Erasmus School
of Social and
Behavioural Sciences

**Dr. Jess Bier**
**Engaging Public Issues Master**

# Infrastructures of Power

## Manual 2019-2020

**Erasmus University Rotterdam**

A Palestinian protester climbs over a section of the Israeli wall in the West Bank on 17 Feb. 2017, close to a protest marking the 12th anniversary of a campaign against the wall in the village of Bil'in near Ramallah. Image credit: REUTERS/Mohamad Torokman. Caption adapted from: *www.pbs.org/newshour/arts/photo-scaling-fence-west-bank*

# Contents

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## Introduction

This course sensitizes you to the social and material groundedness of public issues in intersectional systems of power related to gender, class, ancestry and (post)colonialism, economic class, technology. It familiarizes you with cutting edge work in social theory, as told through cases that reveal the varied power of the socio-technical infrastructures that provide the context for public contestation (by authors such as Haraway, Hall, Roy, Star, Bowker, Edwards, Kitchin, Starosielski, and Mattern). Infrastructure here includes both the material settings of—to give two possible examples—water or internet infrastructure, and the social organization and work practices that go into the making of publics and issues, such as standards for 'clean' water or debates over corporate control of internet bandwith.

You will learn a selection of major approaches in contemporary social theory, and willl yourself form strategies for thinking with/against these approaches and applying them to relevant public issues. The aim is to come up with new ways to address the varied infrastructures of power that infuse struggles over contemporary issuess in particular places and times. The course also highlights the ways that the legacies of past power imbalances continue to shape current debates, and how the uneven form and contexts of social issues, such as legacies of sexism and colonialism, can change through an awareness of the lives and theorizing of actors who were traditionally omitted from public debates. It puts socio-material power imbalances at the core of social theory, and uses these to better address which publics and issues become visible and how more heterogeneous solutions can become viable.

One way to think about infrastructures is as the concrete manifestation of power across time and space. So the role of space and the uneven effects of power in infrastructures are also central to this course. It also pays attention to the significance of relatively recent technological infrastructures, in particular to 'digital infrastructures' and to the ways these transform, and are transformed by, public debates. For example, you may learn to empirically study how online algorithms sort out what can become visible and what counts as public knowledge, and the ways that technology can alternately alleviate or deepen social injustice.

## Learning Goals

**1** Become familiar with the social scientific theories and analyses of infrastructures

**2** Sociologically analyze public interventions in terms of their dependency on infrastructures

**3** Sociologically analyze the relevant infrastructures for major current public issues

**4** Become familiar with social scientific analyses of space and power

**5** Empirically apply perspectives on space and power to current public issues

**6** Empirically study the role of technological infrastructures in public issues

## Course Meetings

This course consists of one lecture and one working group meeting every week. In select cases, instead of a lecture we may do a field visit or other type of participatory meeting.

You are responsible for consulting the course manual and Canvas fully for all of the requirements, deadlines, and grades related to this course. The deadlines and regulations are based on the rules and instructions of the Exam Committee.

Two of the required meetings in January will not be at their scheduled day/time/location:

**1** The field visit, 9:45-11:30 on Tue. 7 January
Meet at 9:45am at the AWZI Kralingseveer, Rivium Promenade 27, Capelle.

**2** The second guest lecture, by Laleh Khalili, 17:00-19:00 on Thurs. 16 January.
Location: Erasmus Paviljoen.

**!** You must reserve a (free) place for Dr. Khalili's lecture via Studium Generale. Get your place early, before it fills up.

## Practicalities

### Course Materials
Articles and book chapters assigned for the course are provided on Canvas.

### Email
All questions regarding registration, conflicting courses, problems with Canvas, and course scheduling must go through the Education Office, Webteam, or other relevant office. For emails that merit a response, allow at least 2-3 days for any reply. We do not respond to emails about questions that are answered in this course manual or covered in lectures or working groups.

