hour examination paper.

Brief description of modules and reading lists

1 The Public and the Private – Prof John Thompson
This aim of this module is to re-examine our ways of thinking about the distinction between the public and the private in relation to changing technologies of media and surveillance in the modern world. We will begin by retracing some aspects of the history of the distinction between the private and the public, starting from Hannah Arendt’s seminal discussion in *The Human Condition*. We will then explore in detail how traditional notions of the public and the private are being challenged, threatened or reconfigured by social and technological change. The first session will focus on the changing nature of the public sphere in the age of mediated communication, while the second session will focus on how privacy is being challenged by the development of computerized databases and the disclosure of personal information online. We shall use examples ranging from political scandals and modern forms of surveillance to blogs and social network sites.

Reading
The new visibility (session 1)

Privacy in question (session 2)


Marwick, Alice and danah boyd, ‘Networked Privacy: How teenagers negotiate context in social media’, *New Media and Society*, 16/7 (2014), pp. 1051-1067.


**Essay questions**

1 Why has scandal become such a prevalent feature of public life?

2 Should we worry about privacy in the age of the internet?

**Supervision**

Contact Prof Thompson at jbt1000@cam.ac.uk

**2 Gender and Sexual Nationalism – Dr Véronique Mottier**

This module will explore intersections between sexuality, gender, race, and national identity. The first 2-hour session examines the ways in which sexuality and sexual ‘purity’ have been mobilized politically by the state. Focusing on the example of eugenic state regulation of reproductive sexuality in pre- and post-War European welfare-states, we analyse the intertwinement of sexuality with normative ideas about gender and race, against the backdrop of processes of nation-building. The second two-hour session further pursues the analysis of politicisations of sexuality and race, examining contemporary controversies and collective mobilizations around (a) sexual and reproductive rights and (b) femonationalism/homonationalism/sexual nationalism.

**Reading**

Racial purity, eugenics and reproductive control (session 1)


Sexual and reproductive rights vs ‘femonationalism’ (session 2)


Essay questions

1 How is sexuality relevant to analyses of nation-building?
2 How are notions of ‘sexual and reproductive rights’ used within contemporary political struggles around migration?
3 Why is race an important category for analyses of reproductive ‘rights’?

Supervision

Contact Dr V. Mottier at vm10004@cam.ac.uk

3 Cultural Trauma – Dr Josh Booth

This module looks at how malevolent, disruptive, and painful social events can be transformed into collective traumas that define individual and group action and determine subsequent historical conflict. Psychoanalytic and realist approaches to social suffering will be contrasted with a cultural-sociological understanding, which emphasizes the constructed quality of collective events and the performative nature of social action. What makes the cultural sociological approach distinctive? What is the difference between an occurrence and the construction of an event? What is the nature of the classification process? How do good and evil, perpetrator and victim, get defined? What roles do stratification and distribution of resources play? How do carrier groups address various audiences? In attempting to answer these questions, we
will work through two historical examples of cultural trauma: the Holocaust, and the atomic bombing of Hiroshima.

**Reading**  
**Session 1:**  
* Jeffrey Alexander *Trauma: A Social Theory* (Polity, 2012, Introduction, Ch1, Ch 2)  
* Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Johns Hopkins, 1996)  


**Session 2:**  
* Jeffrey Alexander (ed.), *Remembering the Holocaust: A Debate* (Oxford University Press, 2009, critical commentaries and Alexander’s response)  
Bruce Grant, ‘New Moscow monuments, or states of innocence’, American Ethnologist, Vol. 28(2), 2001


Essay questions
1 Do disruptive events cause cultural traumas?
2 Evaluate the role played by carrier groups in the construction of cultural trauma.

Supervision
Contact Dr Josh Booth at jnwb2@cam.ac.uk

4 Remaking Life – Dr Lucy van de Wiel
This module will review recent debates in the social study of bioscience and biomedicine addressed to the changing status of the ‘biological’ as it becomes increasingly subject to technological intervention – sometimes referred to as the ‘remaking of life’. In the first two-hour session we examine Paul Rabinow’s contention that ‘nature will be remade as technique’ and that new forms of ‘biosociality’ will emerge in response to projects such as the Human Genome initiative. We will further develop this concern with readings by Sarah Franklin and Michelle Murphy in order to explore what, exactly, is meant by ‘biology’ in the context of reproductive technologies. If biology is becoming more ‘technologised’, does this also suggest a more biological model of technology? In what way might we reconceptualise both biology and technology, now that they appear to be increasingly merged? What are the (bio-)political dimensions of these questions?

In the second session we explore these questions with two contemporary case studies. Firstly, we will consider the 21st-century introduction of egg freezing as a means for having children later in life alongside Hannah Landecker’s ‘Living Differently in Time: Plasticity, Temporality and Cellular Biotechnologies.’ Landecker demonstrates how a sociology and cultural critique of biotechnology can offer a rethinking of what it means to ‘be biological’ and to live in time. The question of time is also central in the second case study: a new, visual reproductive technology for embryo selection called time-lapse embryo imaging. With Fox Keller’s concept of the ‘biological gaze’ and Sarah Franklin’s Biological Relatives we will critically examine the technoscientific knowledge practices that shape contemporary understandings of the biological.

Reading
Session 1

See also:

Session 2

See also

Essay questions
1 Is biology socially constructed?
2 Has human reproduction been changed by technology?

Supervision
5 Rethinking Populism – Dr Filipe Carreira da Silva and Dr Mónica Brito Vieira

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, we 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, we 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, we consider one particular historical case to explore the limits of current approaches to ‘populism’.

Reading
First session

**Second session**

**Essay questions**
1 What factors led to the rise of populism in recent years?
2 Is populism an ideology?

**Supervision**
Contact Dr Filipe Carreira da Silva at fcs23@cam.ac.uk

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**6 Internalized Racism – Dr Monica 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, to social problems and notions of change. We will focus on the topic of racism (although many of the ideas may apply to interlocking oppressions such as classism, sexism, ageism, ableism) to guide a discussion on how sociology, cultural studies, critical race studies, feminist theory 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? How can we make it possible for a renewed sense of unity to develop between radicals and people who just tag along and do not engage in critiques of oppression? 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 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.

**Reading**
1. The internalised side of racism (session 1)

2. Domination, Ideology, Habit and Resistance (session 2)


**Essay questions**
1. To what extent do the dominated play a role in their own oppression?
2. In challenging racism how can we think critically about the relation between ideology and habit?

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

**7 War and Militarism – Prof Michael Mann**
This module will be concerned with aspects of war and military power in the 20th and 21st centuries. The first session will focus on war and revolution, and the second will focus on war in the contemporary world.

**Reading**

**War and Revolution (session 1)**

Skocpol, Theda 1979. *States and Social Revolutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


**War in the Contemporary World (session 2)**


Essay questions
1 Would communism have existed without world war?
2 Is the United States an imperial power?
3 Is war obsolete, or has it been revived by terrorism and the United States?

Supervision
Contact Dr Jeff Miley at tjm52@cam.ac.uk