



# Sociology UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO

## **SOC6101H - Contemporary Sociological Theory, Winter 2022**

Instructor: Luisa Farah Schwartzman

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Office Number: Room 244

Class time, place: 3pm, room 240

Course Website: Quercus

### Course Description

This course aims to introduce graduate students to some major theoretical problems, approaches or domains that have concerned sociologists since the mid-twentieth century. With the understanding that sociology is not the only discipline or place where the social world is theorized (and that the very definition of a "sociologist" can be problematized), however, we will be reading not only professional sociologists but also other scholars who have become influential in the discipline and/or whose work speaks to central sociological concerns. Beyond reading and thinking *about* theory, the course also aims to providing students with tools and resources that can allow them to think *with* theory. In other words, it aims to help students engage with concepts, language, models, epistemologies, questions, etc., that they can use to make sense of particular empirically observable social phenomena and/or to draw on empirical phenomena or other theories to question, modify or elaborate on, particular existing theories of the social world.

### **Course objectives:**

- Learn some of the theoretical tools that sociologists have worked with (analytical concepts, ways of thinking, levels of analysis)
- Learn to read social theories and think critically about these works
- Be exposed to some major theoretical problems that sociologists (and other scholars of the social world) have grappled with since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century.
- Think about the question of universality vs. particularism of theory to particular people and domains of life
- Learn how to use theory to make sense of particular social/empirical problems
- Be able to evaluate theories in light of other theories and/or particular empirical phenomena

### Session Topics & Readings

For the specific topics and readings that we will discuss each week, please look at the course schedule at the end of the document. A single course cannot possibly cover everything there is to know about social theory, so certain choices had to be made, which partly reflect my own

knowledge, trajectory and engagement with the field at this point in time. However, I hope that my choice topics and authors will allow for a productive and generative engagement with a range of theoretical frameworks, problems and approaches, and will motivate you to continue reading and theorizing the social world throughout your other courses and your career as social thinkers, according to your own interests and concerns. The final paper and the discussion in the last week of class will be an opportunity for you to pursue your own interests and share your insights with the rest of the class. I am also very open to your suggestions of readings to include in future iterations of the course, so as to make it more inclusive and relevant for everyone.

All readings will be available on Quercus.

## Course Requirements

Students will be required to come to class every week, having done the readings and being prepared for an engaged discussion. This will be a seminar format, which means that I will not be lecturing. Instead, we will all be actively involved in making sense of the readings and the main theoretical problems and concepts for that week. Besides reading, participating and attending every week, students will be asked to complete certain assignments, as described below.

## Evaluation

### **Grading components and percentage of final grade**

- Weekly response papers, 50% (5% each X 10 times)
- Leading the discussion, 10%
- Paper presentation, March 18, 10%
- Final paper (Due April 8), 30%

### **Weekly response papers**

Every week, you are supposed to do the readings for that week and write a short (approximately 1 -page, single-spaced) response with your reaction to the readings. This is not an exercise in summarizing all the readings, but in thinking about how the readings speak to one another, and how they relate to the topic of the week. Also, what do \*you\* find interesting or surprising or worth thinking (or troublesome or problematic) about in the readings? And what questions did the readings for that week raise for you?

I recognize that the amount of reading is heavy, but I expect you to make a concerted effort to read as much and as closely as you can. However, if on some weeks this feels overwhelming or impossible, you may choose to skip one (but no more than one!) of the readings or do all the readings but skim some sections that are not central to the authors' argument. If/when you choose to skip a reading, don't just skip the last reading or the longest: make your choices purposefully depending on your interests or, if you've read some of this work, choose things you haven't read yet. If you want, you may include a note about your reading choices and strategies in your response, so that I can take this into account when grading.

## **Leading the discussion**

You will be asked to lead the discussion for the class once or twice (depending on how many students are enrolled) during the course of the semester. This is a seminar style course, which means that most of the time will be devoted to discussing the readings as a group, rather than someone lecturing and others listening and taking notes. When it is your turn to lead the discussion, you may include a short (5-10 minute) lecture that provides some background that may be useful for understanding the readings, such as biographical information on some of the authors, the context of the time and place that the work was being written, or the significance of the work in a broader scholarly conversation. I don't expect you to spend a lot of time preparing for this, however, just see what you can find easily on the internet. Also, don't summarize the readings in the presentation, we will assume that everyone has read them. Spend most of the preparation thinking about questions for your classmates to discuss in class, that will help us make sense of the central concepts and ideas, to relate the readings to one another and to think about theory and theorizing in interesting and productive ways (you may also, if you have time, read some of the response papers from your classmates and draw on some of the issues they raised there to ask your questions). I will also, at some points, "hijack" the discussion leadership myself to ask questions, clarify points in the reading, provide context, and redirect the discussion to where I think it needs to go.

