

# SO339-15 Religion & the Planetary Crises

**22/23**

**Department**

Sociology

**Level**

Undergraduate Level 3

**Module leader**

Claire Blencowe

**Credit value**

15

**Module duration**

10 weeks

**Assessment**

100% coursework

**Study location**

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

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## Description

### Introductory description

Religion & the Planetary Crises explores the historical role of religion - especially colonial Christianity - in the creation of the contemporary planetary crises (wherein climate emergency and legacies of racism intersect with neoliberal capitalist crises of authority, mental-health). It also explores the role of religion and spirituality in our responses to the planetary crises. The module develops advanced skills in cultural, social and anti/de/post-colonial theory.

### Module aims

To address core questions of cultural, social, political and anti/de/post-colonial theory concerning spirituality, alienation, authority, colonialism and ecology in modernity.

To introduce contemporary theoretical debates concerning the causes and possible responses to planetary crises, focusing on religion, spirituality and non-secular knowledges.

To introduce and interrogate key themes in classical and contemporary social theory and cultural sociology concerning the role of religion and spirituality in producing, reproducing and transforming capitalist and colonial economies and power relations.

To raise students' awareness of the contemporary importance of religion and religious thinking to questions of social, cultural, political theory - especially to the dilemmas of responding to climate catastrophe in light of colonial histories.

To question secular assumptions and the role of secularism in colonial power/knowledge.

To deepen students' understandings of the complex and contested histories of modernity, capitalism and colonialism as the context of planetary crises.

## **Outline syllabus**

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

How do people's religious beliefs, spiritual strivings and desires play into power relations, political economy, and ecology? What is the role of religion in the history of colonialism, settler colonialism and their terraforming impact on the planet? Is Christianity responsible for capitalist and colonial economics? Did capitalism destroy religion? And why are so many struggles for domination, survival and resistance in the contemporary world explicitly framed in terms of spirituality, religion or the sacred? Will spiritual practice save us from climate catastrophe?

This module takes up a series of classic debates from social theory about the relationship between modernity, capitalism, ideology and religion and brings them up to date - especially setting them in the context of planetary crises and colonial history. We will explore religious dimensions of contemporary power – including Neoliberal economics, international development, settler colonialism, extractive industries and authoritarianism. We will engage with classic and cutting edge social, cultural, political and anti/de/post-colonial theory, and apply this to examples from Africa, America and Europe.

The history explored in the module will primarily relate to Christianity and European colonialism, but students will be supported to incorporate their own research into other religions should they chose. The module is deliberately interdisciplinary (or anti-disciplinary) bringing different forms of writing and argument into conversation with more conventional forms of social theory.

### **Indicative module outline**

1. The End of the World Again: Planetary Crises and Colonial Violence
2. The Witch Hunters: Terraforming Colonial Christianity from Europe to the Americas
3. The Exorcists: Evangelical Revival & Missionary Christianity in the British Empire
4. The Spiritual Warriors: Pentecostalism & Neoliberal Development
5. Worshiping Wealth: From Commodity Fetishism to the Terror of Debt
6. Neoliberal Authoritarianism & Planetary Crises
7. Liberation Theology & Environmentalism
8. Animism & the Return of Gaia
9. The Blockade: Indigenous Resistance as Resurgence

## **Learning outcomes**

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Demonstrate advanced knowledge and skills in social, cultural, political and anti/de/post-

colonial theory.

- Be able to talk about the relationship of religion to planetary crises in an open-minded, generous and critical/creative fashion.
- Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the role of Christianity and Western civilising missions in the history of capitalism, modernity, and planetary crises.
- Advanced skills in creative and critical essay writing.