Contact us at the start of the course to make arrangements if you have a known physical or mental condition or disability and would benefit from specific accommodations. We can arrange those together with you, but only beforehand.
If you have exceptional circumstances, or any emerging condition that may significantly affect your ability to fulfill the requirements for this course, then contact the study advisor and/or student counselor as soon as you become aware of it. In that case, include us in cc' or have the counselor contact us directly.

Do not record lectures or working groups except in cases where you have received our explicit written permission due to a special condition. Even in that case, the recordings must be only for personal use for the purposes of this course, must not be put online in any way, and you must delete them as soon as you have received a grade for the course.
The student counselor is also available for free for any student who wishes to speak privately about anything that might affect your ability to participate fully in your daily life.

## Language

The language of instruction is English. This course provides a chance to receive feedback on your English from native and fluent speakers.

## Course Requirements

To be eligible to pass and receive a grade for this course, you must meet all of the following conditions:

1. Arrive at the working group meetings having read all of the week's required readings, and actively participate in the discussion
2. Submit an individual final paper on Canvas by the appropriate deadline
3. Your paper must meet all of the stated requirements (See section "Final Paper".)

If one or more of these conditions is not met, then you will receive an automatic grade of zero for both the assignment and the course, until all of the conditions have been satisfied.

Incomplete assignments will receive an automatic grade of zero and must be resubmitted by the next available deadline. An assignment is considered incomplete if it does not meet all of the requirements for the assignment as stated in this course manual.

It is the ¬student's responsibility to be aware when their own assignment or course requirements are incomplete. The student will not be notified in case of a zero grade.

## Deadline Final Paper and Resit

The final paper and resit are due on Canvas before the deadline for the relevant upload box in Canvas. The final grades will be distributed within 3 weeks after the relevant deadline.

## Working groups

To attend the working group meetings, you are required to have done the readings before the start of the tutorial, and you must actively participate in the discussion.

The goal of the working groups is to discuss the weeks' readings and understand their main arguments and implications in detail, as well as their relationship to specific scholarly approaches, issues, and relevant infrastructures.

The working groups are to be conducted in an atmosphere of respect for oneself and others. If there are any breaches of respect or obstacles to your participation in the discussion, then you are welcome to privately discuss with the tutor, coordinator or, if you feel more comfortable, the student counselor.

## (Optional) Guidelines for Preparing Working Group Participation

The following is recommended but not required, as by now you should be used to writing weekly response papers. There will be space in the working group to discuss what you've prepared, and your notes will be useful when writing your final paper.

**Once per week, for that week's group of Required Reading as a whole:**

- Which scholarly approaches (e.g. critical race studies; Marxism; etc.) and infrastructures do these readings represent or discuss?
- Write 1-2 questions that you still have, to raise during the working group discussion.
- Select 1 quotation from the text that you think is particularly interesting and would like to discuss during the working group. To avoid plagiarism, include quotation marks and a citation that includes the relevant page number(s).
- State one thing you noted this week that was particularly interesting and/or that you didn't know before and would like to remember.
- State in 2-3 sentences: Think about what connects these sources and why we are reading them together. Think about how this week's readings connects to the readings, lecutres, and working group discussions of the previous weeks.

**Multiple times per week, once for every required reading for that week:**

- List 3-5 key terms or words from the text. These are usually repeated many times and can help to discover the author's main argument.
- State in your own words in 1-2 sentences: What is the author's main argument?
  *When seeking the main argument, look for "I argue....", "I claim...", etc. But make sure you don't just choose any argument from the text. Pick the most central one.*
- What is your reaction to this text? If you're unsure, give your individual opinion of how this text relates to other required texts that you've read for the course so far, or to what you've read elsewhere or experienced yourself.

## Lectures and Reading

You are required to have read each week's readings before the start of your working group that week. The readings are provided via Canvas.

