

# **SO303 Special Topics Groups 2016-17**

*Supervisors:*

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The **signing-up** arrangements for Special Topics groups in 2016-17 are as follows:

**Each group will meet throughout the year's two semesters at the same time.** It is **your** responsibility to make sure that your group's meeting time does not clash with required courses in other Departments in either the first or the second semester.

- Sign-up for workshop times will be done through the SO303 module Moodle site, on a first-come, first-served basis. Details on group meeting times are available on the SO303 Moodle site. Please also ensure that you attend lectures and monitor the departmental website and notice boards for further information;
- SO303 group sign-up will **commence** on the SO303 Moodle site on **WEDNESDAY 21<sup>st</sup> September at 10am and run until 12pm on TUESDAY 27<sup>th</sup> September 2016;**
- All registered SO303 students should automatically have access to the module's Moodle page; **if you haven't finalised your registration by the time the sign-up process gets under way, please contact the Sociology Department office.** Once the sign-up process concludes, you cannot change out of your selected group;
- The groups will commence the week beginning **Monday 3rd October 2016.**

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## **Place Exploration - Dr. Mary Benson (Wednesday at 10am Auxilia Seminar Room)**

This special topic group is an exploration of place/space; place identity and identification. Places should not be considered as a setting or backdrop but rather as an agentic player in the game – a force with detectable and independent effects on social life (Werlen, 1993). The identity of a specific place cannot be solely understood by geographical or architectural facts. Places exist physically but also in peoples lived experiences and in hidden meanings and layers. Place exploration can be carried out on specific landscapes, buildings and hidden areas within a landscape. Students can explore functioning sites; derelict sites or unseen parts of the built environment. The aim of this special topic reading, discussion and research group is to help you identify specific places that you can research and which also fit in with your own areas of interest. Students will be encouraged to carry out explorations of different places with a view to developing a sociological awareness of place as a theoretical concept and as lived experience and also with a view to understanding the complex interplay of identity and place. Students will use both visual representations and interviewing as methods of data collection and are encouraged to take SO205A Fieldwork Methods alongside this special topic group.

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## **Researching Politics: Issues, Questions, Methods – Dr. Barry Cannon (Monday at 3pm Auxilia Seminar Room)**

For much of the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, politics seemed to have a future. Political parties were genuine mass movements with solid social bases and firm ideological identities. Popular participation in elections was high with social and material conditions steadily improving for increasing numbers of people. These certainties seemed to dissolve, however, in the aftermath of the Cold War. Politics, rather, has become a byword, in the popular imagination, for deceit and mistrust and participation in political parties and in elections has decreased dramatically from their post-War highs, a process which seems to have accelerated since the Great Financial Crash in 2008. In its stead huge popular movements have appeared throughout the world, seeking a new form of politics which transcends existing systems, but which have failed, for the moment at least, to solidify into living alternatives. To paraphrase Antonio Gramsci, the old is dying but the new has not yet been born. We are left instead, with a host of questions: What form may this new politics take? What, if anything should remain of the present system? Are political parties – indeed politicians - of any use in the new era? Do ideologies - left and right - have meaning anymore? Will democracy survive; indeed does it deserve to do so? Can politics be reinvented, or is the present system the “least worst” as Winston Churchill once said? And how can we make any new systems genuinely responsive to the challenges facing the world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century? This special topic aims to help students identify the main issues confronting politics today, formulate relevant questions which can help advance politics in the current context, and devise appropriate methodological strategies to help answer these questions. In this way the sessions aim to blend discussion on politics with approaches to its study in order to help students complete their final year dissertations successfully.

## **Religion and Society - Dr. Brian Conway (Thursday at 1pm Auxilia Seminar Room)**

Are we more or less religious now than before? Why do women tend to be more religious than men? Why are strict churches strong? These are some of the questions taken up by sociologists concerned with the relationship between religion and society. In the first semester students learn about the major theoretical and empirical debates and issues in the sociology of religion literature. Special attention is given to placing the Irish case in comparative perspective. This provides a foundation for the second semester, in which the focus turns to carrying out a research project about a research question(s) derived from the literature examined in the first semester.

## **Ireland Under Austerity - Dr. Colin Coulter (Thursday at 12pm Auxilia Seminar Room)**

It might be hard to fathom now, but there was a time not so long ago when the Irish Republic was widely regarded as an exemplar of how small, previously underdeveloped states might

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reach the promised land of national prosperity. The former 'poster child' for capitalist globalization is now more likely, however, to be offered as a cautionary tale for those tempted to tread the same neoliberal path. The global economic crash heralded most dramatically by the collapse of Lehman Brothers in September 2008 had rather more severe consequences for Ireland than most other western societies. The scale of the country's fall from grace was indexed in spiraling levels of unemployment, emigration and national debt not seen since the sour times of the 1980s. In this seminar programme, we will take a critical look at how Irish society has changed since the onset of recession. We will examine some of the debates that attended the Celtic Tiger era before turning to consider the ways in which the austerity measures introduced since boom turned to bust have been represented, experienced and contested. The series concludes by analysing whether the current claims that Ireland has 'turned a corner' provide grounds for optimism or signal that the tragedies of recent times are about to be played out once again as farce. It is hoped that the programme will offer a critical and engaging perspective on the nature of social change in a country that has, more than almost any other, reflected the promise and peril at the heart of late capitalism.

