

SOCIOLOGY 1

2025: FOURTH TERM

SOCIAL AND CULTURAL CHANGE



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Introduction

Sociology is the study of society, its structures and institutions, and the complex relationships that shape human behaviour. At the heart of the discipline lies the concept of *social change*, which is the transformation of cultural norms, social institutions, and power dynamics over time. Whether driven by conflict, climate events, discoveries and innovation, resistance, or reform, social change provides sociologists with the opportunity to examine how societies evolve and adapt.

Society is constantly changing and adapting to new conditions and ideas. Social change happens at various levels, and at different speeds, over time, and affects how social institutions and social structures operate, and how people relate to each other and organise themselves in a community. Social institutions are connected to each other in multiple ways and when there is a change in one institution, it can affect many others. For instance, COVID-19, which was a global health issue, affected the family, the church, education, the economy, and how these social institutions interacted with each other in different ways all over the world. Some people and institutions resist social change, some drive it, and some are resilient to it. Sociologists are interested in understanding how and why social change occurs.

This course is an introduction to how to think about social change from a sociological perspective. Over time, different sociological theories have explained social change from various perspectives, each shaped by its own historical context and underlying assumptions. Each of these theories gives us a way to understand how and why societies evolve, resist change and transform. This course explores key theories of social change and critically examines their relevance in today's world. We will investigate how these theoretical frameworks can be applied to better understand and explain the social transformations shaping contemporary society.

Theory	Main Idea	Key Theorists	Example
Evolutionary Theory	Societies evolve from simple to complex over time	Auguste Comte, Herbert Spencer	Development from agrarian to industrial societies
Functionalist Theory	Change helps restore balance and maintain stability	Émile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons	Reforms that stabilize political or educational systems
Conflict Theory	Struggle between groups (e.g. classes) drives change	Karl Marx, Max Weber	Class revolutions like the Russian or Cuban Revolutions
Cyclical Theory	Civilizations rise, decline, and repeat in cycles	Arnold Toynbee, Oswald Spengler	Rise and fall of empires like the Roman or British
Modernization Theory	Western development is the ideal model for others	Walt Rostow	Economic liberalisation in developing countries

Feminist Theory	Social change is gendered, intersectional, and can be activated and addressed by social movements and collaboration	Kimberlé Crenshaw, Sylvia Tamale	Liberian women's protests to end the civil war
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MODULE OBJECTIVE AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The aim of this module is to offer you an engaging and critical sociological perspective on social change. Theories of social change will ground your understanding of the underlying trends in the evolution and transformation of human societies over time, and in different contexts. By the end of the course, you will be able to:

- Provide a sociological definition of social change.
- Explain different sociological theories and perspectives of social change and be able to apply them in the tutorial assignments, test and exam-equivalent assessments.
- Explain social and cultural change, particularly change due to colonialism, capitalism and climate change.

You are expected to read prescribed readings (available on RUconnected) and you are encouraged to read academic journals on the topics covered in the module (e.g., social movements, population and climate change). You are also encouraged to draw on current social media articles, videos and personal experiences to support your arguments in the tutorial assignments, test and exam.

Please refer to the Sociology Handbook (available on RUconnected) for the rules regarding the university's policy on plagiarism as well as the department's rules regarding formatting, referencing, and late submission of assignments. All assignment, test and exam submissions MUST include a signed cover page (available on RUconnected and in the Handbook).

MODULE STRUCTURE AND OVERVIEW

There will be four lectures per week (Monday–Thursday) from 13h15 to 14h00 in Barratt 2. Prescribed readings and lecture slides will be uploaded on RUconnected. Each week, there will be a compulsory writing activity during the lecture, which will help inform and enrich your tutorial discussions. Each week, there will also be opportunities to post reading summaries and engage in peer reviews on the RUconnected site. There will be three *compulsory* tutorials starting from the second week of term. You are expected to read the prescribed material before each lecture, and you are encouraged to ask clarifying questions on the week's lecture notes, presentations and readings.

Week 1: 25–28 August

Reading, writing and thinking about Social Change

Much of this module involves engaging with what others have written about social change, including theories of social change, and then joining the conversation through your own writing in class activities, tutorials, test and exam. This section of the module will equip you to read sociological texts on social change, and to think and write from a sociological perspective. This means you will learn to become an active, curious, and independent scholar of social change.

Prescribed reading

Bharuthram, S. (2017). The reading habits and practices of undergraduate students at a higher education institution in South Africa: A case study. *The Independent Journal of Teaching and Learning*, Vol. 12 (1), pp. 50–62.

Pineteh, E. A. (2014). The academic writing challenges of undergraduate students: A South African case study. *International Journal of Higher Education*, Vol. 3 (1), pp. 12–22.