### Week 1: Why study infrastructures?

**Lecture**
**Survival as Sabotage: An Introduction to Infrastructure and the Politics of Knowledge**

**Required Reading**
- This course manual!
- Thompson, "Time, Work Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism"
- Larkin, "The Politics and Poetics of Infrastructure"
- Thorat, "Colonial Topographies of Internet Infrastructure"
- Holt and Vonderau, "Where the Internet Lives", Ch. 3 in Parks and Starosielski, *Signal Traffic*

**Optional Reading**
- Starosielski, "Warning: Do Not Dig"
- Kallianos, "Infrastructural Disorder"
- Tsing, "The Global situation"
- Blumenberg, "Shipwreck with Spectator"
- Hu, A Prehistory of the Cloud
- Mattern, "Networked Dream Worlds"
- Schivelbusch, "The Policing of Street Lighting"
- Haag and Hu, "1.5 Million Packages a Day: The Internet Brings Chaos to N.Y. Streets"

### Week 2: Who has the power to make infrastructures?

**Lecture**
**Critical Race Studies: White Supremacy and Colonial Infrastructures of Classification**

**Required Reading**
- Robinson, "Racial Capitalism," Ch.1 in *Black Marxism*
- M'Charek, "Beyond Fact or Fiction"
- Bowker and Star, "The Case of Race Classification and Reclassification under Apartheid", Ch. 6 in *Sorting Things Out*
- Browne, "What Did TSA Find in Solange's Fro?" Ch. 4 in *Dark Matters*

**Optional Reading**
- Baldwin, "The Price of the Ticket"
- Essed et al., eds. *Relating Worlds of Racism*
- Essed et al., eds. *Race Critical Theories*
- Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*
- Hage, "The Politics of White Restoration Has to 'Go Back Where It Came from'"
- Hage, "Response to Decent Reople Re: My Guardian 'Where Are You from' Piece"
- Luque-Ayala and Marvin, "The Maintenance of Urban Circulation"
- Wekker, *White Innocence*
- Beaman, *Citizen Outsider*
- Nimako and Willemsen, *The Dutch Atlantic*
- Levy, "A Spreadsheet Way of Knowledge" or the related podcast: https://www.npr.org/sections/money/2015/02/25/389027988/episode-606-spreadsheets

## Week 3: What is the matter with infrastructures?

**Lecture**
Transgender Studies: Intersectionality, the Body, and the Infrastructure of Sports

**Required Reading**
- Lorde, "There is No Hierarchy of Oppression" Ch.22 in *I am Your Sister*
- Loeb, "Cutting it Off"
- Roen, "Transgender Theory and Embodiment" Ch.46 in *The Transgender Studies Reader 1*
- Bettcher, "Feminist Perspectives on Trans Issues". Read all except part. 6.

**Optional Reading**
- Snorton, "Introduction" in *Black on Both Sides*
- Somerville, "Scientific Racism and the Emergence of the Homosexual Body"
- Stryker, "(De)Subjugated Knowledges" Intro. in *The Transgender Studies Reader 1*
- Stryker, "Introduction: Transgender Studies 2.0" in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2*
- Frank, "Sister Outsider and Audre Lorde in the Netherlands"
- Hartman, "A Note on Method", in *Wayward Lives, Beautiful Experiments*
- Najmabadi, "Epilogue" in *Women with Mustaches and Men without Beards*
- Beauchamp, "Artful Concealment and Strategic Visibility" Ch.3 in *The Transgender Studies Reader 2* (on surveillance)
- Broussard, "When Binary Code Won't Accommodate Nonbinary People"

## Week 4: When do facts and practices become infrastructures?

**Guest Lecture by Dr. Irene van Oorschot, Erasmus University College**
Science and Technology Studies (STS) and the State: Crime, from Determining 'Who Did It' to the Violence of Bureaucratic Power

**Speaker Bio**
*Irene van Oorschot* is a senior lecturer in the humanities department at Erasmus University College. She attained her PhD in sociology at Erasmus University Rotterdam (cum laude), after which she worked as a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Amsterdam. Drawing on postcolonial and feminist science studies, she has focused on scientific, legal, and forensic production of facts and truths, paying special attention to materialities ranging from case files to human DNA. Her monograph on the production of scientific and legal facts – The Law Multiple – is scheduled to be appear in early 2020 (Cambridge University Press).

