

SO9E7-20 Decolonising Ecology: Race, Coloniality and the Climate Crisis

24/25

Department

Sociology

Level

Taught Postgraduate Level

Module leader

Joseph Davidson

Credit value

20

Module duration

10 weeks

Assessment

100% coursework

Study location

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

Description

Introductory description

This optional module examines the relationship between the ongoing climate crisis and colonial relations of power. Climate change is almost universally recognised as one of the most pressing problems facing the world today. However, its relationship with colonialism—whether past, present or future—is often repressed. This is despite the fact that climate change is intimately tied up with forms of colonial domination and racial violence. Whether this be the ecological destruction associated with the spread of European colonialism from the sixteenth century onwards or the fact that people in the Global South are facing the most extreme effects of climate change in the contemporary moment, there is a co-constitutive relationship between colonialism, racism and ecology.

This module asks the following questions: How have dominant forms of environmentalism in the Global North reflected and entrenched global inequalities? How has colonialism contributed to the climate crisis? What forms of ecological degradation were associated with British imperialism in India, settler colonialism in South America, and plantation monocultures in North America and the Caribbean? How have colonised peoples responded to the climate crisis? What is the value of decolonising ecology and how might this contribute to a liberatory future?

Module aims

The module aims to introduce the key components of a decolonial ecology. Students will be encouraged to critically interrogate forms of environmentalism (most particularly, conservation) that have their roots in colonial projects and consider the problems of proposed solutions to the crisis that reinforce current global inequalities (such as an emphasis on population control). We will discuss the ways in which colonialism laid the groundwork for the current climate crisis, highlighting the deleterious environmental effects of plantation agriculture in the Caribbean and extractive industries in South America. The module will also examine the distinctive forms of environmentalism produced by peoples subject to colonial domination, with a particular focus on anticolonial, Black and Indigenous ecological thought and action.

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.

1. Introduction: The climate crisis and decolonial theory
2. The colonial origins of environmentalism in the Global North
3. The colonial present of environmentalism in the Global North
4. Plantation: Slavery and the origins of the climate crisis
5. Extraction: Mining and the origins of the climate crisis
6. Reading week
7. Deforestation: Forestry and the origins of the climate crisis
8. Anticolonial ecologies: The soil of empire and unequal exchange
9. Black ecologies: Plantation monocultures and toxic dumping
10. Indigenous ecologies: More-than-human forces and pipeline protests

Learning outcomes

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

- Critically analyse the entanglement of colonialism and dominant forms of environmentalism in the Global North.
- Identify how colonial relations of power have contributed to climate change, creatively using examples from key areas of socio-natural life and particular regions of the world (e.g., the plantation in the Caribbean, deforestation in India).
- Critically assess futures of the climate crisis from a decolonial perspective, speculating on the possibility of both dangerous and liberatory trajectories.
- Address the aims and objectives of the module demonstrating close engagement with module materials

Indicative reading list

Carney, J. A. (2021). Subsistence in the Plantationocene: Dooryard Gardens, Agrobiodiversity, and the Subaltern Economies of Slavery. *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 48(5), 1075–1099.

Das, P. V. (2016). *Colonialism, Development, and the Environment: Railways and Deforestation in British India, 1860–1884*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Davidson, J. P. L. and da Silva, F. C. (2022). "Fear of a Black planet: Climate apocalypse, Anthropocene futures, and Black social thought." *European Journal of Social Theory*, 25(4), 521-538.

Davis J., Moulton A. A., Van Sant L., and Williams B. (2019). Anthropocene, Capitalocene,...Plantationocene? *Geography Compass*, 13(5), 1-15.

Davis, H., and Todd, Z. (2017). On the Importance of a Date, or, Decolonizing the Anthropocene. *ACME: An International Journal for Critical Geographies*, 16, 761–780.

Ferdinand, M. (2022). *Decolonial Ecology: Thinking from the Caribbean World*. Cambridge: Polity.

Gómez-Barris, M. (2017). *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Grove, R. H. (1996). *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism, 1600-1860*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mitchell A., and Chaudhury A. (2020). Worlding beyond 'the' 'end' of 'the world': White apocalyptic visions and BIPOC futurisms. *International Relations*, 34(3), 309-332.

Parsons, L. (2023). *Carbon Colonialism: How Rich Countries Export Climate Breakdown*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Ross, C. (2016). *Ecology and Power in the Age of Empire: Europe and the Transformation of the Tropical World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Smith, K. K. (2007). *African American Environmental Thought*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.

Whyte, K. (2018). Settler Colonialism, Ecology, and Environmental Injustice. *Environment and Society*, 9, 125-144.

Interdisciplinary

Decolonial ecology has been advanced by scholars in multiple fields, including sociology, politics, history, and geography. All of these disciplines will be discussed in the lectures and included on the reading list. The final lecture will also include some discussion of fictional representations of future climate change.

Subject specific skills

An in-depth understanding of concepts and theories around the sociology of climate change and colonialism

An ability to critically engage in debates around the causes of, and responses to, climate change

A capacity to write on the topic of the climate crisis, engaging with different theoretical perspectives and empirical case studies

Transferable skills

Critical thinking

Analytical skills

Written and verbal communication

An ability to undertake independent learning

Study

Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	9 sessions of 1 hour (4%)
Seminars	9 sessions of 1 hour (4%)
Private study	102 hours (51%)
Assessment	80 hours (40%)
Total	200 hours

Private study description

Preparing for the seminar (including reading), reading broader material related to the course, conducting independent research into the broader literature.

Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

Assessment group A

	Weighting	Study time
4000 word essay	100%	80 hours

Students should answer one essay question. Students will have a range of essay questions to choose from. Each topic will have a corresponding essay question. Students are also invited to devise their own essay question.

Feedback on assessment

Written feedback on 1 x 100% essay via Tabula.

Availability

Courses

This module is Option list A for:

- Year 1 of TWSA-M9P7 Postgraduate Taught Gender and International Development
- TSOA-L3PW Postgraduate Taught Social Inequalities and Research Methods
 - Year 1 of L3PW Social Inequalities and Research Methods
 - Year 2 of L3PW Social Inequalities and Research Methods
- TSOA-L3P8 Postgraduate Taught Social and Political Thought
 - Year 1 of L3P8 Social and Political Thought
 - Year 1 of L3P8 Social and Political Thought
- TSOA-L3PD Postgraduate Taught Sociology
 - Year 1 of L3PD Sociology
 - Year 1 of L3PD Sociology