HSPS Tripos – Part 1, Soc1
Introduction to Sociology: Modern Societies I
(2019-20)

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Aims and Objectives
The course has three interconnected aims and objectives:
● to introduce students to the systematic study of society and social life
● to introduce students to the central debates concerning the nature of the modern era and its
  social consequences by exploring a selection of key sociological texts by Karl Marx, Max
  Weber, Emile Durkheim and W.E.B. Du Bois
● to provide students with a fundamental understanding of the major institutions that comprise,
  and issues that confront, modern societies

Course Content
The course introduces students to the discipline of sociology in two parts. In the Michaelmas term
students are thoroughly acquainted with core sociological concepts and concerns (e.g. class,
bureaucracy, social solidarity, social change). We do this through a critical engagement with the
ideas of four central figures in the history of modern sociological thought: Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and W.E.B. Du Bois. Towards the end of Michaelmas and throughout Lent, we
build on the foundations laid by the classical theorists and develop a systematic analysis of key
institutions and aspects of modern societies including the following: the modern state and the rise
of nationalism; citizenship and the welfare state; the media and public life; class and inequality;
gender and sexual divisions; race and ethnicity. We conclude with a broader reflection on the
changing nature of modern societies in our contemporary global age.

Mode of Teaching
The paper is taught through 18 two-hour lectures over three terms. A list of supervision topics is
included in this paper guide and will also be available from the Faculty Office. Students will be
expected to supplement the material acquired in lectures through their own reading of the
literature recommended here and by supervisors. Required reading is starred.

Mode of Assessment
There is one three-hour written examination at the end of the year. Candidates must answer three questions from an undivided paper.

**Supervision**

Supervision is essential for this paper and will be arranged by Directors of Studies in the Colleges. It is recommended to have six to eight supervisions in total for this paper (including revision supervisions), covering six of the topics in this paper guide. A list of qualified supervisors is provided by the paper coordinator.

**Part I: THEORIES OF MODERNITY (Michaelmas 2019)**

Prof Patrick Baert

*Introductory lecture*

(Michaelmas week 1)

This introductory lecture elaborates on the structure of the course. In relation to Part I of the course (theories of modernity), it discusses the relevance of sociological classics for understanding society today and the impact of recent debates (e.g. surrounding decolonizing) on the study and selection of classical authors. Part I focuses on writings by Karl Marx, Max Weber, Emile Durkheim and W.E.B. Du Bois. For all four, we discuss what they see as new or distinctive about modern society, what they think are its main problems and how can they be solved.

In relation to Part II of the course (the study of modern societies), this lecture introduces the notion of intersectionality to frame the empirical themes that will be dealt with.

*Topic 1 – Karl Marx*

(Michaelmas weeks 1-2)

Karl Marx is an unusual figure in that his writings not only contributed to the study of capitalism but also inspired various political experiments around the world. This is very much how he conceived of his own work: whilst his writings engaged with philosophy and were highly theoretical, his ultimate aim was to change the world.

**a. Historical context**

The first part addresses the particular intellectual and socio-political context within which Marx wrote. More specifically, we will consider how Marx was influenced by and reacted against German idealist philosophy and utopian socialist thought.

**b. Historical Materialism and the Communist Revolution**

The second part explores four important texts by Marx. *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* includes an intriguing discussion of alienation, whilst *German Ideology* presents a basic outline
of a materialist conception of history. Both demonstrate the influence of Feuerbach on the young Marx and the extent to which he distances himself from Hegel. Co-written with Friedrich Engels, *Communist Manifesto* is a polemical piece, defending historical materialism and predicting the collapse of capitalism. *Grundrisse* is generally viewed as a transition piece, linking his earlier philosophical concerns with what could be described as a more ‘scientific’ approach found in *Capital*.

c. Marx and Marxism: the legacy and its critics
The final part of this lecture deals with Marx’s enduring influence, the varieties of Marxism, and its critics. We also assess the widely held view that recent social and political events refute the validity of Marx’s views.