**The movement against water charges: an oral history – Dr. Laurence Cox (Wednesday at 11am TERM 1 and Tuesday at 1pm TERM 2 Auxilia Seminar Room)**

**PLEASE NOTE: Times are different in Semester 1 and Semester 2 and you should NOT take this special topic if either time is a problem**

The social movement against water charges has been one of the largest movements in the Republic in many decades, involving a very substantial proportion of the population in non-registration and non-payment in particular as well as a series of massive demonstrations in Dublin and around the country, direct action against water meters, local meetings in many communities, and extensive social media-based resistance to official discourses about the issue and the movement. This means that for many people opposition to water charges has been their first involvement in a movement of this kind. Such experiences are often personally transformative in many ways, with unexpected impacts on individual lives; the fact of such large-scale political engagement on the part of people who have not previously been involved in this way can also have important effects on the wider society. However to date very little research has been done on what ordinary people's experience of involvement in the movement has been.

This special topic sets out to capture something of this experience while it is still fresh in people's minds. Group participants will be introduced to the literature on the movement as well as to key aspects of social movement research more generally. The group will be trained in oral history research methods, and will develop a common set of interview themes. Participants will then interview a number of people who have been involved in the water charges movement, primarily those who are new to social movements rather than experienced activists and famous individuals. Together the interviews collected in this group will constitute a valuable record of this dramatic moment in Irish history. Subject to ethical

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approval, anonymised versions of the transcripts will be made available for other researchers; it is also hoped to write a suitable academic piece (after dissertations have been submitted) making the results of this project publicly available, and group participants will be very welcome to join in doing this.

### **Women's interests, agency and activism in Ireland - Dr. Pauline Cullen (Monday at 10am Auxilia Seminar Room)**

How can we understand what are women's interests and are they similar or different to men's interests? How and why are relations between women and men changing and what are the economic, social and political consequences? How are women's organisations and feminist movements engaging with the reality of women's lives in all their diversities? What contribution can feminist scholarship provide to understanding contemporary forms of women's subordination? This special topics course is interested in these questions in the context of Irish society. Drawing from sociological research on gender inequality, women and public policy, women's representation in decision making and women's and feminist movements this seminar will explore the gendered structures, social practices and ideologies that shape the experiences, perspectives and life-chances of women in Ireland. Issues to be examined include: younger women and older women, intersectionality and solidarity between women in the context of race and class dynamics; women's movements and feminist activism. A specific focus will be on the kinds of political agency available to women in Ireland and the specific forms that gender asymmetry and feminist struggle assume in societies where capitalism is *financialized, globalizing and neoliberal*. Potential topics for research projects include: women lives as workers; women in higher education; women and decision making/political office; women and community organising; women's movements; feminist organising; women and health; women and welfare; women and climate change; women and media representation. Projects should include a focus on the forms of agency and activism that women exercise in these domains.

### **Gender, Violence and Security - Prof. Honor Fagan (Wednesday at 1pm Auxilia Seminar Room)**

This module examines violence, conflict, and security from a gendered perspective. It will provide students with the opportunity to learn how to research gender with a particular emphasis on researching gendered perspectives on violence, conflict, and security in international contexts. It will focus on research design and methods, epistemological, methodological, and ethical considerations in conducting research on how gender is reflected in the substantive areas of nation state development, peace-building, warring, and global security. Topics in the first semester will include:

- 1) Gendering Violence
- 2) Nation and Citizenship

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- 3) Peace-making and Security
- 4) War and Terrorism
- 5) Militarisation and Masculinity
- 6) Violence and Sexuality
- 7) Sexual Violence as a Weapon of War
- 8) The Sex Trade
- 9) Trading Sex in Refugee Camps
- 10) Understanding and Experiencing Insecurity
- 11) Gendered Processes of Securitisation
- 12) Gender Justice Movements
- The second semester will introduce students to appropriate research methods, research design, practising research skills and reflecting on ethics appropriate for generating data for gender analysis and researching gendered perspectives.

### **Family Histories and Social Change - Dr. Jane Gray (Monday at 4pm Auxilia Seminar Room)**

In this seminar we will work together to explore social change in Ireland using family history and biographical methods. The aim of our research will be to trace key social processes across the generations, and to identify the contexts and practices that gave rise to significant transformations in social life. Each student will construct a family history that includes information for individuals in at least three generations. Then you will use the information you have gathered to identify three people to interview - at least one from each generation - using an in-depth biographical approach. Your final project report will address questions about a particular dimension of social change drawing on the 'social genealogy' you have constructed. The seminar will introduce students to both quantitative and qualitative analyses of genealogies and life histories in Sociology.

