



## **The new higher education Act: Freeing speech or silencing protest?**

### **Also in this issue:**

- **From classroom to stock market and back for prize-winner**
- **Media reporting of trans issues is a 'theft of empathy'**
- **Full coverage of the BSA's annual conference**
- **Sociology must 'share its impact potential'**

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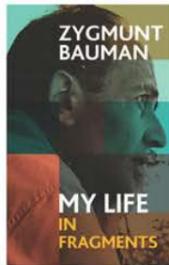
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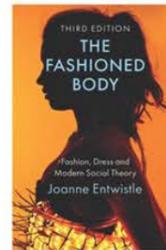
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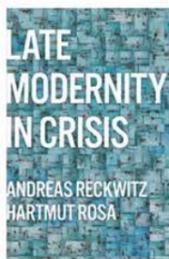
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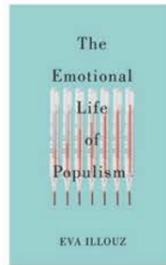
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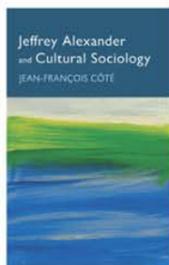
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**What effect will the new Free Speech Act have upon freedom of speech in universities?**

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*graphic: adapted stock imagery*



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## Research looks at how welfare affects health

**University of Kent:** A £3 million research project will examine how welfare systems in five countries affect claimants' mental health.

The project will find out if welfare provision in Estonia, Hungary, Norway, Spain and the UK provides dignity and security or makes claimants feel stigmatised, insecure or unjustly treated.

Dr Trude Sundberg and Dr Robert de Vries will work with Professor Ben Baumberg Geiger, of King's College London, on the five-year project, entitled 'WelfareExperiences'. The overall aim of the project is to contribute to making claimants' experiences better.

The project team will conduct surveys with claimants to see how they are affected by small-scale interactions such as conversations with officials, and by broader country-wide factors including the wider levels of trust that people have in different systems.

Professor Geiger said: "To date, most research has looked at whether these systems reduce poverty and encourage people to work. These are important but, from speaking to claimants, we know that other things matter too – whether benefits provide dignity and security and feel fair, or whether people feel stigmatised, insecure and unjustly treated."

The project is a collaboration between Kent, King's College London, Oslo



Dr Trude Sundberg

Metropolitan University, Tallinn University the Praxis think-tank in Estonia, Complutense University of Madrid, and the Central European University in Hungary.

The grant is a European Research Council Consolidator Grant, which is part of the European Union's Horizon Europe programme.

## Mathematical sociology PhD adds up to 50

Sociology PhD students who feel their research is never-ending should take inspiration from Nick Axten, who was recently awarded his doctorate more than 50 years after starting work.

Dr Axten, 76, began his thesis on mathematical sociology at the University of Pittsburgh in the US in 1970 on a Fulbright Scholarship. But after five years he returned to the UK with the PhD unfinished.

He kept working on his research, however, developing what he believes is a new theory for understanding human behaviour, based on the values each person holds, and which has the potential to change the view of behavioural psychology.

He fitted his research around a varied career, in which he was the creator of the school teaching programme, Oxford Primary Science.

Now the **University of Bristol** has conferred on him a Doctor of Philosophy in front of his wife Claire and granddaughter Freya.

Dr Axten said his research had been "exceptionally difficult. Some problems are so great it takes the best part of a lifetime to get your head around them. They need a long hard think. This one has taken me 50 years."

When he started his undergraduate degree in Leeds, in 1967, "it was still flower power and there was a revolutionary feel. Sociology and psychology were suddenly boom subjects. I went to study them because I wanted to understand people."

## Over half of academics admit to questionable research practices

**University of Essex:** Over half of researchers in Europe have admitted to questionable research practices in their work, a survey has found.

Professor Nick Allum led a research team that surveyed 45,000 researchers in Europe, mainly the UK, Norway, Iceland and Switzerland, and 2,300 in the US.

Questionable research practices were defined as falling short of outright misconduct but still transgressions of best practice, improper use of data, or ethically questionable behaviour.

The researchers asked if they had committed one of the questionable practices in the previous three years, classing 'rarely', 'sometimes' or 'often' responses as 'yes'; and 'never' as 'no'.

The most common practice admitted by European respondents was the inclusion of authors on the list of researchers who had not contributed sufficiently to warrant this (almost 70% of researchers admitted this).

Just over half Europeans admitted not conducting a thorough enough literature review, and around a half admitted not adequately supervising junior staff.

Almost 30% admitted not reporting findings that contradicted their theory, and just over 20% admitted not citing publications that contradicted their beliefs.



Professor Nick Allum

One in five admitted carrying out research without ethical approval, and around one in 10 admitted failing to disclose a conflict of interest. One in 12 admitted using another researcher's idea without giving credit.

The figures for the US were slightly lower for each of the practices, except for higher rates of inadequately supervising junior staff and using other's ideas without credit.

The researchers looked at the figures by field, finding that the admission of questionable practices in the social sciences

was lower than in the natural or medical sciences but higher than in the humanities.

In Europe, early and mid career researchers were more likely to admit to these practices than later career academics. Men and women were approximately equal.

Professor Allum said: "The survey found that, in comparison to their American counterparts, European researchers were more likely to admit to questionable research practices, such as inappropriate authorship, selective citation and inadequate peer review, and were less confident in their ability to maintain high standards of research integrity.

"Set against this are positive signs of a readiness to adopt research and organisational practices that are believed to be conducive to enhancing responsible research conduct."

The research also found that European researchers were less confident in their employer's ability to ensure that the appropriate standards of research were maintained, with less than a quarter reporting either 'not much' or 'no' confidence compared to 29% of American researchers.

The research was part of the Standard Operating Procedures for Research Integrity four-year project, funded by the European Commission.

## News round-up: veganism, migration and awards

**University of Kent:** Dr Corey Wrenn has given talks on veganism at several events recently.

Dr Wrenn spoke at 'Total liberation: the case for vegan sociology', a colloquium on vegan sociology at Essex. She introduced vegan sociology as a new field, building a case for the inclusion of other animals within the discipline.

She was also part of the Teaching Vegan Sociology Panel at the Animal Advocacy Conference at Kent in June, which brought together researchers from social and behavioural sciences and animal activists from around the world.

In other Kent news, an 'Augmented agency – augmented fairness forum' was held in April. This involved expert participants working in different areas of core technology relating to human enhancement. This included natural science subjects such as digital health, sports science, medicalisation, biosciences and genomic sciences, and also included related experts in the social sciences, arts and humanities.

Dr Jennifer Leigh's new book, *Borders of Qualitative Research: Navigating the Lands Where Qualitative Research, Therapy, Education, Art and Science Connect*, will be published this year by Policy Press. Dr Leigh's research includes projects on making chemistry more inclusive and accessible.

**Loughborough University:** Dr Simone Varriale published a monograph with Bristol University Press, *Coloniality and Meritocracy in Unequal EU Migrations: Intersecting Inequalities in Post-2008 Italian Migration*.

The book draws on interviews with working class and middle class white and Black Italians who moved to Britain after the 2008 economic crisis.

It explores the narratives of Northern meritocracy and Southern backwardness that inform migrants' motivations for moving abroad.

The book looks at how meritocracy reproduces narratives of ethnic and racial difference between European centres and

peripheries, and between Europe and other parts of the world:

<https://tinyurl.com/2u2v63ue>

**University of Liverpool:** Dr Aminu Musa Audu is one of the winners of this year's Alumni Award. Twenty awards are given each year to former students notable for their contribution to business, arts, sport, charity, the community, and Liverpool city. Dr Audu has been a governor of a local school and has researched police corruption in Nigeria, his birth country, recommending that the police be better paid and trained. He recently completed six years as a BSA trustee.

The School of Sociology, Politics, and International Studies at the **University of Bristol** has been given a Bronze Athena Swan award. The award was given for its effective approach to flexible working, and the work of the school's Gender Research Centre.

## Covid feeding plans 'failed'

**University of Essex:** British emergency feeding plans for children failed during the Covid pandemic, research has found.

Professor John Preston contrasted the robust civil defence plan during a national crisis that were put in place after the second world war with that of the recent pandemic.

He used archival data from once-secret government files to find that in the late 1940s and early 1950s investment in school kitchens and staff allowed the school meals service to feed not just children but the whole population in a crisis.

But decades of under-funding by a succession of governments led to a poor quality of provision. National supplies of food for use in an emergency were depleted, and in 2019 the government decided that emergency feeding was a matter that involved working with the private sector, rather than public provision.