**Reading**


**Essays**

1. Do you agree that Marx is a critic of capitalism but not of industrialisation?
2. How relevant is Marx’s theory of exploitation for understanding inequalities in the modern world?

**Topic 2 – Max Weber**

(Michaelmas weeks 3-4)

These lectures introduce Weber’s views about the transition to rational capitalism. As with the
lectures on Marx, we consider two fundamental aspects of Weber’s intellectual project: first, his observations regarding what is distinctive and problematic about modern society; and second, his interest in the role of unanticipated effects in history.

a. Historical context
The first part of this lecture explores the particular intellectual and socio-political context in which Weber wrote. It includes, amongst other things, a discussion of Weber’s relationship to historical materialism, his position vis-a-vis the ‘Methodenstreit’, the notion of Verstehen and the use of ideal types.

b. The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism
The second part introduces Weber’s classic study of the relationship between Protestantism and rational capitalism. The lecture also explores Weber’s text on ‘bureaucracy’.

c. Weberian sociology and its critics
The final part gives some indication of Weber’s influence and assesses various critiques of Weberian sociology.

Reading
Collins, H. Weberian Sociological Theory. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (esp. chapters 1, 2)

Essays
1. According to Weber, what makes bureaucracies efficient? Do you agree?
2. Critically discuss Weber’s theory on the role of the Predestination doctrine in the development of early capitalism.
**Topic 3 – Emile Durkheim**

(Michaelmas week 5)

These lectures introduce Durkheim’s views about the transition to a modern differentiated society. We focus on *Division of Labour* and *Suicide*, discussing it in two ways. Firstly, we consider Durkheim’s thoughts on what is distinctive and problematic about modern society, and secondly his views concerning how society is held together.

**a. Historical context**

The first part of this lecture explores the particular intellectual and socio-political context in which Durkheim wrote. It includes a discussion of Durkheim's efforts to create a new academic discipline, the influence of Comtean positivist philosophy and the socio-political situation in the Third Republic in France.

**b. Division of Labour, Suicide and other works**

The second part introduces Durkheim’s *Division of Labour*. We first discuss Durkheim’s use of evolutionary theory to account for societal change. Second, we discuss his diagnosis of the problems of modern society, in particular the notion of anomie. We subsequently explore how some of the themes in *Division of Labour* are taken up in later works, in particular his groundbreaking book *Suicide*.

**c. Durkheimian sociology and its critics**

The second part of this lecture explores Durkheim’s legacy as manifest in the work of more recent social thinkers. It also discusses major criticisms of Durkheimian sociology.

**Reading**


**Essays**
1. What does Durkheim mean by anomie, and why does he regard it as a problematic feature of modern societies?
2. What are the major strengths and flaws of Durkheim’s book *Suicide*?

**Topic 4 – W.E.B. Du Bois**

(Michaelmas week 6)

These lectures introduce W.E.B. Du Bois’ sociological reflections on race and ethnicity. We focus on his text *The Souls of Black Folk*, a collection of essays that reflect on the condition of African Americans at the beginning of the twentieth century in the US.

a. Historical context
We explore the specific social and political context in which Du Bois grew up with a focus on racial segregation. We analyse how his studies at Harvard and Berlin affected him and how his sociological work was intertwined with his political activism.

b. Souls
We explore *The Souls of Black Folk* and discuss key concepts such as ‘double consciousness’, ‘the veil’ and ‘the colour line’. We also pay attention to other writings by Du Bois, including *The Philadelphia Negro*.

c. Legacy
We discuss the relevance of Du Bois’ work on contemporary sociological analysis of race and ethnicity. We discuss the similarities between Du Bois’ concerns and those by Frantz Fanon and Steve Biko.