## **Indicative reading list**

- Anzaldúa, G. (1987). *Borderlands: The new mestiza = La frontera*. San Francisco, Spinsters/Aunt Lute.
- Beard, Jennifer (2007), *The political economy of desire: international law, development and the nation state* (Abingdon: Routledge).
- Benjamin, Walter 'Capitalism as Religion' Walter Benjamin Selected Writings. Boston, Harvard University Press.
- Blencowe, Claire (2016) 'Ecological Attunement in a Theological Key: Adventures in Anti-Fascist Aesthetics' *GeoHumanities*
- Blencowe, Claire. "Disenchanted secularism (or the cultivation of soul) as pedagogy in resistance to populist racism and colonial structures in the academy." *British Educational Research Journal* 47.2 (2021): 389-408.
- Blencowe, Claire. (2021). Family debilitation: Migrant child detention and the aesthetic regime of neoliberal authoritarianism. *GeoHumanities*, 7(2), 415-440
- Bornstein, Erica (2005) *The Spirit of Development*.
- Clark, N., & Szerszynski, B. (2020). *Planetary social thought: The Anthropocene challenge to the social sciences*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Comaroff, J. & Comaroff, J.L. (2002) 'Privatizing the Millennium: New Protestant Ethics and Spirits of Capitalism in Africa, and Elsewhere' *Journal for the Study of Religion* 15(2):15-38
- Comaroff, J.; Comaroff, J. (2012), "Neo-Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism: perspectives from the social sciences". In: Bongmba, E. (ed.). *The Wiley-Blackwell companion to African religions*. Malden: Blackwell Publishing Ltd
- Connolly, William E (2008), *Capitalism and Christianity, American Style* (Duke University Press).
- Cooper, Melinda (2015) 'The Theology of Emergency: Welfare Reform, US Foreign Aid and the Faith-Based Initiative' *Theory Culture and Society* Vol. 32(2) 53–77
- Cooper, Melinda. *Family values: Between neoliberalism and the new social conservatism*. MIT Press, 2017.
- de la Cadena, Marisol (2011) *Earth Beings: Ecologies of Practice Across Andean Worlds*. Duke University Press.
- Federici, Silvia (2004) *The Caliban and the Witch*, Autonomedia.
- Ferguson, James (2006) *Global Shadows: Africa in a Neoliberal World Order* Duke University Press - especially chapter '3. De-moralizing Economics: African Socialism, Scientific Capitalism, and the Moral Politics of Structural Adjustment'
- Ghosh, Amitav (2021) *The Nutmegs Curse: Parables for a Planet in Crisis*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago.
- Goodchild, Philip (2007), *Theology of money* (Hymns Ancient and Modern Ltd).
- Goodchild, Philip (2002), *Capitalism and religion: The price of piety* (Psychology Press).
- Guattari, Felix (2000) *The Three Ecologies*, Bloomsbury.

Gudynas, Eduardo. 2011. 'Buen Vivir: Today's tomorrow' *Development* 54(4): 441-447

Jacob, Michell, (2013) *Yakama rising: indigenous cultural revitalisation, activism and healing* (University of Arizona Press)

Keller, Catherine and Kerns, Laurel eds. (2007) *Ecospirit: Religions and Philosophies for the Earth* Fordham University Press.

Klein, Naomi. 2015. *This changes everything: Capitalism vs. the climate*: Simon and Schuster.

Mbembé, J-A (2001), *On the postcolony* (41: Univ of California Press).

Mellor, Philip A. and Shilling, Chris (2014) *Sociology of the sacred : religion, embodiment and social change*. London, Sage.

Pignarre, Phillipe & Stengers, Isabelle (2011) *Capitalist Sorcery: Breaking the Spell*. Basingstocke, Palgrave.

Radcliffe, S. A. (2012). Development for a postneoliberal era? *Sumak kawsay, living well and the limits to decolonisation in Ecuador*. *Geoforum*, 43(2), 240-249.

Shiva, Vandana. 1993. *Monocultures of the mind: Perspectives on biodiversity and biotechnology*: Palgrave Macmillan.

Silko, Leslie Marmon. "Almanac of the Dead." New york (1991).

Simpson, L. B. (2017). *As we have always done: Indigenous freedom through radical resistance*. U of Minnesota Press.

Simpson, Leanne Betasamosake. *A Short History of the Blockade: Giant Beavers, Diplomacy, and Regeneration in Nishnaabewin*. University of Alberta, 2021.

Stengers, Isabelle. 2012. 'Reclaiming animism' *e-flux* (36):n.p.