During the pandemic most schools and local authorities were unable to use in-house or local authority suppliers due to the isolation rules, he notes in a paper in the *British Journal of Sociology of Education*.

Professor Preston said: "The UK failed to



Professor John Preston

adequately supply nutritional school meals to children, particularly working class pupils, during the Covid-19 pandemic.

"The findings of the research have implications for other areas of long-term planning. We only find out about the failure of emergency plans in an actual emergency, so if governments are to plan effectively for a crisis, then they need to ensure that their plans are up to date and robust."

## Grandchildren of Turks studied

**University of Essex:** The grandchildren of Turkish migrants to the rest of Europe will be interviewed as part of a €2.75 million research project.

Professor Ayse Guveli will explore the impact of migration on the third generation of Turkish migrant families, examining their socio-economic position and how they have assimilated into their broader society.

Her five-year project, entitled, ThirdGen, is funded by the European Research Council.

Professor Guveli said: "Research has produced extensive knowledge about migrants and their children.

"But we know almost nothing about the third generation – the grandchildren. Studying the third generation will reveal the long-term implications of migration.

"Has their socioeconomic position improved? Do they still plan to look after their elderly relatives at home? What role do religion and gender play?"

# Film reveals legal system fails domestic abuse survivors

**Glasgow Caledonian University:** Researchers have released a film featuring testimonies from survivors of domestic abuse and stalking who express their frustration at Scotland's police and legal system.

A survey of over 130 women found that many told of a lack of communication from the police and courts, lengthy case delays and perpetrators breaching bail conditions.

The film concludes that the system allowed the abuse to continue and sometimes added to it.

The film was created as part of research by Professor Nancy Lombard and Dr Katy Proctor, who have written a report calling for police and criminal justice staff to better understand the trauma caused by reporting coercive control. It recommends that bail conditions are better enforced and survivors are listened to throughout the justice process.

The research, carried out with funding from the Scottish government's Justice Analytical Services, concludes that communication needs to be improved at



Professor Nancy Lombard

every stage of the investigation and prosecution process.

Professor Lombard said: "Scotland's legislation on domestic abuse has been described as gold standard. However, it is

important to recognise that, despite victim-centred policies and legislation, criminal justice processes and individual responses can diminish their impact.

"Our participants described repeatedly how they felt the criminal justice system further controlled them and often facilitated the perpetrators' abusive behaviours."

Dr Proctor said: "Women told us some officers advised that they should take civil action, often instead of criminal action, despite the significant financial cost to the women.

"This made women feel there was reluctance by individual officers to take the case forward or that the reported incidents were seen as 'just' a relationship breakdown and not an abusive course of conduct. To some, it felt like someone else was deciding what was best for them."

The short film, which was produced by the award-winning production company Media Co-op, is at:

[www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_V7LivgP5FI](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_V7LivgP5FI)

# Book studies queer lives

**University of Strathclyde:** Professor Yvette Taylor has published a new book, *Working-Class Queers: Time, Place and Politics*, based on more than 20 years of her research.

The book engages with the experience of working class queers through cycles of crisis, austerity, recession and migration to show how they have been under-represented, and calls for this to be changed.

Drawing on academic and radical activism in queer studies and feminism, Professor Taylor critiques the policy, theory and practices that have maintained queer middle class privilege at the expense of working class queers.

Professor Matt Brim, of City University of New York, said the book "makes major

intellectual and ethical contributions to queer feminist methods. This book is a must-read for thinkers asking about the 'how' of queer and lesbian studies, not least in that it reflects intimate methods of sharing negotiated by a scholar working in troubled and hopeful times alike."

In other Strathclyde news, Keri McGachy, a PhD student, has accepted a Scottish Graduate School of Social Science summer internship with the Scottish Government. Ms McGachy, a former modern studies teacher, hopes that the internship will serve to strengthen the relationship between academic research and policy, and also raise the profile of university students who were raised in care, issues that form her research.

# Gary Younge wins Orwell prize

Professor Gary Younge has been awarded the Orwell Prize for Journalism 2023.

The prize is given every year for the reporting which best meets the spirit of George Orwell's ambition to make political writing into an art.

Professor Younge's three articles submitted for the prize were entitled 'How racism shaped my critical eye', 'Lest we remember: how Britain buried its history of slavery' and 'Facts that matter'.

Professor Younge joined the University of

Manchester in 2020 from *The Guardian*, where he was appointed US correspondent in 2003 before becoming their editor-at-large in 2015. His latest book is a collection of his journalism, *Dispatches from the Diaspora: From Nelson Mandela to Black Lives Matter*. He is currently concentrating his research on the Black presence in post-war Europe.

Professor Younge is an honorary Fellow of the British Academy, a Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature.

# Research to study murder files

**Glasgow Caledonian University:**

Researchers will study police files of domestic abuse murders in Scotland in order to identify patterns of behaviour and help prevent future deaths.

The study will focus on cases going back 10 years where a woman was killed by a current or former partner.

The university is collaborating with Police Scotland and charities working to stop violence against women in order to look at perpetrators' backgrounds and previous involvement with the criminal justice system, identify risk factors, and pinpoint opportunities for intervention.

Professor Lesley McMillan, who is leading the study, said: "Our goal is to more fully understand the domestic homicide of women, the patterns of behaviour that precede it, the challenges it presents in terms of prevention, and the opportunities that may exist for safeguarding.

"The in-depth analysis of homicide cases will allow us to explore perpetrator characteristics, patterns of behaviour and abuse."

The pilot project, funded by the ESRC, could pave the way for a larger study into domestic homicide that will also include 'hidden homicides' – suicides related to domestic abuse.

# Book reveals how to do research using collage and theatre

**Goldsmiths:** A guide to doing critical and creative research using a range of unusual methods will be published in November by the university.

*How to Do Research With ...* is a large catalogue of essays from the Sociology department, co-edited by Dr Kat Jungnickel, Dr Nirmal Puwar and Professor Rebecca Coleman, who is now based at the University of Bristol.

This spans methods and topics including using theatre and collaging to carry out research.

Other recent Goldsmiths publications include Professor Kirsten Campbell's book, *The Justice of Humans: Subject, Society, and Sexual Violence in International Criminal Justice*, which develops a new feminist approach to international justice by focusing on the treatment of sexual violence as a gender-based crime.

Professor Kate Nash is translating Aimé Césaire's work *Toussaint L'Ouverture*, on the Haitian freedom fighter, as a contribution to decolonising human rights. Dr Fay Dennis, Professor Marsha Rosengarten and Dr Kiran Pienaar, of Deakin University, Australia, will be publishing *Narcofeminisms: Revisioning Drug Use* as part of SAGE's Sociological Review Monograph series.

# Sportswomen's stitch in time

**Goldsmiths:** Dr Kat Jungnickel has examined patents for clothing over the past two centuries to see how women have adapted menswear so that they could take part in sport.

Dr Jungnickel looked at some of the publicly available open-access patents from the European Patent Organisation to reveal a history of inventive clothing that helped women get round societal restrictions on taking part in sport.

Because women were rarely the focus of sportswear manufacturers, they had to either borrow or adapt existing menswear or invent it themselves.

Dr Jungnickel said: "We've unearthed hundreds of clothing inventions for and by women for all kinds of sports and activities. They reveal the extraordinarily ingenious ways that women have challenged the status quo to do what they've loved while forging the path for future generations.

"In addition to being hampered by negative social attitudes, even when women carved out ways to participate in sports, they rarely had appropriate things to wear because they have seldom been the focus of sportswear manufacturers."



Dr Nirmal Puwar

The department held various events recently. The Centre for Urban and Community Research hosted 'A global sense of place revisited' in February, with speakers Dr Yasmin Gunaratnam, of King's College London, Professor Suzanne Hall, LSE, and Professor Agata Lisiak, of Bard College in Berlin, to revisit Doreen Massey's classic 1991 essay on globalisation.

The Centre for Feminist Research helped organise an event at Coventry Cathedral in May entitled 'Woman, life, freedom', which featured the sounds of the feminist mobilisations in Iran, including a version of Baraye, a song which was awarded a Grammy for Best Song for Social Change in 2023.

Dr Melissa Nolas, Dr Brenda Herbert, Zoe Walshe, a doctoral student, and Elina Moraitopoulou, a doctoral student at Hamburg University, are organising a three-part seminar series on 'Childhood publics and the child's gaze' funded by the Sociological Review Foundation.