**Reading**


Essays
1. What is meant by ‘double consciousness’? What are the possible political implications of this notion?
2. Would you agree that, for Du Bois, Fanon and Biko, racial inequality is not only a structural issue, but also manifests itself at a psychological level?
Part II: The Study of Modern Societies (Michaelmas 2019 - Lent 2020)

SOCIAL INEQUALITIES
Dr Manali Desai

Topic 1 – Class and Inequality
(Michaelmas week 7)

a. In this part of the lecture we will discuss various theories of class, examining how neo-Marxists and neo-Weberians have thought about class, and Bourdieu’s variation on the theme.

b. In this part of the lecture we will discuss empirical studies of class, examining evidence on the persistence and evolution of social class in modern Britain.

Reading

a.

b.


**Essays**

a. Do Savage et. al. make a convincing case for a new model of class? Why or why not?

b. Discuss and provide evidence for two mechanisms that enable class in modern Britain to persist.

**Topic 2 – Race, Ethnicity and Racism**

(Michaelmas week 8)

a. The first part of this lecture will discuss the concepts of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’ and how they are linked to contemporary inequalities.

b. In the second part of this lecture we will discuss the history of racism in the UK and beyond, considering how ethnic divisions can become racialized and lead to discrimination and violence.

**Reading**

a. 


*b.


b.


*Bhambra, G. K. (2017) ‘Brexit, Trump, and “Methodological Whiteness”: on the


**Essays**

a. What are the similarities and differences (if any) between the concepts of race and ethnicity?

b. Discuss two key social or cultural mechanisms by which racism persists in contemporary culture (you can choose a non-western country or a country other than the UK)?

**Topic 3 – Nations and Nationalisms**

(Lent week 1)

a. This part of the lecture addresses the rise of the nation and nationalism in Europe and beyond.

b. In this part of the lecture we will ask whether nationalism is on the decline in the face of globalization.

**Reading**

a.


b.


**Essays**

a. Discuss the strengths and weaknesses of Anthony Smith’s theory of the ethnic origins of nations.
b. Discuss, using examples, how ‘globalization’ both erodes and strengthens nationalism.

**Topic 4 – Gender, Sexuality, and Intersectionality**

(Lent week 2)

a. In this part of the lecture we will discuss the category of ‘gender’; how is it constructed, and why is it so powerful? How are gender and sexuality related?
b. What is ‘intersectionality’ in sociology and why is it important?

**Reading**

a.


Beauvoir, Simone de. 1949. The Second Sex. [Available in two English translations.]


b.

* Collins, Patricia Hill. 1991. Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the


McCall, Leslie. ‘The Complexity of Intersectionality.’ Signs 30.3 (Spring 2005): 1771-1800


**Essays**

a. Are gender and sexuality fundamentally intertwined, or should they be considered as entirely separate analytical frameworks?

b. Discuss two ways in which the theory and method of intersectionality challenges white, western feminism (or feminist theory).

**Topic 5 – The Global Politics of Inequality**

(Lent week 3)

a. This part of the lecture discusses the rise in global inequalities and considers some of the antecedents of these inequalities.

b. This part of the lecture discusses the consequences of these inequalities with a focus on austerity and structural adjustment policies.

**Reading**

a.


*Dorling, Danny. 2014. Inequality and the 1%. London: Verso.


**Essays**

a. Why has global inequality grown steadily during the past two decades?

b. Discuss two important consequences of recent austerity measures in the UK, or structural adjustment policies in the global South, using evidence to show these effects.
Topic 1 – Understanding Power
(Lent week 4)

a) This part of the lecture introduces the concept of power by discussing different approaches to understanding power: structuralist, constructivist, and relational ones.

b) The second part of the lecture discusses how these different views on power relate to issues of social inequality at the intersection of class, sexuality, gender and race.

Reading

a) Schmidt, Brian C. “Competing Realist Conceptions of Power.” Millennium 33, no. 3 (June 1, 2005): 523–49.