Cloete, M. (2018). The impact of an integrated assessment on the critical thinking skills of first-year university students. *Accounting Education*, Vol. 27 (5), pp. 479–494.

Weeks 2 & 3: 1–11 September

Defining and Theorising Social Change

What is social change? Sociologists define social change as the significant alteration of social structure and cultural patterns through time (Vago, 1989). There are many theories of social change, ranging from those that explain specific factors that cause small-scale changes to abstract and broader theories which attempt to understand underlying trends in the evolution and transformation of human societies. This section will help you understand the traditional theories of social change, as well as feminist and African feminist ideas on social change.

Prescribed Readings

Thomas, C. (2014). Social change. In: P. Stewart & J. Zaaiman (eds.). *Sociology: A South African introduction*, pp. 89–91. Cape Town: Juta & Company.

Vago, S. (1989). *Social change*, pp. 7–15 & 27–59. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Tamale, S. (2020). Decolonization and Afrofeminism. *Introduction*, pp. 1–10. Available at: <https://pueaa.unam.mx/uploads/materials/Tamale-S.-2020-1.pdf?v=1656724825>

Recommended Readings

Giddens, A. (2006). *Sociology* (fifth edition), Chapters 1, 7 & 16. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Haralambos, M., Holborn, M. & Heald, R. (2004). *Sociology: Themes and perspectives* (sixth edition), Chapter 1. London: HarperCollins Publishers.

Salami M. (2013). A brief history of African feminism. MsAfropolitan. Available at: <https://msafropolitan.com/2013/07/a-brief-history-of-african-feminism.html>

Weeks 4: 15–18 September

Sources of Social Change

When we think about a specific change, such as urbanisation, or migration, it is not easy to pinpoint a single source of that change. This is because change tends to result from a complex series of interconnected structures and events. For example, most sociologists trace the major changes in the structure and functions of the family to the Industrial Revolution, colonialism, urbanisation, and modernisation. In this section, we will focus on social change in the “Third World” (Thomas 2014: 93), by examining the relationship between dependency and modernisation theory to explore the drivers of social change, and how these relate to the challenges of climate in Africa.

Prescribed Readings

Thomas, C. (2014). Social change. In: P. Stewart & J. Zaaiman (eds.). *Sociology: A South African introduction*, pp. 91–111. Cape Town: Juta & Company.

Marema, D. & Vogel, C. (2023). Gender and climate change ‘through other eyes’: Grassroots women’s responses to changing environments in southern Africa. *Agenda*, Vol. 37 (3), pp. 90–105.

Recommended Reading and YouTube video

Udo, F., Bhanye, J., Daouda Diallo, B. & Naidu, M. (2025). Evaluating the sustainability of local women's climate change adaptation strategies in Durban, South Africa: A feminist political ecology and intersectionality perspective. *Sustainable Development*, Vol. 33 (3), pp. 3212–3227.

Prime Minister Mia Mottley’s speech at the 20th Annual Nelson Mandela Lecture 2022: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyEQL52Gv4E>

Week 5: 22–25 September

Social Movements and Social Change

Social movements are collective attempts to further a common interest or secure a common goal through action outside the sphere of established political institutions. Social movements “seek to bring about or block social change and normally exist in relations of conflict with organisations whose objectives and outlook they frequently oppose” (Giddens, 2009: 1133). In this section, we will discuss various types of social movements such as online movements, and reform movements (e.g., #RememberKwezi; #RhodesMustFall; the Green Belt Movement etc.), which seek to improve society by changing some specific aspect of the social structure (Kendall, 2013: 609).

Prescribed readings and YouTube video

Kendall, D. (2013). *Sociology in our times* (ninth edition), pp. 608-611. Boston, Mass.: Wadsworth.

Kinoti, K. (2022). The green belt movement: Women, land, and development. *Global Africana Review*, Vol. 6 (1), pp. 38-50.

Wangari Maathai and the Green Belt Movement
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BQU7JOxkGvo>

Recommended Reading and websites

African Climate Alliance. Available at: <https://www.africanclimatealliance.org/>

Climate Action Network International. Available at: <https://climatenetwork.org/>

Giddens, A. (2009). *Sociology* (sixth edition). pp. 1010–1021. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Maluleke, G. & Moyer, E. (2020). “We have to ask for permission to become”: Young women’s voices, violence, and mediated space in South Africa. *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, Vol. 45 (4), pp. 871–902.

Weeks 6 & 7: 29 September–9 October

Population, Demographic and Epidemiological Transitions

Population growth and density are responsible for many of the major policy issues, such as urban overcrowding, pollution, and family planning. Changes in a population's size, density, and composition have an important impact on social change. This section focuses on *demographic transition*, which involves the study of the current state and changes over time in the size, distribution, and composition of human populations. We will also include *epidemiological transition*, which is used to demarcate the change from predominantly infectious causes of death, still common in poorer countries, to degenerative diseases, which have become the leading cause of death in richer countries (McKeown, 2009).