The events take part at a time when the advent of smartphones, tablets and digital cameras means that children are taking more and more photos. More details are at: [tinyurl.com/ymcrmp7h](https://tinyurl.com/ymcrmp7h)

Dr Vik Loveday has been conducting a visual sociology project on perceptions of communist-era architecture and public art in Central Europe.

The research aims to make connections between the virtual world of Instagram aesthetics and the real world practices of those seeking to protect buildings and artworks from the threat of dilapidation, destruction and amnesia.

# Varese leaves Oxford for Paris

**University of Oxford:** Professor Federico Varese, the Head of the Sociology Department, has left to take up a new professorship at Sciences Po in Paris.

Professor Varese completed his DPhil in sociology at Oxford in 1997. Since 2003 he has been a Fellow of Nuffield College and in 2006 was made Professor of Criminology. He had led Oxford sociology as Head of Department since 2021.

Professor Varese has written about the Russian mafia, Soviet criminal history, the migration of mafia groups, Somali piracy, the dynamics of altruistic behaviour and the application of social network analysis to criminology.

Professor Colin Mills will take over as interim Head of Department. He is a Fellow of Nuffield College and has been a member of the university since 2002.

His research interests include social inequality, social mobility, workplace employment relations, social survey methodology, and quantitative social research.



Dr Jungnickel and her team at the Politics of Patents project were funded by the European Research Council for the research. A journal article, 'Convertible, multiple and hidden: the inventive lives of women's sport and activewear 1890–1940', has been published in the *Sociological Review*: <https://tinyurl.com/4h4hawzk>

**Photo above:** Dr Jungnickel wearing American aviatatrix Edith Foltz's 1937 Convertible Skirt & Skirt, described at the time as "useful for a range of outdoor activities, including horse-back riding, hiking and like sports".

## Four-day week ‘cuts stress and illness’

**University of Cambridge:** The world’s largest trial of a four-day working week has found that it significantly reduces stress and illness in the workforce and boosts employee retention.

A team of Cambridge social scientists, led by Professor Brendan Burchell, researched 61 organisations in the UK that committed to a 20% reduction in working hours for all staff for six months with no fall in wages.

The researchers found a 65% reduction in sick days and a 57% fall in the number of staff leaving the companies, compared to the same period the previous year.

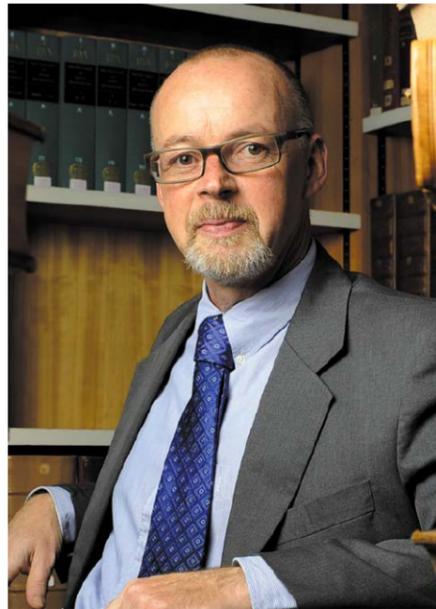
They also found that 71% of employees self-reported lower levels of burnout and 39% said they were less stressed.

Company revenue increased by 1.4% on average for the 23 organisations that provided data on this.

Fifty-six out of the 61 companies said they intended to continue with the four-day working week, with 18 confirming the change as permanent.

The Cambridge team worked with academics from Boston College in the US and the think tank Autonomy on the trial, which ran between June and December 2022. Around 2,900 employees took part.

Organisations involved in the trial included online retailers, financial service providers, animation studios and a local fish and chip shop. Other industries represented



Professor Brendan Burchell ©Christopher Cox

include consultancy, housing, IT, skincare, recruitment, hospitality, marketing and healthcare.

“Before the trial, many questioned whether we would see an increase in productivity to offset the reduction in working time – but this is exactly what we found,” said Professor Burchell.

## Virdee appointed RSE Fellow

**University of Glasgow:** Professor Satnam Virdee has been made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh.

Professor Virdee was one of 91 Fellows elected to the RSE this year, joining a Fellowship of around 1,800.

“Over three decades my work has focused on mapping the entangled histories of capitalism, class and racism alongside the remarkable efforts of the subjugated to challenge the structural inequalities they encountered,” Professor Virdee said.

“I hope my election represents an opportunity to have a deeper reckoning with racism and its multifarious effects so that we can move towards a more enlightened future of human flourishing for all.”

Professor Les Back, Head of Sociology, said: “More than any other contemporary scholar, Satnam Virdee’s writing and thinking provide a deep critical understanding of how racism is implicated and embedded in the structural inequalities of capitalist societies.”



Professor Satnam Virdee

“Not content to only understand the world, he is a scholar committed to changing it and his election to an RSE Fellow is a significant step towards the realisation of a decolonised academy.”

## Warwick receives Silver Athena Swan award

**University of Warwick:** The Department of Sociology has received a Silver Athena Swan Award for its work on gender equality.

In a letter of application the department said that it had worked to become more inclusive for trans and non-binary students and staff. It had also provided support and training in relation to sexual harassment.

The proportion of women professors had increased from 30% in 2017 to 62%, and BAME staff from 24% to 30%, with seven BAME professors out of 11.

The proportion of BAME students had increased from 39% of women and 41% of men in 2017, to 56% of women and 70% of men currently.

“The department is a recognised research leader in gender, race and ethnicity, sexuality, social theory, inequalities and social change, economy and expertise, and social justice,” said the letter, written by Professor John Solomos, a previous head of department.

“Emerging from this research expertise and our commitment to embedding gender, race and class in our curriculum, is an established culture of seeking to promote equality in all spheres of activity. This informed our efforts to develop aspirational targets around gender and ethnicity in staffing and inspired our curriculum review.

“We now have UG specialisms in race and global politics, and social inequalities and public policy, and are proposing a new MA in gender and sexuality. The department strives for gender and ethnic balance within its leadership team.

“We now have new challenges to address. The key ones include improving progression for administrative staff and addressing issues relating to fixed-term teaching-only contracts.”

Professor Solomos served as head from 2013 until 2018, and for part of 2022. Professor Virinder Kalra was head between 2018 and 2021. Professor Alice Mah is the current head. The award is given by Advance HE.

Also, the university gave an ‘Excellence in gender equality’ award to a team led by Professor Nickie Charles and Dr Maria do Mar Pereira.

The award is given to individuals and teams doing outstanding work to promote gender equality at Warwick.

The team organised several national and international events, bringing together academics, students, administrators and practitioners across more than 60 universities, to exchange best practice and provide mutual support.

## Youth group brings strong sense of community to childhood study

**Youth study group:** The Youth study group and Childhood study group organised the Lifecourse stream of the recent BSA annual conference in April.

Six stream panels focused on youth research, including transitions and relationships, sociological archives, activism, popular culture, citizenship, co-production and marginalisation. Two other panels focused on older people’s experiences, death administration and hospices.

The two study groups carried out a joint lifecourse stream plenary titled ‘(Re)imagining the lifecourse: examining childhood and youth futures’. This featured a keynote by Professor Rob MacDonald on the value of a political economy perspective for the future of youth study research, with responses from experts including Professor Sharlene Swartz and Dr Karenza Moore.

Youth study group panels were well-attended with a strong sense of community developed from regular virtual meetings held during the pandemic.

Those interested in joining virtual meetings can sign up to the study group newsletter and follow it on twitter @BSAYouthSG.



Professor Rob MacDonald

The group welcomed four new convenors in April. Thalia Thereza Assan is a PhD candidate at the University of Edinburgh whose academic interests include friendship, activism, education and qualitative methods.

Dr Liam Wrigley, of Keele University, researches youth studies and social policy. Ms Assan and Dr Wrigley will focus on

supporting early careers members.

Dr Harriet Rowley, of Manchester Metropolitan University, combines ethnographic approaches with arts-based methods to research youth participation, social engagement and the representation and recognition of marginalised groups.

Dr Grace Spencer, of Anglia Ruskin University, is a registered nurse with a background in public health and health promotion. Her research interest includes youth transitions, migration, social change, qualitative research methods and ethics with children and young people.

The new convenors join Dr Janina Suppers, University of Waikato, and Sophie Atherton, University of Manchester, as convenors.

The group thanked longstanding convenors Dr Moore, of Newcastle University and Dr Benjamin Hanckel, of Western Sydney University, who have stepped down and whose work over the last few years has been central to fostering the youth study group as a stimulating and supportive community that brings together PhD students, early career and senior academics.