* Mann, Michael. The Sources of Social Power: Volume 1, A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760. Cambridge University Press, 2012. [Chapter 1]

Poggi, Gianfranco. Forms of Power. John Wiley & Sons, 2016. [Introduction, Chapter 1, 2]


* Castells, Manuel. Communication Power. OUP Oxford, 2013. [Chapter 1]


Essays

1. Discuss the advantages and disadvantages of realist, materialist and post-structuralist approaches to power.

2. How can hegemonic power be challenged in Foucault’s theory of social control?
**Topic 2 – Political Power: State & Revolution**

(Lent week 5)

a) In the first part we explore different approaches to social revolutions and discuss how these views relate to specific approaches to power and the state.

b) In the second part of the lecture we explore different views on the causes and consequences of revolutions.

**Reading**


* Skocpol, Theda. *Social Revolutions in the Modern World*. Cambridge University Press, 1994. [Chapter 4, 7, 8]


* Sanderson, Stephen K. *Revolutions: A Worldwide Introduction to Political and Social Change*. Routledge, 2015. [Chapter 4-5]

b) * Castells, Manuel. *Networks of Outrage and Hope: Social Movements in the Internet Age*. John Wiley & Sons, 2013. [Chapter 1-2]

Kandil, Hazem. “Why Did the Egyptian Middle Class March to Tahrir Square?” *Mediterranean Politics* 17, no. 2 (July 1, 2012): 197–215.


**Essays**

1. What causes revolutions? Are they becoming less likely?

2. Is the use of violence necessary in revolutions?

**Topic 3 – Military Power: War & Society**

(Lent week 6)

a) The first part of this lecture discusses the changing character of collective violence in society.
b) In the second part of this lecture we explore debates on the emergence of “new wars” and the US led “war on terror”.

**Reading**

**a)**


**b)**


**Essays**

1. Discuss if contemporary warfare can be considered “new”.

2. Discuss the “war on terror” and how it relates to the changing position of the state in society.

**Topic 4 – Ideological Power: Neoliberalism**

(Lent week 7)

a) The first part of this lecture discusses different approaches to the concept of ideology and how these relate to realist and post-structuralist views of power.

b) In the second part of this lecture we discuss the causes and consequences of the emergence and global dominance of neoliberal ideology.

**Reading**

**a)**

Mannheim, Karl. *Ideology and Utopia*. Routledge, 2013. [Chapter 1 and 2]

b) Harvey, David. *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*. Oxford University Press, 2007. [Introduction, Chapter 1, 4]


**Essays**

1. If ideologies are only about ideas, how can they become a source of power?

2. Weber famously stated that the state has a monopoly on violence. Can we also say that the state has a monopoly on symbolic, ideological, violence?

**Topic 5 – Combined Power: Empire & Resistance**

(Lent week 8)

a) In the first part of the final lecture we compare the notions of empire and globalization in relation to state, military and ideological power.

b) In the second part we conclude the course by exploring possibilities for resistance to dominant powers in a world shaped by globalization & empire.

**Reading**

a) *Hardt, Michael, and Antonio Negri. Empire. Harvard University Press, 2001. [Chapter 1.1, 1.2, 4.3]*

Mann, Michael. *Incoherent Empire*. Verso, 2005. [Introduction, Chapter 1-4].


Castells, Manuel. c: Social Movements in the Internet Age. John Wiley & Sons, 2013. [Esp. Chapter 1 (Introduction), 2 (Tunisia), 3 (Egypt)]


Essays
1. Is Imperialism still possible today?
2. Do you agree that against neoliberal hegemony, resistance is futile?
Part III. Revision Sessions (Easter Term 2020)
Prof Patrick Baert, Dr Teije Hidde Donker and Dr Manali Desai

Further information:

a) How this course relates to others
This paper provides students with grounding in some of the classic texts of social thought, with an introduction to some of the key concepts in sociology today and with an understanding of some of the core institutions of modern societies. The paper provides the foundations for more advanced coursework in sociology at the IIA and IIB levels.

b) Supplementary Reading List

c) Student Feedback
Your chance to put forward your opinions on the papers you take!

For Sociology Papers, student feedback is collected via anonymous online surveys distributed at various points in the academic year. It is crucial that you complete these 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.