Prescribed Reading

du Plessis, G. (2014). Population. In: P. Stewart & J. Zaaïman (eds.). *Sociology: A South African introduction*, pp. 55–84. Cape Town: Juta & Company (RUconnected).

Recommended Readings and YouTube Videos

Bhana, D. & Nkani, N. (2016). ‘What can I do, the child is already here?’ Caregivers, gender, poverty and the contradiction of care in supporting teenage mothers at school. *South African Review of Sociology*, Vol. 47 (2), pp. 3–18.

Cleland, J. & Machiyama, K. (2017). The challenges posed by demographic change in sub-Saharan Africa: A concise overview. *Fertility Transition in sub-Saharan Africa*, Vol. 43 (S1), pp. 264–286.

Cunningham, P., Boulton, B. & Popenoe, D. (1998). *Sociology*, pp. 396–414. Johannesburg: Prentice Hall South Africa.

Duminy, J. (2023). Critical commentary: Beyond growth and density: Recentring the demographic drivers of urban health and risk in the global south. Available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/epub/10.1177/00420980211014410>

McKeown, R. E. (2009). The epidemiologic transition: Changing patterns of mortality and population dynamics. *American Journal of Lifestyle Medicine*, Vol. 3 (1Suppl), pp. 1–14

Moyo, I. & Nicolau, M. D. (2016). Remittances and development: Zimbabwean migrant teachers in South Africa and their impact on their Zimbabwean families. *African Population Studies*, Vol. 30 (2), pp. 2506–2519.

Muza, C. & Mangombe, K. (2019). Population development in Africa with special regard to ageing. *African Population Studies*, Vol. 33 (2), pp. 4913–4926.

United Nations Population Fund. (2023). Available at: <https://youtu.be/rMyZLaalPM>

United Nations Population Fund. (2023). Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lqv7EhIK1Gg>

United Nations Population Fund. (2023). Available at: <https://youtu.be/Lxu15yLM5NI?t=3>
Vago, S (1989). *Social change*, pp. 157–163. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

MODULE ASSESSMENT

Four assignments will be written for this module: three *compulsory* tutorial assignments (assessed by tutors), and a test (assessed by Dr Knowles). The test counts 95% of the term mark, and it is *mandatory* as it is part of your Duly Performed (DP) requirements for Sociology 1. Although the tutorial assignment mark counts only 5% towards your term mark, *paying attention to each tutorial is in your best interest* because one of the tutorial questions will be included in the exam.

If you are unable to attend the tutorial or write the test on the stipulated date, you must apply for a Leave of Absence (LOA). Failing to do so will jeopardise your DP (see pages 19–21 of the *Sociology Handbook*). Email Mrs Juanita Fuller (j.fuller@ru.ac.za) or Mrs Noluvuyo Sakata (noluvuyo.sakata@ru.ac.za) for the LOA form, which must be submitted to the Head of Department for approval. A LOA is not automatically approved and must be accompanied by relevant documents (e.g., a medical certificate) to support the application.

Test:

The test will be written on Thursday, 25 September 13h15–14h05 in Barratt 2 & 3. It will take the format of an essay.

Tutorials:

1. 4th and 5th September
2. 18th and 19th September
3. 2nd and 3rd October

For each tutorial, you are required to write an essay, print it out (with your name and student number) and bring it with you to your tutorial. If you do not produce this at the start of the tutorial, you will be marked absent and receive no marks.

Exam:

You will write two essays in the November exams based on the material covered in the lectures and tutorials. The module mark is broken down as follows:

- Test and tutorial assignment – 30%
- November examination – 70%

MODULE EVALUATION

As a department, we are committed to reflecting on our teaching practices and module content to strengthen our courses. Towards the end of the term, you will be asked to participate in a module evaluation process. Please take this seriously and evaluate the module honestly and comprehensively. Your input will be highly appreciated and will make a real contribution to enhancing teaching and learning in the department.

CONSULTATION TIMES

Tuesday and Wednesday: 10h00 – 12h00

Please email me (c.knowles@ru.ac.za) to book an appointment.

TUTORIAL ASSIGNMENTS

For each of the tutorial assignments, you will be assessed on both the *format* and the *content* of your essay. Please pay close attention to the format guidelines provided beneath each tutorial question.

Tutorial Assignment 1: 4th & 5th September

Sociologists define social change as any significant alteration, modification, or transformation in the organisation and operation of social activity. As a sociologist, when studying change, you must first identify the social activity that has changed or is changing.

Question:

What are the sources of change in dating habits of young people in South Africa?

