

Colonialism & Modern Social Theory

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Introduction

- I am Professor of Postcolonial and Decolonial Studies
- I co-edited the *Decolonising the University* volume and direct the [Connected Sociologies Curriculum Project](#)
- I also edit the [Global Social Theory](#) website and am keen to facilitate a broader engagement with 'theory'
- The module is developed in relation to a new book I have just written with Professor John Holmwood
- My email is g.k.bhambra@sussex.ac.uk and am happy to respond to questions about the module by email.

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Gurminder K. Bhabra
& John Holmwood

On the role of colonialism
and empire in the formation
of social theory ... from
Hobbes to Hegel,
Tocqueville, Marx, Weber,
Durkheim, and Du Bois.

Forthcoming 2021, Polity

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Module Details

- This module addresses the broader colonial contexts within which contemporary understandings of modern social theory were formed.
- It takes seriously the histories that were the context for the development of these ideas and the ways in which these come to be 'missing' in subsequent discussions.
- It places the theorists firmly within their times and discusses their writings in terms of the histories they were living through.
- The purpose here is to 'decolonise' the concepts and categories they have given to us.

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Indicative Content

- Introduction: The Idea of Modern Society
- Empires and European Colonialism
- Private Property and Possession: Hobbes and Locke
- Stadial Theory and the Idea of Progress
- Tocqueville: From America to Algeria via Haiti
- Marx: Colonialism, Capitalism, and Class
- Weber: Religion, Nation, and Empire
- Durkheim: Modernity and Community
- Du Bois: Beyond the Colour Line
- Decolonising Social Theory

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Seminars & Assessment

- Seminars occur weekly
 - Each seminar involves a lecture on the topic with open discussion on the lecture and readings
 - There are also small group discussions around set questions
 - There will be an essay workshop and time for individual discussion of essays
 - Students are expected to do the weekly readings, to ask questions, and to contribute to seminar discussions
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- One short essay, 1.5k words, due in week 6/7
 - One long essay, 3.5k words, on a question of your choice

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Indicative Readings

- Aravamudan, Srinivas 2009. 'Hobbes and America' in Daniel Carey and Lynn Festa (eds) *The Postcolonial Enlightenment*.
- Berry, Christopher J. 1997. *Social Theory of the Scottish Enlightenment*.
- Du Bois, W. E. B. 1903. *The Souls of Black Folk*.
- Fields, Karen E. 2012. 'Individuality and the Intellectuals: An Imaginary Conversation between Emile Durkheim and W. E. B. Du Bois'
- Marx and Engels 1848. *The Communist Manifesto*
- Pitts, J. 2000. 'Empire and Democracy: Tocqueville & the Algeria Question'
- Shilliam, Robbie 2021. *Decolonising Politics*.
- Tageldin, S. M. 2014. 'The Place of Africa, in Theory: Pan-Africanism, Postcolonialism, Beyond,' *Journal of Historical Sociology*
- Zimmerman, Andrew 2006. 'Decolonizing Weber,' *Postcolonial Studies*

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Learning Objectives

- Demonstrate an understanding of the ways in which colonialism was central to the development of the traditions of modern social and political theory.
- Evaluate the thought of the different thinkers addressed in the module in the context of their time.
- Critically assess the strengths and limitations of modern social thought and its influence on contemporary constructions of relations among individuals, institutions, and wider society
- Clarify and critically discuss the concepts developed by selected theorists and theories

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Any questions?

- Please email me at: g.k.bhambra@sussex.ac.uk
- I look forward to hearing from you!
- If you'd like to find out more about what a postcolonial social science is, you can check out this [podcast & interview](#).

Gurminder