## Round-up: STS and Emotions

**STS study group:** The group organised STS and digital studies themed sessions in a joint effort with the Digital Sociology study group at the BSA annual conference in April, with six paper panels, a stream plenary and a study group lunch meeting.

Presenters from various countries and at different career stages shared their research during the panel sessions, with topics including lay science, technology in healthcare and digital platform use.

In the stream plenary, Dr Mark Carrigan, of the University of Manchester, Dr Huw Davies and Dr Karen Gregory, of the University of Edinburgh, Professor Rebecca Enyon, University of Oxford, and Dr Janja Komljenovic, Lancaster University, discussed present challenges and future work in relation to educational technology.

The STS study group brought current and prospective group members together for a lunch meeting on the last day of the conference, sharing thoughts on the group as a community and making suggestions on future activities.

The study group also held an event entitled ‘How to: publishing a book in STS’ in January, featuring a panel of editors who shared their experiences with those thinking about publishing a book.

The group is organising events for the next academic year, including a workshop entitled

‘Re: constructs/exchanges between STS and sociology’, which will take place at the University of Essex on 8 December.

The workshop is funded by the Department of Sociology at Essex and the Centre for Interdisciplinary Methodologies at the University of Warwick and organised by Dr Tara Mahfoud, University of Essex, Professor Noortje Marres, Warwick, and Dr Michael Guggenheim, Goldsmiths. It will include talks by Professor Linsey McGoey University of Essex, and Professor Anne Pollock, King’s College London. Email tara.mahfoud@essex.ac.uk for more details.

**Emotions study group:** The Emotions Study Group ran an online symposium in June, focusing on the connections between emotions, inequalities and solidarities.

The event took place online over two half-days, a format used to build on the international character of previous symposia, which maximises participation from the diverse membership. Papers examined various forms of solidarity as they shape the dynamics of intersecting inequalities. Talks focused on both virtual and in-person patterns of experience and relationship from a wide range of social contexts, drawing out the tensions, connections and discontinuities between emotions, inequalities and solidarities.

## Mentor scheme’s success continues

**Medical Sociology study group:** The group’s mentoring programme is set to continue during 2023, its third year of operation.

The mentoring network was launched so that the support and community connections made at the annual Medsoc conference could be extended throughout the academic year.

This year, the group has facilitated more than 40 mentor-mentee pairings, with applicants from the UK and countries including Bangladesh, Belgium, Germany, India, Ireland, Pakistan and Zimbabwe.

It has attracted sociologists of health and illness at all career stages, from postgraduate students starting out in the field to emerita and emeritus professors, offering mentorship to the next generation of medical sociologists.

The issues that mentees have identified as most pressing are grant applications, publishing, promotion and precarity.

The group also has mentors and mentees researching and teaching outside of sociology departments and outside of academic institutions, who bring expertise in conducting research in health care settings and for charitable organisations.

The group hopes that the scheme will provide mentees with vital support and expert feedback for their careers.

# Sociologists' lifetime of achievement recognised by BSA special awards

**Lifetime Achievement Awards** have been given to nine prominent sociologists by the BSA.

The awards recognise their extraordinary contribution to the history of UK sociology.

Conventionally only one or two awards are given each year, but the awarding of nine at once marked the 70th anniversary of the BSA last year.

As the 2022 event was online only, the giving of the awards was postponed to this year, the first in-person conference for four years.

The recipients are all current or former professors. They are:

Margaret Archer, a social theorist whose public roles included presidency of a Vatican advisory body. She has since died. *see page 39*

Les Back, of the University of Glasgow, whose main fields of interest are the sociology of racism, migration, auditory culture, music and city life.

Avtar Brah, who recently retired from Birkbeck as a specialist in race, gender and ethnic identity issues.

Anthony Giddens, former Director of the LSE, an adviser to the New Labour government.

Lynn Jamieson, of the University of Edinburgh, whose research interests include social change in personal life, European identity and oral history.

Ann Phoenix, of UCL, whose interests

include motherhood, social identities, racialisation and gender.

John Scott, of the University of Plymouth, who has researched social stratification, power and elites, business organisation, research methods, sociological theory and the history of sociology.

Beverley Skeggs, of Lancaster University, whose work addresses the multi-dimensional nature of inequality, including the intersections between class and gender.

The broadcaster Laurie Taylor, whose academic career spanned sociology and criminology and who presents the BBC Radio 4 programme Thinking Allowed.



Photos –  
Above, Margaret Archer.  
Above right, clockwise from top left: Laurie Taylor, Avtar Brah, Bev Skeggs, Lynn Jamieson, Ann Phoenix, John Scott, Les Back, Anthony Giddens



# Article on 'selfish' sperm donors wins award

An article about the selfish aspect of sperm donation has won this year's *Sociology* journal SAGE prize for innovation and excellence.

"The 'selfish element': how sperm and egg donors construct plausibly moral accounts of the decision to donate' wins £250 worth of SAGE books or a free annual individual journal subscription for Dr Leah Gilman, of the University of Sheffield.

The article focuses on 52 interviews conducted with men and women who had donated eggs, embryos or sperm.

In it, she notes that "The vast majority of men who articulated procreative motivations were non-parents at the time of their donation and they usually related this motive to an expectation (or concern) that they might never have children.

"Donation was presented as either an 'insurance policy' against not achieving, or an alternative to, 'real' fatherhood, enabling the fulfilment of a desire to procreate, while not becoming a parent in the more



Dr Leah Gilman

established sense of the word.

"While on the one hand, sperm donors often presented the desire to procreate as 'natural', as a motive for donating sperm it was also often framed as morally

questionable (certainly less straightforwardly 'good' than the desire to help others).

"This raises the question: why do men frame their reasons for donating in this way? If we understand motivation talk as a social act of moral self-presentation such statements are puzzling.

"Seemingly, all participants had free rein to present their reasons as entirely 'right', in line with the narrative widely expected of 'good donors' in contemporary Britain. Why qualify their accounts of wanting to help others with 'a selfish element'?"

"I offer two inter-related explanations for this finding: the need to offer an account which will be viewed as plausible by others, and a desire to articulate an account which feels authentic. The desire and ability to achieve both plausibility and authenticity are shaped by the interplay between specific interactional and wider cultural contexts."

The article is at:  
<https://tinyurl.com/2nvtvcy5>

# Review finds strong commitment by BSA to care for sociology

**A statement from the BSA Board of Trustees:**

In 2022, the trustees commissioned a full governance review to ensure that the BSA is meeting the expectations of good charity governance, delivering its objectives and working effectively as a membership organisation.

The review was conducted by academic external consultants drawing on detailed scrutiny of board papers, BSA charity and trading company documentation, BSA policies and procedures, and interviews with staff, trustees and key stakeholders.

The review report recognised that this governance review was carried out as the world was emerging from the Covid-19 pandemic and at a time where many charities, including the BSA, were considering new working models and practices, building on the learning and opportunities from the pandemic and re-instating practices that may have been paused for practical reasons during that time.

The consultants summarised their findings to the board, saying that there was a lot that was working well including:

- There is strong clarity of purpose amongst the board and strong commitment to and care for sociology and its stakeholders, including members.

- Trustees have a shared sense of the challenges facing the BSA.
- Meeting effectiveness is supported by well-presented and succinct papers and a warm, welcoming style of chairing which encourages contributions from all.
- Risk management is prioritised, with an annually reviewed risk register and new risks brought to the Board at meetings.
- Board effectiveness is supported by a commitment to externally reviewing governance every five-seven years, an annual trustee skills audit, and continuity and certainty about succession (with the Vice-chair taking up the Chair's role at the end of the latter's term).
- Equality, diversity, and inclusion is prioritised and considered at meetings, supported by a working group.
- There is a strong commitment to the green agenda and tackling climate change.

There are 14 recommendations for improvement, which is normal for this type of review:

- Strategic development and performance monitoring (build a mechanism to track the difference we make).
- Trustee role and division of labour (improve trustee role descriptions).
- Practical suggestions to enhance Board meeting effectiveness (e.g. introduce timed agendas).

- Strengthen board assurance mechanisms (co-opt someone with financial skills onto the board).
- The President's role (more clarity of the role needed).
- The Chief Executive's performance review (return to pre-Covid annual appraisal by Chair).
- Conflicts of interest and loyalty (introduce a separate agenda item at every board meeting).
- Risk management and oversight (introduce formal codes of conduct and mechanisms for dealing with breaches of code of conduct).
- Board effectiveness and development including induction (return to pre-Covid induction).
- Diversity, equity and inclusion (increase outreach for new trustees to increase diversity).
- Website information (increase clarity and transparency).
- Trading company (co-opt independent expert onto board).
- Advisory Forum (draft clear Terms of Reference and seek feedback in a more explicit manner on issues of strategic concern).
- Develop organisational 'values'.