**Required Reading**
- Prior, "'Repositioning Documents in Social Research"
- van Oorschot, "Doing Times, Doing Truths"
- Starr, "The Interview"
- Hull, "Ruled by Records"

**Optional Reading**
- Tawil-Souri, "Colored Identity"
- Pelizza, "Developing the Vectorial Glance"
- Murphy, *The Economization of Life*
- Zelizer, "Human Values and the Market"

**Week 5: Where are infrastructures located?**

**Lecture**
Decolonial Studies: Crisis, Everyday Disaster,
and the Uneven Distribution of Life and Death

**Required Reading**
- Bhambra, "Postcolonial and Decolonial Dialogues"
- Matson and Nunn, "Space Infrastructure, Empire, and the Final Frontier"
- Azoulay, "Regime-Made Disaster" in *The Visual Cultures of Nongovernmental Politics*
- Tyner, "Preface" in *Dead Labor*

**Optional Reading**
- Wainaina, "How to Write About Africa"
- Ibañez-Tirado, "Everyday Disasters…and the Normalcy of Non-Development"
- Bhambra, "Postcolonial Europe"
- Bhambra et al., eds., *Decolonising the University*
- Maldonado-Torres, "The Decolonial Turn" in Poblete, ed., *New Approaches to Latin American Studies*
- Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor"
- Lugones, "The Coloniality of Gender"
- Okwenje, "Visa Applications: Emotional Tax and Privileged Passports"
- Khader, "Why Are Poor Women Poor?"
- McKittrick, ed., *Sylvia Winter: On Being Human As Praxis*
- Redfield, *Space in the Tropics*
- Stoler, *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*
- Tilley, "Wynter, Sylvia" in *Global Social Theory*

**Week 6: How can we approach studying the power of infrastructures #1?**

**Field Visit**
***Note different time and location!**

**Where the water goes: Kralingseveer Sewage Treatment Plant**
Erasmus University lies within a short bike or metro ride of the AZWI Kralingseveer, the main water sewage treatment plant for much of the Rijnmond region. We will tour the plant to better understand how sustainable infrastructures are made to work in practice, including water and waste management, maintenance and the repair of underground pipes in a crowded urban environment, as well as potential impacts on planning due to flooding in relation to climate change. We will keep in mind the resonances with water controversies in places like Palestine/Israel and Flint, Michigan.

**Required Reading**
- Anand, "Leaky States"
- Ballestero, "List" Ch. 3 in *A Future History of Water*
- Liboiron, "Waste Colonialism"
- Schindler and Kanai, "Getting the Territory Right: Infrastructure-Led Development and the Re-Emergence of Spatial Planning Strategies"

**Optional Reading**
- Ballard, " Why Amsterdam Halted Data Center Construction"
- Ellis-Petersen, "Treated Like Trash: South-East Asia Vows to Return Mountains of Rubbish from the West"
- Sample, "Moon Buggies and Bags of Poo: What Humans Left on the Moon"

## Week 7: How can we study the power of infrastructures #2?

**Guest Lecture by Professor Laleh Khalili, Queen Mary University London**
**\*Note different day, time and location!**

**The Corporeal Life of Commerce at Sea**
This lecture serves as an example of how to study multiple infrastructures, such as capitalism and colonialism, at the same time

**Speaker Bio**
*Laleh Khalili* is a world renowned researcher who "is interested in questions of struggle over infrastructures, violence, war, mobility of migrants and refugees, contentious politics, and gender.... Khalili's first book, Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration (Cambridge 2007) drew on ethnographic research in the Palestinian refugee camp of Burj al-Barajna in Lebanon.... Her most recent book, Time in the Shadows: Confinement in Counterinsurgencies (Stanford 2013), drew on interviews with former detainees of Abu Ghraib, Guantanamo Bay, and various Israeli detention camps and prisons – and military officers, guards, and interrogators, as well as a large number of archival sources to show the continuities in practices of detention...." Source: web.archive.org/web/20181119162826/https://www.soas.ac.uk/staff/staff36189.php.