## **Final paper and paper presentation**

Write 3,000-5,000 words paper where you do one of the following options:

- (A) Use an existing theoretical approach (or more than one, if you prefer) to make sense of a particular empirical social phenomenon (e.g., a one-time but significant event, a particular social structure, a regularly observed behavior, the experiences of a particular group of people, etc.). In this case, you should discuss the extent to which the theoretical framework is useful for understanding this phenomenon, and which aspects of the phenomenon do not fit the theory or require modification of the theory.
- (B) Bring in insights and observations from a different scholarly tradition or empirical domain to question the generality or validity of a particular theory or theoretical framework (here you can suggest if the theory in question should be discarded, reformulated or merged/extended). Whereas in the first option (A) the main purpose is to understand the empirical social phenomenon itself, in this one (B) the main goal is to critique or modify a theory or theoretical framework.
- (C) Following Swedberg's suggested strategies for theorizing, make up your own theory about an empirically observed social process or phenomenon, and then justify your theory in the context of other existing theories.

You should do a short oral presentation summarizing the main argument of your paper during the last week of class (April 4). You will be able to use some of the feedback from the presentation to work on your paper, which is due on April 15.

## **Late assignments policy**

Given that the weekly assignments are only 5% each and that one can be skipped, I will not be accepting late response papers. For the final paper, I will be discounting 5% per day of lateness. If, for reasons beyond your control, you are not able to complete these assignments on time, please contact the instructor and I will make appropriate accommodations.

### Academic Integrity Clause

Copying, plagiarizing, falsifying medical certificates, or other forms of academic misconduct will not be tolerated. Any student caught engaging in such activities will be referred to the Dean's office for adjudication. Any student abetting or otherwise assisting in such misconduct will also be subject to academic penalties. Students are expected to cite sources in all written work and presentations. See this link for tips for how to use sources well:

(<http://www.writing.utoronto.ca/advice/using-sources/how-not-to-plagiarize>).

According to Section B.I.1.(e) of the Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters it is an offence "*to submit, without the knowledge and approval of the instructor to whom it is submitted, any academic work for which credit has previously been obtained or is being sought in another course or program of study in the University or elsewhere.*"

By enrolling in this course, you agree to abide by the university's rules regarding academic conduct, as outlined in the Calendar. You are expected to be familiar with the *Code of Behaviour on Academic Matters* (<http://www.artsci.utoronto.ca/osai/The-rules/code/the-code-of-behaviour-on-academic-matters>) and *Code of Student Conduct* (<http://www.viceprovoststudents.utoronto.ca/publicationsandpolicies/codeofstudentconduct.htm>) which spell out your rights, your duties and provide all the details on grading regulations and academic offences at the University of Toronto.

Normally, students will be required to submit their course essays to Turnitin.com for a review of textual similarity and detection of possible plagiarism. In doing so, students will allow their essays to be included as source documents in the Turnitin.com reference database, where they will be used solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism. The terms that apply to the University's use of the Turnitin.com service are described on the Turnitin.com web site.

### Accessibility Services

It is the University of Toronto's goal to create a community that is inclusive of all persons and treats all members of the community in an equitable manner. In creating such a community, the University aims to foster a climate of understanding and mutual respect for the dignity and worth of all persons. Please see the University of Toronto Governing Council "Statement of Commitment Regarding Persons with Disabilities" at <http://www.governingcouncil.utoronto.ca/Assets/Governing+Council+Digital+Assets/Policies/PDF/ppnov012004.pdf>.

In working toward this goal, the University will strive to provide support for, and facilitate the accommodation of individuals with disabilities so that all may share the same level of access to opportunities, participate in the full range of activities that the University offers, and achieve

their full potential as members of the University community. We take seriously our obligation to make this course as welcoming and accessible as feasible for students with diverse needs. We also understand that disabilities can change over time and will do our best to accommodate you.

Students seeking support must have an intake interview with a disability advisor to discuss their individual needs. In many instances it is easier to arrange certain accommodations with more advance notice, so we strongly encourage you to act as quickly as possible. To schedule a registration appointment with a disability advisor, please visit Accessibility Services at <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as>, call at 416-978-8060, or email at: [accessibility.services@utoronto.ca](mailto:accessibility.services@utoronto.ca). The office is located at 455 Spadina Avenue, 4<sup>th</sup> Floor, Suite 400.

Additional student resources for distressed or emergency situations can be located at [distressedstudent.utoronto.ca](http://distressedstudent.utoronto.ca); Health & Wellness Centre, 416-978-8030, <http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/hwc>, or Student Crisis Response, 416-946-7111.