The next review is scheduled to take place in the next five to seven years, by the end of 2029.

## Would you like to contribute to Network?

We are looking for letters, opinions and news articles

For more information please contact Tony Trueman at: [tony.trueman@britsoc.org.uk](mailto:tony.trueman@britsoc.org.uk) or on 07964 023392, or BSA Chief Executive Judith Mudd at: [judith.mudd@britsoc.org.uk](mailto:judith.mudd@britsoc.org.uk)

The Autumn 2023 edition of *Network* will be published in December. Copy deadlines are around two months before publication (please check with Tony or Judith).

We try to print all material received, but pressure of space may lead to articles being edited and publication being delayed.

Books for review can be seen at: <http://bit.ly/2gM3tDt>



# All around the world...

Links to online articles about these topics can be found at [www.britsoc.co.uk/members-area/network](http://www.britsoc.co.uk/members-area/network)

## Network takes a look at sociology beyond our shores

### Diab convicted of bombing

A Lebanese-Canadian sociology professor has been convicted of carrying out the deadly bombing of a Paris synagogue in 1980.

Judges in Paris ruled that Hassan Diab, 69, was the young man who planted the motorcycle bomb in the Rue Copernic which killed four people and injured 38.

Professor Diab, who refused to attend the trial, was given a life sentence for the attack, the first to target Jews in France since world war two.

He is a Lebanese man of Palestinian origin who obtained Canadian nationality in 1993 and teaches sociology in Ottawa. He was first named as a suspect on the basis of new evidence in 1999, nearly 20 years after the killings.

Over three weeks the Paris court heard arguments identifying Diab as the bomber, and counter-evidence suggesting he was a victim of mistaken identity.

The prosecution relied on passport evidence that showed that Diab travelled to Spain at the time of the attack, and could then have crossed to France.

The surviving witnesses who saw the attacker in 1980 admitted that their memories were too hazy to be reliable.

The attacker was alleged to belong to a dissident Palestinian group called the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine-Special Operations.

His conviction means that an extradition request from France to Canada will follow, though with strong doubts over whether it will succeed.

The Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau, said his government "will look carefully at next steps, at what the French government chooses to do. But we will always be there to stand up for Canadians and their rights."

• Authorities in Iran have sentenced a sociology professor, Saeed Madani, to nine years' imprisonment for "propaganda against the establishment" and "organising opposition groups". According to *The Sharq Daily*, his book *Against the Death Penalty*, published in Sweden, was used by judiciary officials to prove his "acts against national security."

### Silver screen turns white again

The diversity of Hollywood's biggest film productions fell in 2022 after years of incremental progress, according to a new study by UCLA researchers.

The research by sociologists Dr Darnell Hunt and Dr Ana-Christina Ramón found that ethnic and gender inclusivity in films reverted back to 2018 levels, reversing the trend towards greater equity on screen and behind the camera.

This was despite the Oscar triumph for Asian American representation with the best picture award given to *Everything Everywhere All at Once*.

Opportunities were notably greater for women and people of colour on lower-budgeted streaming films than in theatrically released films.

The film industry was still recovering in 2022, producing fewer films, with box office returns at 67% of pre-pandemic levels.



### The 1%: more money than sense

The top 1% of earners score lower on IQ tests than those whose incomes rank below them, research shows.

Although people with higher incomes tend to score higher on IQ tests, this correlation breaks down at the highest level, the study from Linköping University shows.

The researchers combined scores from cognitive ability tests taken by 59,000 male military conscripts in Sweden at age 18-19 with data on their earnings when they were aged around 40.

They found that while higher IQ scores correlated with higher incomes in later life, this effect levelled off at €60,000 a year. Those in the top 1% income category had slightly lower IQ scores than those in the top 2% or 3%.

"This data trope permits us to test, for the first time, whether extremely high wages are indicative of extreme intelligence," said one researcher, Dr Marc Keuschnigg, of the Institute of Analytical Sociology at Linköping.

The paper, published in the *European Sociological Review*, says: "We find no evidence that those with top jobs that pay extraordinary wages are more deserving than those who earn only half those wages."

### Albanian women freed

Albanian women have freed themselves from the obligation to raise children and keep house and this has caused a large fall in the birth rate, say sociologists.

For years, Albania has seen a decrease in the birth rate, leading to a population total that has fallen steadily from a high of 3.3 million in 1990 to 2.8 million today.

The total fertility rate of 1.7 children per mother is one of the lowest in the world, statistics show.

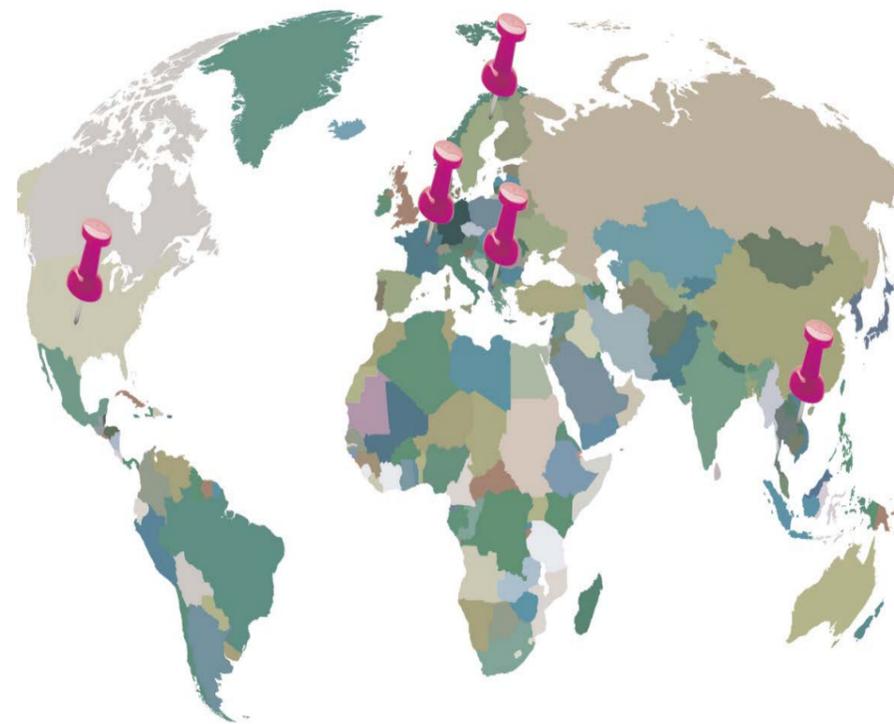
The sociologist Gëzim Tushi said that there were many causes: "One of them is the decline in the birth rate, due to the emancipation of the Albanian family.

"The Albanian woman has been emancipated, she is no longer just a reproductive being, she has come out of that fatal triangle of kitchen, motherhood and raising children.

"Today, we have a woman who has her goals in life."

The fall was also caused by a decrease in the number of marriages and a rise in divorces, he said.

"What I want to highlight as a priority is the need to have the best social services for the family," said Dr Tushi.



### ChatGPT

ChatGPT is coming for your job, or at least a part of it, a study has found. Sociology is among the 20 occupations most exposed to artificial intelligence language modelling tools, it claims.

According to researchers from Princeton, the University of Pennsylvania and New York University, sociology and other social sciences may be affected by AI, in ways ranging from job losses to the use of technology to help with job functions.

The researchers took 10 common applications of AI, including image generation such as the app Dall-E and text creators like ChatGPT, and mapped them to different occupations to see how related AI tools' abilities were to various job skills.

The most exposed profession was telemarketers, followed by language and literature teachers, then history, law and philosophy teachers, with sociology teachers at sixth place, ahead of political scientists, criminologists, psychology teachers and geographers, as well as judges and attorneys.

"There are a lot of really interesting things you can do with ChatGPT, like use it to create a syllabus or suggest readings," said Dr Manav Raj, one of the researchers.

### Spare the rod, save the child

Spanking is bad for children's social development, a longitudinal study found.

Children who were spanked had lower self-control and interpersonal skills compared to children who had not.

Dr Jeehye Kang, of Old Dominion University, Virginia, analysed survey data on US children aged five to seven.