**Required Reading**
- Khalili, "Carceral Seas"
- Khalili, "The Roads to Power"
- Cowen, "The Geo-Economics of Piracy" Ch. 4 in *The Deadly Life of Logsitics*
- Vertesi, "Seamful Spaces"

**Optional Reading**
- Tsing, "Supply Chains and the Human Condition"
- Rossiter, "Logistical Worlds"
- Khalili, "Sand and Oil"
- Parker and Slemrod, "UN Gives Ultimatum to Yemen Rebels over Reports of Aid Theft"
- Teunter and Rusman, "Van Banaan tot Zuivel: Boodschap Kost Vaak Meer Dan de Prijs aan de Kassa"

## Week 8: How can we study the power of infrastructures #3?

**Final paper workshop (attendance optional)**
Your turn: this is an opportunity to receive feedback and work in peer groups, and to ask me any questions you still have about the final paper.

**Required Assignment (required in order to attend)**
This session is optional, but in order to attend you are required to bring with you:

**1** Two paper copies of a detailed outline or draft of your paper. Paper is necessary so that it can be passed among a small group of your peers.

**2** A prepared max 5-min. informal talk. Explain your paper topic and main argument to your peers. No slides.
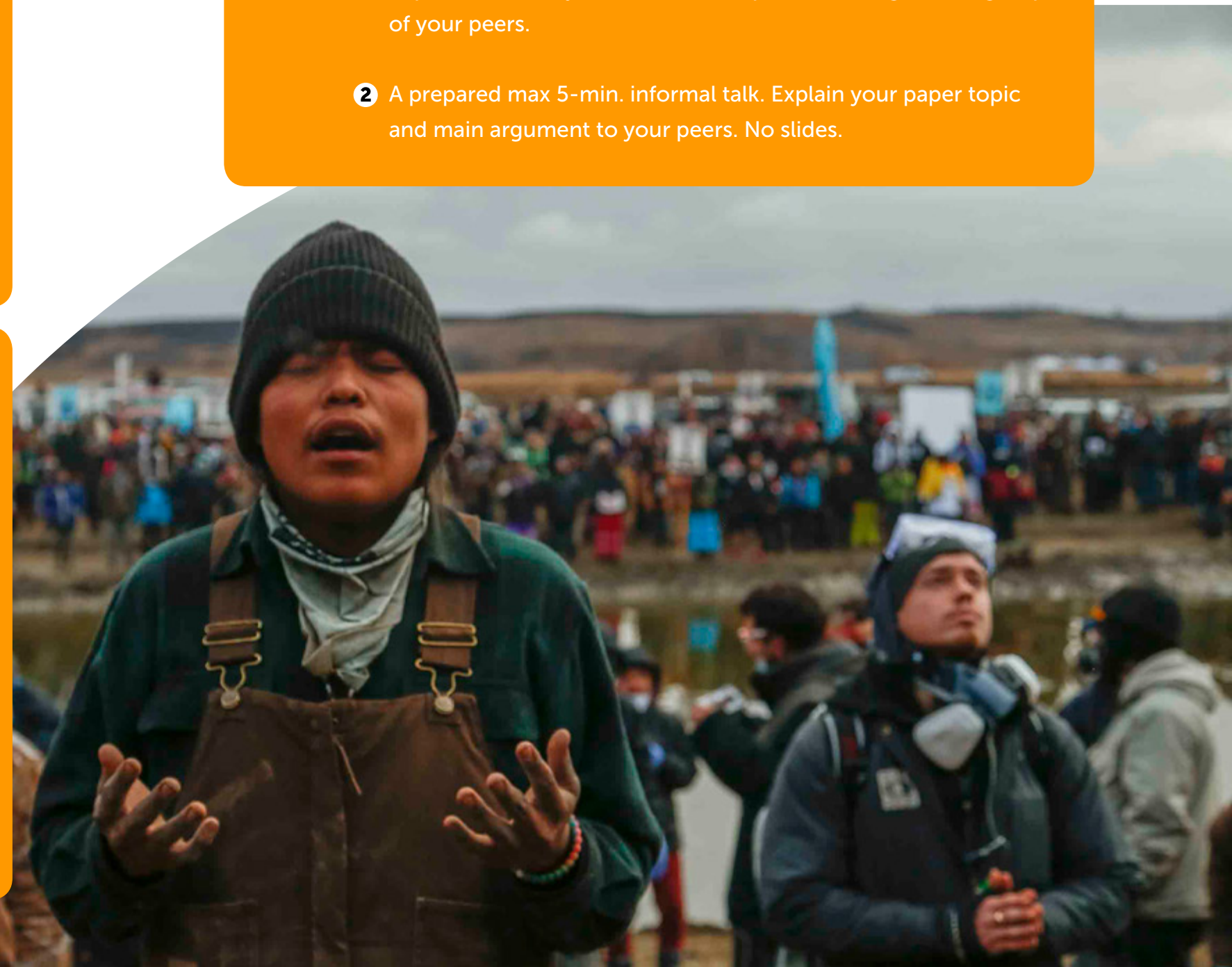
## Final Paper