## Equity and Diversity Statement

### **Equity and Diversity**

The University of Toronto is committed to equity and respect for diversity. All members of the learning environment in this course should strive to create an atmosphere of mutual respect. As a course instructor, I will neither condone nor tolerate behaviour that undermines the dignity or self-esteem of any individual in this course and wish to be alerted to any attempt to create an intimidating or hostile environment. It is our collective responsibility to create a space that is inclusive and welcomes discussion. Discrimination, harassment and hate speech will not be tolerated.

Additional information and reports on Equity and Diversity at the University of Toronto is available at <http://equity.hrandequity.utoronto.ca>.

If there is anything happening in this course that makes you feel disrespected or uncomfortable and that, in your view, needs to be better addressed, please feel free to reach out to the instructor by email or in person during office hours or after class.

## Course Schedule

### **Week 1, January 10 – Introduction: what is sociological theory and what is it for?**

Abend, Gabriel. 2008. "The Meaning of 'Theory.'" *Sociological Theory* 26(2): 173-199.

Swedberg, Richard. 2012. "Theorizing in sociology and social science: turning to the context of discovery." *Theory and Society* 41(1): 1-40.

Araujo, Kathya. 2021. "Social theory anew: from contesting modernity to revisiting our conceptual toolbox—the case of individualization." *Current Sociology* 69(3):415-432.

## **Week 2, January 17 – Epistemology, legitimation and power**

Said, Edward. 1978. *Orientalism*, "Introduction", pp. 1-27. [30]

Latour, Bruno. 1987. *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society*. Harvard University Press. Chapter 1 (pp. 21-62) [40]

Collins, Patricia Hill. 1989. "The social construction of black feminist thought." *Signs: Journal of women in culture and society* 14(4): 745-773. [30]

Watts, Vanessa. 2013. "Indigenous place-thought and agency amongst humans and non-humans (First Woman and Sky Woman go on a European world tour!)." *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* (2)1, pp. 20-34. [14]

## **Week 3, January 24 – Rationality, cognition and practice**

Gary Becker. 1976. "The economic approach to human behavior." Pp. 3-14 in *The Economic Approach to Human Behavior*." Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [11]

DiMaggio, Paul J., and Walter W. Powell. 1983. "The iron cage revisited: Institutional isomorphism and collective rationality in organizational fields." *American Sociological Review*: 147-160. [13]

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1990. "Structures, *Habitus*, Practices" in: *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, CA. Stanford University Press. Pp. 52-65 [13]

Hochschild, Arlie. 1998. "The sociology of emotion as a way of seeing." Pp. 3-16, Chapter 1, in: *Emotions in Social Life: Critical Themes and Contemporary Issues*, edited by Gillian Bendelow and Simon J Williams. [13]

Cerulo, Karen A., Vanina Leschziner, and Hana Shepherd. 2021. "Rethinking Culture and Cognition." *Annual Review of Sociology* 47: 63-85. [22]

## **Week 4, Jan 31 – Micro-level interaction**

Fanon, Franz. (2008 [1952]). *Black Skin, White Masks*, Chapter 1 ("The Black Man and Language") [23]

Erving Goffman. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Chapter 1, pp. 17-77 [60]

Harold Garfinkel. 1967. *Studies in Ethnomethodology*, "What is Ethnomethodology?", pp. 1-34. [34]

Blumer, Herbert. 1969. *Symbolic Interactionism: Perspective and Method*. Berkeley: University of California Press, Chapter 1 (p. 1-60) [60]

### **Week 5, Feb 7 – Mapping social structures**

Ture, Kwame and Charles V. Hamilton. 1992 [1967]. "White power: the colonial situation." Chapter 1 in: *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America*, pp. 2-32. Vintage Books. [30]

Levi-Strauss, Claude. 1976. "A reflection on the atom of kinship." Pp. 82-111, Chapter 7 in: *Structural Anthropology: Volume II*. Basic Books. [30]

Hopkins, Terence K., and Immanuel Wallerstein. 1986. "Commodity chains in the world-economy prior to 1800." *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 10(1): 157-170. [13]

Burt, Ronald S. 2004. "Structural holes and good ideas." *American Journal of Sociology* 110(2): 349-399. [50] => Feel free to skim over the data analysis parts, read for the theory, check out the network graphs

### **Week 6, Feb 14 – Structure/agency duality**

Giddens, Anthony. 1979. *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, Chapters 2 and 3 (pp. 49-130). [80]

Sewell Jr, William H. 1992. "A theory of structure: Duality, agency, and transformation." *American Journal of Sociology* 98(1): 1-29. [30]

Mahmood, Saba. 2001. "Feminist theory, embodiment, and the docile agent: Some reflections on the Egyptian Islamic revival." *Cultural anthropology* 16(2): 202-236.