This recorded children's social competence, self-control and interpersonal skills, and if the parent had spanked the child.

The results revealed that 61% of the children had been spanked at some point in their lifetime and 28% had been spanked in the previous week. Children who had been spanked had lower self-control and interpersonal skills at age six.

Dr Kang said. "My study shows that spanking may hinder children's development of self-control and interpersonal skills. This finding was robust even when spanking was as infrequent as once a week. In other words, spanking is doing the opposite of what parents intend to achieve."

The study is published in the journal *Child Abuse & Neglect*.

### Positive spin for the globe

Small acts of kindness are frequent and universal, a new study has found.

Researchers analysed more than 40 hours of video recordings of everyday life involving more than 350 people in diverse places in England, Italy, Poland and Russia, and rural villages in Ecuador, Ghana, Laos and aboriginal Australia.

The analysis focused on sequences in which one person sent a signal, such as asking directly for help or visibly struggling with a task, and another person responded.

The authors identified more than 1,000 requests, occurring on average about once every two minutes. The situations involved minor instances of sharing items for everyday use or helping others with tasks around the house or village, for example.

People complied with small requests much more often than they declined or ignored them. The average rates of rejection was 10% and ignoring 11%, much lower than the average rate of compliance, 79%.

The preference for compliance held across all cultures and was unaffected by whether the interaction was among family or non-family members.

People helped without explanation, but when they declined, they gave an explicit reason 74% of the time. That suggests that while people decline to help only for a good reason, they give help unconditionally, without needing to explain why they are doing it.

The researchers, led by UCLA sociologist Dr Giovanni Rossi, found that the rate of helping others was similar across all countries studied.

However, high-cost decisions that involved more time, effort and sacrifice, such as whether to build a village road, varied according to the culture.

Dr Rossi said: "While cultural variation comes into play for special occasions and high-cost exchange, when we zoom in on the micro level of social interaction, cultural difference mostly goes away, and our species' tendency to give help when needed becomes universally visible."

The findings suggested that being helpful is an ingrained reflex in the human species, he said, and that the human capacity for co-operation transcended cultural differences, contrary to previous research that emphasised the variations in rules and norms governing cooperation, he said.

The study is published in *Scientific Reports*: [www.nature.com/articles/s41598-023-30580-5](http://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-023-30580-5)

# New Act: freeing speech or silencing dissent?

The free speech Act comes at a time when the Conservative government and some free speech advocates have raised concerns about a small number of cases at universities where staff or invited speakers have alleged they were prevented from expressing their views. See box on page 16 for more details of the Act.

How will this Act affect researchers? The Westminster Higher Education Forum held a seminar on the future for freedom of speech in UK higher education at which experts gave their opinions on what was then a Bill going through Parliament, which has now been passed into law.

One of the speakers was Professor George Letsas, Reader in the Philosophy of Law and Human Rights at UCL, who said: "I'm genuinely worried about the new higher education Bill, and I think it has very serious implications for academic freedom. And this is particularly in relation to the so-called issue of de-platforming."

"Now, we're all for free speech. The trouble is that free speech claims are competing and can be invoked by all sides."

"The combination of the new Bill and the already consumerist tendencies for management to have control of universities constitutes a very real attack on academic freedom. The real problem is who has control over academic departments. And in this case, I think, academics have been known to have a very important right and they have to control that."

"Nobody has a right to speak in my university seminars or in my class or in my events. Academics are the ones to decide who is invited and who is disinvited. And students very crucially have rights to protest, even disruptive protest. I don't think we want anybody to tell students what is a good topic to protest on, what is offensive or going too far and what isn't."

"I think the best way to handle things is to let the university culture flourish from the bottom up, where academics and students together are guardians of the pursuit of knowledge."

"The crucial thing about academic freedom is that it should be interpreted to mean autonomy from both government interference and university management, and it is a worry that the Bill doesn't respect that."

"The crucial thing about academic freedom is that it should be interpreted to mean autonomy from both government interference and university management, and it is a worry that the Bill doesn't respect that."

## This May saw the passing by Parliament of the Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. Its 19 sections set out for the first time how any university that fails to meet legal and regulatory obligations on free speech can be sued for damages. Network takes a look at a recent conference on the Act's implications

"If I have a right to invite someone to my seminar, it follows logically that I also have the right to decide to rescind an invitation. I don't think that it's for the government to police the reasons for which an academic may want to rescind. We've had that right for many centuries. Universities have been progressive institutions, where protesting has

been a force of good. Think of the Vietnam wars, think of apartheid. Think of the very many social justice protests that happened within universities. Do we want this to stop?"

"In a healthy democracy we should allow a degree of disruptive protest, as has been the case historically. So we don't want that taken away, particularly by the government."

Dr Naomi Waltham-Smith, Chair, Academic Freedom Review Committee, University Of Warwick, gave a summary of a number of pieces of legislation about free speech and higher education, among them:

- The 1986 Freedom of Speech: Duty in Education Act, which said that universities "shall take such steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure that freedom of speech within the law is secured for members, students and employees of the establishment and for visiting speakers."

- The Education Reform Act 1988, which said that a body of University Commissioners should be set up "to ensure that academic staff have freedom within the law to question and test received wisdom, and to put forward new ideas and controversial or unpopular opinions, without placing themselves in jeopardy of losing their jobs or privileges they may have at their institutions."

- The European Convention on Human Rights Article 10, which states that: "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas

without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers."

Dr Waltham-Smith said: "So what does the Bill add to this? The Bill, quite crucially, retains the existing rather thin definition of academic freedom. It doesn't, for instance, include the explicitly recognised right to critique one's institution or system that's recognised by [the European Convention on Human Rights based in] Strasbourg, nor other aspects of academic freedom."

"It is a missed opportunity to introduce a new ground for unfair dismissal in the employment tribunal, specifically for infringement of Article 10 rights and academic freedom of expression in particular."

"I'd say that the Bill does not amount to a radical transformation of the existing legal position for free speech on campus. And I think it's also a missed opportunity to improve the comparatively weak protection in this country for academic freedom."

## 'There is enormous sensitivity to the use of words'

Lord David Willetts, who was a Minister of Universities and Science between 2010 and 2014, and is the founder and chair of the Resolution Foundation, said: "I do think there is a bit of a problem, and it's partly across all of society, but it's acute in universities. Increasingly, identity and opinions are seen as connected. So a criticism of an opinion or a view is seen as somehow failing to respect that person's identity. It's harder and harder for us to say, 'we're having an argument about a point of opinion or a point of historical interpretation, it has nothing to do with your particular identity, ethnicity, gender orientation or whatever'."

"There is enormous sensitivity to the use of words, partly because the doctrines around critical race theory are that language itself is a tool of oppression, and the way people talk about things is part of the problem. That doctrine, in turn, creates enormous sensitivity about the use of language."

"So those forces, ironically many of them emerging from universities themselves, where these doctrines and views of the world were first developed, have made it harder

for universities to carry out what is a crucial function: to be places for freedom of speech, not safe from different opinions, but in a highly divided wider culture."

"For younger people who may arrive at university shocked by the idea that people have radically different opinions, their university is a great place where people can learn how to disagree. So there is an enormous opportunity."

"But the recent track record in universities has included some pretty shocking stories, and some of the problem has been around particular sensitivities on transgender issues."

He said one "unhappy episode" involved the University of Sussex, where Kathleen Stock, Professor of Philosophy, resigned in 2021 after her views on transgender rights and gender identity became a contentious issue.

"I still think myself that universities are above all still places where a wide range of opinions are expressed, and they do their



best to promote this, but there has been concern prompted by cases such as that."

"There is a view that we don't really need this further legislation. Nevertheless, there have been these troublesome cases. And what this legislation does is to require universities to have an explicit code of conduct for how they're going to manage freedom of

speech within their universities. It sets out a general right of freedom of speech and includes within this an obligation on student unions."

"We have to recognise there will now be a much more intrusive regulatory regime. One of my fears is that this actually, paradoxically has a chilling effect. If nobody's invited to speak, they can't be disinvited and they can't be shouted down. There may be a safety first environment where you just don't engage in all this, and don't try to have controversial speakers on controversial subjects. That would be a great pity, and it is a risk if we've ended up over-regulating."

## 'It's universities interfering with freedom of speech'

Dr Bryn Harris, the Chief Legal Counsel for the Free Speech Union, said that his organisation welcomed the Act.

"The problems that it seeks to address are real. The Free Speech Union has dealt with, since its beginning in February 2020, 2,000 cases of [alleged infringement of free speech], of which 400 have concerned people at universities. So from our position, we have no option but to say that there is a real issue at English universities."