At the end of the course, each student will submit a final paper. The paper will analyze one contemporary public issue from the point of view of two infrastructures and their respective scholarly literature as discussed in the course. The aim is to compare and contrast how a single issue is framed and seen from two different infrastructures of power.

### Requirements

Papers that do not meet all of these basic requirements will receive an automatic zero grade.

#### Format

1. On the title page, write 2-3 sentences stating the topic of your paper and how/if it relates to the paper you wrote for the previous course, "Public Issues: Introduction."
2. Max 4,000 – 5,000 words (length includes notes but excludes reference list). 12 point font and double spaced. Cite and include a reference list of every cited source, and no more, in an appropriate style.

#### Content

3. Use multiple quotations from every required reading from the course that is relevant to your topic and both approaches.
4. Make a clear argument, either in favor of one approach over the other, or combine the best aspects of both to suggest a specific and effective way to treat your issue.

#### Address the following

5. What is the theoretical approach of the scholarly literature for each relevant infrastructure? How is the topic framed and defined according to each? Where are the important locations, places, and people according to each? Who and what aspects are left out or erased by each?
6. How do the recommendations of proponents from each approach overlap? How are they different? What are the consequences of these similarities and differences?

Choose a unique and individual case of a public issue that you find particularly interesting, as well as two different theoretical approaches and their relevant infrastructures from the course. Discuss these with the tutor as soon as possible.

Think about what you might like to write about for your Master's thesis. You do not have to continue with this topic, but it will save time if your work is in the same general area.

You can use the same issue that you wrote about for the previous course. However, significant overlap with your own previously submitted papers will be considered plagiarism. For this new paper, you must approach the issue in terms of two relevant approaches to infrastructure (race, gender, ancestry, political economy, etc.), and at least one of these must differ from those you considered previously. For example, if you wrote about gender, you might treat the same issue from the perspective of race and political economy. Consider those who were left out of your previous analysis. How does analyzing them give you a new perspective?

Overlap between the work of two or more students will be considered plagiarism. If two students want to write on a related issue, then they must get approval from the tutor as soon as possible to ensure they each choose their own case and approach both the topic and the readings in a way that is unique to each student.

The sources for the paper include the required course readings for the relevant approach, as well as the list of optional sources, databases, and relevant journals posted in Canvas.

### APA Style

Select quotations carefully and make them of appropriate length—a few sentences at most. Indent quotations longer than three lines. Do not put entire quotations in italics or bold. The final paper should be written in APA style or the Erasmus University house style. Choose one of these styles and be consistent throughout your entire paper.