Stengers, Isabelle. 2015. *In Catastrophic Times: Resisting the Coming Barbarism*. Translated by Andrew Goffey. Lüneburg: Open Humanities Press/ Meson press.

Taussig, Michael (1991) *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. Chicago, University of Chicago Press.

Taussig, Michael. 1987. *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing*. Chicago. University of Chicago Press.

Yusoff, Kathryn, and Jennifer Gabrys. "Climate change and the imagination." *Wiley Interdisciplinary Reviews: Climate Change* 2.4 (2011): 516-534.

Yusoff, Kathryn. *A billion black Anthropocenes or none*. U of Minnesota Press, 2018.

## **Research element**

Student essays will involve their own research which can be historical, theoretical, sociological or cultural studies.

## **Interdisciplinary**

This module draws on literatures that cut across sociology, geography, anthropology, philosophy, theology, colonial and religious studies, as well as drawing upon non-academic activist and religious writing.

## **International**

The module content includes historical or contemporary examples from many countries and transnational religious organisations. In partiuclar it explores histories of colonialism, extractive industries and contemporary religious-political movments in Brazil, Nigeria, South Africa, the USA,

Canada and India/Kashmir.

## **Subject specific skills**

Advanced knowledge of social, cultural, political, and anti/de/post-colonial theory, especially in relation to religion and planetary crisis.

Advanced skills in theoretical analysis and expression.

## **Transferable skills**

Awareness and understanding of complexity of religious beliefs, cultures and history

Advanced skills in critical and creative writing

Advanced skills in open and critical conversation

Understanding of some of the ways different people are responding to and coping with planetary crises

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## **Study**

### **Study time**

<b>Type</b>	<b>Required</b>
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (6%)
Private study	30 hours (20%)
Assessment	102 hours (68%)
Total	150 hours

### **Private study description**

Reading and preparing for seminars every week (3 hrs per week).

Reading and preparing for group presentation/seminar leadership (3 hours, on one week only).

## **Costs**

No further costs have been identified for this module.

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## **Assessment**

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

## Assessment group A1

	Weighting	Study time
Assessed essay	100%	102 hours
A summative assessed essay submitted at the end of the module, to be based on questions set by the module convenor.		

## Feedback on assessment

Written feedback on essay.

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## Availability

### Courses

This module is Core optional for:

- Year 3 of ULAA-ML33 Undergraduate Law and Sociology

This module is Optional for:

- USOA-L301 BA in Sociology
  - Year 3 of L301 Sociology
  - Year 3 of L301 Sociology
  - Year 3 of L301 Sociology
  - Year 3 of L303 Sociology with Specialism in Gender Studies
- Year 4 of USOA-L306 BA in Sociology (with Intercalated Year)
- Year 3 of UHIA-VL15 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with a term in Venice)
- Year 3 of USOA-L314 Undergraduate Sociology and Criminology

This module is Option list A for:

- ULAA-ML34 BA in Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)
  - Year 3 of ML34 Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)
  - Year 4 of ML34 Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree)
- Year 5 of ULAA-ML35 BA in Law and Sociology (Qualifying Degree) (with Intercalated year)
- Year 3 of USOA-L301 BA in Sociology
- Year 4 of UHIA-VL16 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
- Year 4 of ULAA-ML33 Undergraduate Law and Sociology

This module is Option list B for:

- USOA-L301 BA in Sociology

- Year 3 of L304 Sociology with Specialism in Research Methods
- Year 3 of L302 Sociology with Specialism in Social Policy
- Year 4 of UPOA-ML14 Undergraduate Politics and Sociology (with Intercalated year)

This module is Option list C for:

- Year 3 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology
- Year 4 of UHIA-VL14 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with Year Abroad)

This module is Option list D for:

- Year 3 of UHIA-VL13 Undergraduate History and Sociology
- Year 4 of UHIA-VL16 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with Year Abroad and a term in Venice)
- Year 4 of UHIA-VL14 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with Year Abroad)
- Year 3 of UHIA-VL15 Undergraduate History and Sociology (with a term in Venice)