Assignment criteria:

- Read: *Dating Culture in South Africa: A Mix of Cultures and Modern Influences* from Dating Culture in Africa 2 April 2025 <https://www.afriklens.com/dating-culture-in-different-african-countries/> (on RUconnected)
- Read, or watch, one other opinion on *Dating Culture in South Africa* – it must be recent (from 2020 onwards) and correctly referenced. It could be a blog post, or a YouTube video etc. Two additional resources are listed on the RUconnected article – you may use these (both are very short) or find your own.
- Read: Thomas, C. (2014), Social change pp. 96. In: P. Stewart & J. Zaaïman (eds.). *Sociology: A South African introduction*. Cape Town: Juta & Company. (on RUconnected). Thomas explains W.W. Rostow's theory of "modernisation by diffusion" where "[s]ustained interaction between the advanced Western countries and the underdeveloped countries exposes the latter to the institutions, values, cultural patterns ... that will help them develop" (cited in Thomas, 2014: 96).
- Write: a brief essay (500–800 words) on what the writer believes are the sources of change in dating habits in South Africa and whether you agree or not.
 - Introduction: Write two or three sentences outlining how you will answer the question
 - Discuss in two or three paragraphs how the Afriklens article suggests that dating habits have changed. *In each paragraph*,
 - Explain an Afriklens claim (and reference)
 - State whether you agree or not with the claim, and why.
 - Support your claim with a reference from the additional reading/video
 - Explain whether the claim is an example (or not) of Rostow's "modernisation by diffusion" concept.
 - Write a conclusion summarising your discussion.
 - Include a reference list (see Sociology Handbook on how to list references).

Tutorial Assignment 2: 18th and 19th September

Colonisation has left a lasting impact on the consciousness of people in postcolonial societies. Tamale (2020) argues that addressing this legacy requires an ideological shift – what she calls the decolonisation of the mind. This process begins with "conscientization", a concept that involves becoming critically aware of how colonial thinking continues to shape perceptions, identities, and knowledge. Tamale (2020) contends that recognising this internalised

colonialisation is essential for transforming the minds of Africans and bringing about the changes we need for a more just and equitable society.

Question:

Explain one of Sylvia Tamale's four aspects of the colonisation of the mind – othering, invisibilisation, binarization and universalisation, or authoritative knowledges – and how “unlearning” it can lead to social change.

Assignment criteria:

- Read: Sylvia Tamale's discussion on the colonisation of the mind (pp. 245–250 on RUconnected). Tamale theorises that colonisation has been internalised through four interlinked colonising processes (othering, invisibilisation, binarization and universalisation, and authoritative knowledges) and that we must unlearn them to bring about social change.
- Write a brief essay (500–800 words) in which you introduce Tamale's four colonial processes that are part of the colonisation of the mind. Select ONE to discuss in more depth.
 - Introduce the essay by outlining how you will answer the question
 - Write a paragraph that briefly explains the four colonial processes in your own words (othering, invisibilisation, binarization and universalisation, and authoritative knowledges) - *one sentence each* for the four processes.
 - Write a paragraph that expands on ONE of these, giving examples to support your selection, from your own experience/ news articles/other people's experiences.
 - Write a paragraph in which you reflect on how *understanding* how this colonising process works, can bring about change – in other words, now that you know it is a colonial device, how can you (individually and/or collectively) change it, and in so doing, change social relationships?
 - Write a conclusion summarising your discussion.
 - Include a reference list (see Sociology Handbook on how to list references).

Tutorial Assignment 3: 2nd and 3rd October

Climate change is a significant driver of social change in Africa. Scholars such as Marema and Vogel (2023) and Chiweshe (2025) argue that women, often the primary caregivers in their communities, disproportionately bear the burden of climate-related challenges, including food insecurity and inadequate shelter. The late Wangari Maathai's leadership in the Green Belt Movement illustrates how African women have mobilised to confront environmental crises. Beyond Maathai, many grassroot organisations across the continent are actively working toward social change in response to climate events. As Marema and Vogel (2023: 94) note, the

social transformations emerging from climate impacts can be either *incremental* or *transformative*, depending on how communities engage with and respond to these challenges.

Question:

How can African women be both agents of change (exerting power) and victims (lacking power) in the context of climate change in Africa?B

Assignment criteria:

- Read Marema and Vogel (2023) focussing on pages 90–94 and the conclusion on pages 102-103 (on RUconnected).
- Write a brief essay (500–800 words) in which you explain the difference between being an agent of change and a victim of change, and how women can be agents of transformational change.
 - Write an introduction in two to three sentences outlining how you will answer the question.
 - Write a paragraph in which you explain how women, according to Marema and Vogel (2023) are particularly vulnerable to climate change events.
 - Write a paragraph in which you explain how, according to Marema and Vogel (2023), women can be “victims” of these events.
 - Write a paragraph in which you show how women can be agents of transformational change.
 - Write a conclusion that summarises your main points.
 - Include a reference list (see Sociology Handbook on how to list references).