### **Nationalism, Identity and Commemoration - Dr. Niall Gilmartin (Wednesday at 9am Auxilia Seminar Room)**

The centenary year of 2016 will witness unprecedented levels of commemoration right across the island of Ireland. The Easter Rising and the Battle of Somme remain seminal moments in the memory and psyche of nationalist and unionist identities. Commemoration plays a significant and deeply influential role in the shaping of collective memories and dominant national narratives. Commemoration however is as much a process of forgetting as it is remembering. States, political parties, and other social agents are all involved in constructing versions of the national past and national identity, reworking and “re-presenting” public memories for their own particular ends and purposes. In other words, nationalist

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commemorative actions are never objective or impartial projects, accurately reflecting the past. Who decides what and how the nation remembers? Why are some past events commemorated while others are seemingly forgotten? How is the past “re-presented” in order to suit or advance a particular political agenda today? What does nationalism and commemoration tell us about issues of class, gender and race, among others? This special topic is a critical exploration of the political and social processes which shape and inform nationalism, identity and commemoration in contemporary Ireland. The first semester will explore a wide range of topical issues related to contested theories, perspectives and conceptualisations of both nationalism and commemoration. The second semester will consist of workshops primarily aimed at developing the skills required for researching, writing-up and completing the project.

### **‘Self(ie)’ society? – Dr. Patricia Kettle (Tuesday at 11am Auxilia Seminar Room)**

We live in a media saturated world. There are more media and electronic communication outlets, more channels and more choices than ever before. In fact, research indicates that levels of online usage have accelerated considerably over the course of the last ten years, particularly with the advent of the smart phone. For a significant portion of the population, vast tracts of their working and social lives are now mediated and governed by digital technology. For many, the notion of a world without the internet, instant messaging, facebook, instagram among others is simply unthinkable. Recent research suggests that Ireland has some of the highest levels of internet users anywhere in Europe, North American or South America. In fact, recent figures indicate that Irish citizen’s use their smartphones for internet activity more than any other western country, with a third of all web access occurring through smart phones. As levels of online usage continue to saturate our working and social worlds, what impact is it having on society? What challenges and opportunities does digital technology and online use present? Are we obsessed or just conforming? What can levels and patterns of online use and digital technology tell us about the social world and the dynamics of everyday life? In this special topics research group, we will pose questions about the nature and type of use people make of digital technology and social media use; the social contexts in which the new electronic culture is embedded, and the social implications of digital technology and ‘new/social media’ in our lives.

### **Personal Troubles and Public Issues: Solving Ireland’s Public Problems – Michelle Maher (Tuesday at 12pm Auxilia Seminar Room)**

The sociological imagination that connects personal troubles to public issues is the idea advanced in this special topic group. Students are invited to consider how something becomes a public problem, and the involvement of a variety of actors and contexts in devising the policy solution. Each student will be invited to select a particular problem or policy concern relevant or of interest to them as the case study for their dissertation. In class

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the group will learn together how to build a framework to help their thinking about their chosen case study. Classes will be structured to guide students to critically assess the context for decision making; who the influential actors are; how perceptions are shaped; and the power of ideas. The government's presentation and definition of public issues will be unpacked to understand why some personal problems do not become political issues. Threaded through the classes will be practical advice on the task of researching and writing a dissertation.

### **Sport - Dr. Peter Murray (Monday at 11am Auxilia Seminar Room)**

Sport has long been, and still continues to be, an important vehicle for expressing social identities. Playing this role, sport interacts with key sociological variables such as class, ethnicity, gender, nationality and race. Money and the media also exert increasingly influence over sport and there are a myriad of other issues involved, including drug abuse. In this group we will begin by examining a number of recent studies of different sports carried out in an Irish context. Critical appreciation of these studies will serve as the basis upon which we proceed to develop our own research projects.

### **Food Security - Dr. Clodagh O'Malley Gannon (Tuesday at 10am Auxilia Seminar Room)**

To be food secure an individual/household must have: (1) sufficient food of appropriate quality available to them within their society; (2) access to suitable food for dietary needs; (3) food that is safe and nutritious to eat; (4) consistency in food availability and access. Some individuals/households are more food secure than others. Structures of inequality are built into our current food system to advantage the few above the many. But, also most of us are relying on a self-destructive food system to provide our food. This puts our future food security at risk. When you have plenty of food of good quality you tend to take food for granted. But what if the situation were different? In 2008, the cost of food rose dramatically. This created national food shortages and food riots broke out in over 60 countries around the world. And what do you think about the fact that millions of people in the developing and developed world do not know where their next meal will come from? And do you realise that much of your food is being produced under an industrial model of agriculture that uses poisons? These are some of the issues that we will think about. But we will not only look at the problems. Instead, we will also think about the solutions. We will investigate how we might better support food security for today's generation and future ones. Food insecurity is a growing phenomenon but it does not have to be this way. If you believe that everyone should (at all times) have access to the food that they need to live a healthy life then this course is for you.