"The core duty [of the new Act] is basically sound – it's possibly a little unadventurous in that it does very little to take us beyond the original duty in the Education Act 1986."

"I think there's one issue that might come up and that is that the 1986 Act was envisaged as a means of institutions controlling third parties, i.e. students. The assumption was that it was students who had tried to interfere with free speech, for instance, by barracking or protesting against speakers,

and therefore the duty to take reasonably practicable steps was on the institution."

"In 2023, we are in a different situation where it's not just students that are interfering with freedom of speech, it's also the institutions themselves."

"The policies and decisions taken by the institutions themselves can interfere with freedom of speech. So there's an argument that there needs to be tougher duties on the institutions and the decisions and policies they adopt."

"I think it's likely that this will be addressed with OFS guidance. The OFS is taking a very proactive and sensible approach. And I think, hopefully, that this Bill will introduce a general wider culture shift which will change policy and decisions at universities."

"The potential issue that is going to arise,



and a potential source of dispute when the Bill is implemented, will be universities arguing that freedom of speech within the law gives them leeway to restrict what academics say through employers' policies."

"So for instance, the academic will say, 'Well, I have my free speech rights, by statute and by the European Convention', and the university will reply, 'yes, but you have a contractual duty to comply with our harassment policy or dignity of work policy'."

"I think in practice with the Bill, as it's worded, you will get a university saying that freedom of speech within the law allows them to impose fairly limiting policies on the basis that they are prescribed by law."

Feature continues overleaf

## Tory students 'cannot express opinions'

**Professor Bobby Duffy**, Director of the Policy Institute at King's College London, said that the institute had carried out a large number of studies on perception among students of freedom of speech in universities.

He said that 80% of the students in a representative large survey of UK students said they were free to express their own views and most said that their university did a good job in enabling free speech.

But in newspaper reports, the *Daily Mail* "led with the headline that one in three students say free speech is under threat in the university, and the *Telegraph* said that Conservative students were unable to openly talk about their views on campus.

"And both of those are also true from a certain perspective. It's true that larger proportions of Conservative students don't feel able to express their views. For example, two-thirds of Conservative students would say that their university



avoids controversial speakers, when it's four in 10 for Labour supporters, so there is a difference of perspective, depending on your political identity. So there's evidence for both sides of this debate in the research that we've done, in looking across the whole piece, and particularly looking at the trends which do show an increased perception of threat [that expressing their views could bring harm to them] among students.

"It is something to take seriously but not something to catastrophise. It's definitely enough of a shift and of a concern to take seriously and act."

His research also asked students what they thought of the new freedom of speech Bill.

"The majority of students when we described the Bill to them are supportive of it. Even when it was presented as a plan from this current government, which is not that popular among the majority of students."

## Five tests to detect Islamophobia

**Tariq Modood**, Professor of Sociology, Politics and Public Policy at the University of Bristol, said he had five tests when considering if a statement or point of view was racist.

These were: "Does it stereotype Muslims by assuming they all think the same? Secondly, is it about Muslims or is it a dialogue with Muslims, which they would wish to join in?"

"Thirdly, is mutual learning possible? People wanting to make criticisms of Islam and Muslims must be dialogically open to Muslims making criticisms about their positions or other positions. This third point about the mutual learning is especially important in an education institution.

"Fourthly, is the language civil and contextually appropriate? I offer an example here from Islamophobia: I presume that every aspect of Zionism can be reasonably criticised, it would be odd if it couldn't. But we also know that for some people criticism of Zionism can get mixed up with or steer into a diatribe about Jewish people in general and this, of course, then would be anti-semitic. But I don't take it that just because people criticise Zionism that that is anti-semitic.

"[The tone of criticism] can be civil, like we speak to each other in seminars, and contextually appropriate. Or of course, it

can be made in the way that various racists in public squares like Trafalgar Square sometimes make those comments.

"My last test is, is the criticism insincere? Does it come from some ulterior motives? I've got two examples to illustrate what I mean. For instance, we've seen in the last decade or two how some people, especially on the right wing of the far right, who used to have anti-semitic platforms, have now become supporters of Israel, mainly because they see it as a stick by which they can beat Muslims and Arabs. That wouldn't pass my test of reasonable criticism.

"Another example that we're familiar with is how people again on the right who used to be very unhappy with various forms of feminism now say they're very feminist and the problem lies with reactionary Muslims and that they would like to point out those problems."

He said that while certain forms of Islamophobic speech were unlawful, not every instance should be, just as some sexist or anti-semitic statements were not. "But we may still want to react to it. And students or scientists may want to call it out or censure it."



### The new Free Speech Act

**The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023 amends earlier legislation on higher education. The Act extends to England and Wales, but its main provisions apply to England only. Its points include:**

#### STATUTORY TORT

The Act introduces a new statutory tort to allow individuals to bring civil legal proceedings against a higher education provider or students' union if these are not complying with their duties to protect freedom of speech and academic freedom.

A civil claim could only be brought by an individual if they had suffered a loss due to a breach of freedom of speech duties. However, it defined 'loss' to mean loss of any kind, such as reputational damage.

#### OFs COMPLAINTS SCHEME

The Office for Students, which regulates higher education in England, must set up a new complaints scheme and establish a new post of Director for Freedom of Speech and Academic Freedom to ensure that free speech legislation is adhered to.

#### CODE OF PRACTICE

The governing body of a registered higher education provider must maintain a code of practice setting out values relating to freedom of speech, and containing an explanation of how those values uphold freedom of speech.

#### DUTY TO PROMOTE

Universities must promote the importance of freedom of speech within the law, and academic freedom for academic staff.

#### INJUNCTION BY OFs

If a registered higher education provider, a constituent institution or a students' union fails to comply with a requirement imposed by the scheme, and does not satisfy the OfS that it is unable to comply, the OfS may enforce the requirement in civil proceedings for an injunction.

#### NO NON-DISCLOSURE AGREEMENTS

The governing body of a university must ensure that it does not enter into a non-disclosure agreement with a person accused of sexual abuse, sexual harassment or sexual misconduct, or bullying or harassment.



## Education: The State of the Discipline

**Education: The State of the Discipline is a major BERA initiative that aims to provide a clear, comprehensive account of the state of education as an academic discipline in universities; as a field of practice; and as a significant and central element of social and political policy in the four nations of the UK.**

**We have now released three major project reports:**

### A SURVEY OF EDUCATION RESEARCHERS' WORK, EXPERIENCES AND IDENTITIES

The survey provides robust data about the state of education as an academic discipline, and examines the structures and processes that influence opportunity for, and engagement in, research activity for staff working in university education departments.

### AN EXPLORATION OF EXISTING STATISTICAL DATA RELATING TO STAFF EQUALITY IN UK HIGHER EDUCATION

This report contributes to a more detailed understanding of issues of equality, inequality, diversity and discrimination for academic staff working in universities in the discipline of education.

### A SYSTEMATIC SCOPING REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON THE STRUCTURES & PROCESSES THAT INFLUENCE RESEARCH ACTIVITIES IN THE UK

This review surveys and assesses the literature published between 1990 and 2020, and offers an account of how education as a discipline has been influenced over the past three decades.

**We have also commissioned two pieces of work following the outcomes of the most REF which will play into this project. We will be releasing a statement further summarising our findings later this summer.**

**FIND OUT MORE AT  
[WWW.BERA.AC.UK/SOTD-PROJECT](http://WWW.BERA.AC.UK/SOTD-PROJECT)**

# 'It was the push I needed for my research'

The first in-person BSA annual conference for four years was held in April, bringing together a large audience from across the world to take part in what is the UK's biggest sociological event.

The conference, on the theme of 'Sociological voices in public discourse', drew an attendance of 763 people from 39 countries, who gave 503 presentations. It featured three plenary sessions and 55 stream plenaries and special events.

The main plenary addresses were given by the BSA President Professor Gurinder Bhambra, who spoke on, 'Sociology reconstructed: histories, concepts, reparations'; Dr Finn Mackay, of the University of the West of England, on, 'Awake and on the march: a public defence of sociology'; and Professor Ali Meghji, of the University of Cambridge, on, 'The cunning of sociological reasoning: an appraisal of epistemic humility'. *see pages 20-23*

The seven press releases sent out on research presented at the event led to 270 online articles in the media, including *The Guardian*, *ITV*, *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Express*, and overseas media in India, Pakistan and the US.

