

Elective course Globalisation and Sustainable Development

Academic year 2026-2027

Date: 29/10/2026

Lecturer:

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Title: Artificial Intelligence in a Globalised World

The mid-2020s are increasingly characterised by a series of interconnected crises, such as geopolitical conflict, energy insecurity, environmental degradation, economic instability and widening social inequalities, with artificial intelligence (AI) emerging as both a proposed solution to these challenges and a source of new risks and inequalities. **But what does it take to make AI work, and what is AI ultimately being used for?**

This lecture examines AI within the global capitalist system through these two central questions. First, we will look to the material and social infrastructure on which AI depends, i.e. computing power and energy, data extraction and sourcing, data labelling and training, and tech labour.

Second, we turn to some of the more troubling applications and political-economic consequences of AI, including the militarisation of AI and the commercialisation of public and social infrastructure.

Throughout the lecture, we will use the concept of '**AI colonialism**' to situate these developments within wider histories and structures of globalisation and sustainable development.

To establish a common starting point, students are invited to read Chapter 4, "Dreams of Modernity," from Karen Hao's *Empire of AI* (2025). The chapter provides a useful entry point for thinking about what we mean when we talk about AI: its technological foundations and history, the narratives surrounding it, and the economic interests and political actors shaping its development and governance.