### **Week 7, Feb 21 – Reading week, no classes**

### **Week 8, Feb 28 – "Culture" and its reproduction**

Hall, Stuart. 2018 [1973] "Encoding and Decoding in the Television Discourse" Chapter 8 in: *Stuart Hall, Selected Writings. Essential Essays, Vol. 1: Foundations of Cultural Studies*, edited by David Morley. 2018. [20]

Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review*: 273-286. [13]

Ferree, Myra Marx. 2003. "Resonance and radicalism: Feminist framing in the abortion debates of the United States and Germany." *American Journal of Sociology* 109(2): 304-344. [40]

Lamont, Michèle, Stefan Beljean, and Matthew Clair. 2014. "What is missing? Cultural processes and causal pathways to inequality." *Socio-Economic Review* 12(3): 573-608. [35]

Guhin, Jeffrey, Jessica McCrory Calarco, and Cynthia Miller-Idriss. 2021. "Whatever Happened to Socialization?" *Annual Review of Sociology*. [30]

### **Week 9, March 7 - Difference-making, power and social hierarchization**

Mills, C. Wright. 1956. *The Power Elite*, chapter 1 ("The Higher Circles.") [30]

Fanon, Frantz. 2004 [1961]. *The Wretched of the Earth*. Read: "On Violence in the International Context" (pp. 52-63) and "Grandeur and Weakness of Spontaneity" (pp. 64-97). [43]

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1982. "Social Space and the Genesis of 'Classes.'" Chapter 11 in: *Language and Symbolic Power*, pp. 229-251. [22]

Crenshaw, Kimberle. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *The University of Chicago Legal Forum*, pp. 139-167. [28]

Wright, Erik O. 1997. *Class Counts: Comparative Studies in Class Analysis*, Chapter 1 (pp. 1-34) (you can skip section 1.6.). [34]

### **Week 10, March 14 – Fields, worlds, spheres, domains**

Polanyi, Karl. 2001 [1944] *The Great Transformation. Political and Economic Origins of Our time*. Chapters 5 and 6 (pp. 59-81). [20]

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1984 [1979]. *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Tastes*, pp. 226-256 ("The Dynamics of Fields"). [30]

Strauss, Anselm. 1982. "Social worlds and legitimation processes." *Studies in symbolic interaction* 4(17): 171-190. [20]

Gieryn, Thomas F. 1983. "Boundary-work and the demarcation of science from non-science: strains and interests in professional ideologies of scientists." *American Sociological Review*: 781-795. [14]

Tilly, Charles. 1985. "War making and state making as organized crime." In: *Violence: A Reader*, edited by Catherine Besteman. Pp. 35-60. [25]

Armstrong, Pat, and Hugh Armstrong. 2005. "Public and private: Implications for care work." *The Sociological Review* 53(2): 167-187. [20]

### **Week 11, March 21 – Macro-historical relations and change**

Robinson, Cedric. 1983. *Black Marxism*, pp. 1-28 ("Introduction" and Chapter 1: "Racial Capitalism: the Nonobjective Character of Capitalist Development."). [30]

Mann, Michael. 1984. "The autonomous power of the state: its origins, mechanisms and results." *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie/Europäisches Archiv für Soziologie* 25(2): 185-213. [30]

Abu-Lughod, Janet. 1987. "The shape of the world system in the thirteenth century." *Studies in Comparative International Development* 22(4): 3-25. [20]

Adams, Julia. 1994. "The familial state: Elite family practices and state-making in the early modern Netherlands." *Theory and Society* 23(4): 505-539. [35]

Go, Julian. 2013. "For a postcolonial sociology." *Theory and Society* 42(1): 25-55. [30]

### **Week 12, March 28 – Breaking down “citizenship” and “the state,” without forgetting power, violence and rights**

Foucault, Michel. 1995 [1977]. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Read the chapters "The Body of the Condemned" (pp. 3-32) and "Panopticism" (pp.195-230) [60]

Mbembe, Achille. 2003. "Necropolitics." *Public Culture* 15(1): 11-40. [30]

Simpson, Audra. 2007. "On ethnographic refusal: Indigeneity, 'voice' and colonial citizenship." *Junctures: The Journal for Thematic Dialogue* 9, pp. 67-80 [13]

Somers, Margaret R., and Christopher N. J. Roberts. 2008. "Toward a new sociology of rights: a genealogy of 'buried bodies' of citizenship and human rights." *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 4: 385-425. [40]

### **April 4 – Paper presentations**