### Plagiarism

Check your citations and quotation marks! These can get accidentally deleted as you edit your paper, in which case it still counts as plagiarism even if it's by mistake. So go through your entire text again right before submitting:

- Direct quotation? Use the exact wording in the original quote, surrounded by quotations marks. Include a citation with the page number where the quotation appears in the source used.
- Idea from another source that you summarize in your own words? Make sure it's entirely your words. Don't repeat even short phrases from the source. Don't include quotation marks, but do include a citation with the page number where it appears.

You are allowed to revise and expand upon your own previous written work, as long as you wrote it individually (no group work) and you fully rewrite the text to meet the requirements.

If plagiarism from any source whatsoever is detected in any part of your submitted paper, no matter how brief, you will receive an automatic grade of zero for the course and be referred to the Exam Committee for disciplinary action.

### Grading Criteria

If the submitted paper meets all of the requirements, it will be graded based on the following:

*Theoretical frameworks*: Does the paper include relevant theoretical approaches from the course? Are the required literatures cited in a productive way? Does the paper include multiple

direct quotations from multiple relevant sources? Are the approaches discussed in a clear and specific way?

*Empirical examples*: Are relevant examples chosen and described in detail? Are connections drawn between the example and the two approaches? Is the example analyzed from the perspective of each approach?

*Analysis:* Are the goals and the central research question clearly formulated? Does the paper have a main argument, and is it explicitly stated early in the paper? Does the paper critically evaluate the differences and similarities between approaches with respect to the chosen examples? Are comparisons and contrasts drawn in a specific and relevant way?

*Format*: Has the paper been structured well, and is it neatly written? Are the style, language, and format consistent throughout and appropriate for a research paper? Are all references cited in the body text, and do all cited texts appear in the reference list? Is the reference list in a relevant format? Are there only a few minor language or style errors?

## Grading Scale

| Grade | Description |
|---|---|
| **Good/Very good** 7.5 - 8.4 <br><br> **Excellent** 8.5+ | Work at the 'good' ('very good') level will display many (most) of the following characteristics: <br><br> Well-organised, highly competent, comprehensive, analytical, evaluative, showing independence of thought. Evidence of significant reading and study beyond the core materials; relevant theory and/or methodology appropriately applied in the given situation with critical awareness, exposes shortcomings of theory and/or methods being applied, critical discussion of the existing literature. Identifies and addresses the issues raised in the problem statement/research question(s), presenting relevant empirical evidence in an appropriate and coherent manner. <br><br> 'Excellent' work displays all of the above characteristics. |
| **(More than) satisfactory** 6.5 - 7.4 | Competent and comprehensive with a clear and coherently-argued structure. Evidence of reading and study beyond the core materials, with no major errors of fact or interpretation. No major errors in the application of appropriate theory and/or methods of analysis. Evidence of critical awareness and some independence of thought. Analysis and argumentation is directed explicitly at the problem definition/research question(s), and relevant empirical evidence is presented in an appropriate manner. |
| **Sufficient** 5.5 - 6.4 | Competent and comprehensive with a reasonably coherent structure and focus. Evidence of some reading and study beyond the core materials, with no major errors of fact or interpretation. No major errors in the application of appropriate theory and/or methods of analysis. Evidence of critical awareness, but limited originality or sense of perspective. A conscious attempt to direct the analysis and argumentation explicitly at the problem statement/research question(s), with reference to empirical evidence where appropriate. |
| **Insufficient** 4.0 - 5.4 | Evidence of knowledge and understanding, but marred by errors and omissions of key issues. Limited/no evidence of reading and study beyond the core materials. Incorrect application of appropriate theory and/or methods of analysis to answer the question. General but non-specific familiarity with the topic area, but weak attempt to address problem statement/answer the research question(s). Lacks originality. Organisation of material and argumentation is weak. Weak (or non-existent) presentation of empirical evidence. |
| **Poor** < 4.0 | Very little evidence of serious study or minimal understanding/knowledge of the subject area. Contains serious errors and/or significant omissions. |