The press releases dealt with topics including the inadequacy of the police custody oversight scheme, feelings of being stigmatised among those with darker skin tones within families, and how social class contributes more to pupil progress than homework help. For details see: [tinyurl.com/zh7bxycj](https://tinyurl.com/zh7bxycj) and [tinyurl.com/yckhb638](https://tinyurl.com/yckhb638)

Social media posts gave a flavour of the event. Dr Harvey Humphrey wrote: "I'm all peopled out but I've had a brilliant @britsocio conference. Great to hear so many excellent papers & plenaries. Amazing to catch up with colleagues & meet others for the first time. Feel really enthused about sociology & the work we can do to make the world better."

Ashley Collar, University of Manchester PhD student, wrote: "After the amazing response I received from my presentation I feel so inspired to write a paper and continue with the data collection. This conference definitely was the push I needed with my research!"

Dr Jonathan Preminger wrote: "BSA conference at Manchester: one of the best ever! Great plenaries, great WEEL stream, great presentations!" *see right*

Next year's conference will take place online from 3-5 April, with the title 'Crisis, continuity and change'.

The conference organising committee was Dr Mark Doidge, Dr Rima Saini, Jonathan Blundell and Professor Nicola Ingram.

## The BSA's 72nd annual conference was the first held in-person since 2019. Network takes a look at the people, plenaries and prizes...



Professor Angharad Beckett FRSA  
@AngharadBeckett

Thank you @britsocio for a great conference! It felt very welcoming.

I enjoyed papers - many from outstanding ECRs - excellent Keynotes (Finn Mackay's was a highlight) met people from across UK & overseas, & caught up with good old friends over dinner, tea & ginger cake!



Dr Harvey Humphrey (they/them)  
@harveyhumphrey

I'm all peopled out but I've had a brilliant @britsocio conference. Great to hear so many excellent papers & plenaries. Amazing to catch up with colleagues & meet others for the first time. Feel really enthused about sociology & the work we can do to make the world better #britsoc23

Ashley Lynda  
@AshleyLCollar

After the amazing response I received from my presentation at @britsocio, I feel so inspired to write a paper and continue with the data collection. This conference definitely was the push I needed with my research!

Jonathan Preminger  
@JonathanPremi1

BSA conference at Manchester: one of the best ever! Great plenaries, great WEEL stream, great presentations! Looking forward to seeing you all again at the next one @bsaweel @britsocio #britsoc23

Ellie Atayee-Bennett  
@E\_AtayeeBennett



## BSA to focus on membership as its financial position stabilises

The BSA will focus on what it can offer its existing members and how it can recruit new ones, its annual members' meeting heard.

The incoming Chair, Professor Chris Yuill, said that the introduction of open access publishing for journals, and the pandemic, had hit the BSA's income, and seemed at one stage to be "an existential threat to the extent that we might not be able to carry on".

"So we started to change thinking around journals. We started to change our income streams and one thing we unfortunately had to do was discontinue five jobs within the office when people's contracts came to an end.

"We've also changed our investment strategy. We now invest in an ethical banking organisation that returns quite a substantial amount, which actually saved our bacon a little bit during the pandemic.

"I want to emphasise that for the last four years we've been very much focused on just keeping things together."

However the BSA's income had not been hit as hard as first feared and had recovered, he said. "We're trying to come out of survival continuity mode and trying to take stock before having a strategy reset.

"Which means we can start to do good things for the membership. Good things that'll help to try and create a good and solid future for British sociology.

"Every three to five years we refocus our strategy - we have a big strategy meeting in September.

"For example, we're going to focus a lot more on membership. What does it mean to be a member of the BSA? What do people

**'We now invest in an ethical banking organisation that returns quite a substantial amount'**



Professor Chris Yuill

get out of it by joining the BSA?

"That can be things like training, some sort of mentoring. We're going to be looking at the fee structure again, what we charge people.

"We're going to be looking at all sorts of other things that give value to your life and value to your career.

"We're also focusing on trying to help and support people in the school sector and at college level. That's been really important.

"Every year across the UK, something like 44,000 people take either an A-level or a Scottish Higher. So we're going to focus resources and time on the schools."

Professor Yuill said that the BSA's main source of income came from the gift aid from its four journals: *Sociology: Work, Employment and Society*; *Sociological Research Online*; and *Cultural Sociology*.

"Without them, there would be no BSA - we don't make any money out of conferences. We're lucky to break even this year.

"At this conference we've got 100 free places, out of 500. So it's one in five places which are free. That's gone up massively from the past, when it was 30. I think this a very good development.

"We understand the cost of living, particularly for people on lower incomes and people who are in early parts of their career. There's more work to be done around that. That's one of the things we're going to be looking at."

**'What does it mean to be a member of the BSA? What do people get out of it by joining the BSA?'**

# ‘Reporting of trans issues is a theft of empathy, but there is hope’

Sensationalist reporting in the right-wing press about transgender issues has led to “a theft of empathy and a replacement of potential with hate”, Finn Mackay told the BSA conference.

In an address which earned a standing ovation from the audience, Dr Mackay said: “In sociology there are differing views on [transgender issues], sometimes fiercely opposing views. There may well be differences of opinion in this room, just as there are out there in the world, of course.

“But hesitancy to speak about these issues, which the media tells us every day are scary and controversial, leaves a gap and one that, unfortunately, polarizing individuals and groups are all too happy to jump into, and that only further excludes discussion and attention.

“So there are many reasons that I decided to write about this topic, and one was the media coverage of the gender wars, as they’re being called. I saw worlds in that coverage that I recognised and that I have been a part of for decades. But they were being presented as warring camps – as some sort of natural enemies without any common ground.

“I knew that the reality was much more complicated than that. I’ve been involved in feminism for a long time. I joined a women’s peace camp in my teens, inspired by Greenham Common. And then I set up domestic abuse prevention education programmes and anti-bullying programmes in local government. I founded the London Feminist Network in 2004 and we revived the London Reclaim the Night march.

“But alongside all of that, I was also involved in queer communities. Of course these worlds overlapped, or at least they did

then, copiously, although now I wonder if we will see the likes of that again.

“Queer anarchist squats ran the fundraisers for women’s peace camps. Trans women were setting up rape crisis centres, and we would all party together at the women’s disco afterwards.

“These worlds that were my worlds – and they were not really totally separate in my experience – suddenly became subject to scrutiny from outside, appearing in the mainstream media.

“What I then saw was the right-wing media hate rags now suddenly pretending to be interested in lesbian book groups, tomboys, the identities of butch dikes, and language and symbols from cultures that I knew and recognised were being explained to this mainstream audience badly, often completely wrongly or in bizarre ways, and used as ‘gotchas’ for whatever point was being made.

“It was like a window had been opened and now straight society was peering into our communities with a prurient interest, all the while pointing at us for being weirdos.

“In the middle of all this, feminist theory and particularly radical feminism, which is one of the areas that I actually do know a bit about, was being reduced and simplified in the mainstream in order to attack, and call for the rolling back of, rights for another minority group, trans and transgender people. And the media set up the gender wars as being between feminists versus trans women in particular.

“I was horrified to see the term ‘terf’, standing for trans-exclusionary radical feminist, shifting into public discourse and becoming a term applied to anybody regardless of their politics, regardless of whether they are feminists of any school or type.

**In their plenary address, Dr Finn Mackay told of the price of tackling the gender wars between feminists and trans women that are stirred up by right-wing ‘hate rags’**

Photo:  
Tracey Gibbs



## Watch Finn’s plenary

safeguarding emails, I’ll be reported as a risk to the students, a danger to young minds. They contact my employer, they report me as a risk. I have started censoring myself and restricting my own free speech out of courtesy to organisers.

“So my area of research is pretty much ground zero right now and the voices I platformed in my book and the lives that I platformed are under threat.

“We’ve moved far away from a country that in 2004 voted for an out transwoman to win Big Brother. Can you imagine that happening now? A country that shrugged and tuned into a trans character in Coronation Street for about 16 years in the late 1990s, that embraced the late Paul O’Grady’s drag queen Lily Savage on primetime and breakfast TV. Can you imagine that now?

“We are far away from that, and while the majority of people in reality are more worried about paying their rent, keeping their home, feeding their families during a cost-of-Tory crisis, this government, along with right-wing organisations and the media, are busy whipping up a moral panic about trans people. They’ve placed the lives of trans people, and to what extent those lives should be livable, or indeed if they should even be lived at all, centre stage in the middle of the void that is what is left of their mandate.

“So what I see actually unfolding is a burgeoning sex and gender conservatism, one that threatens us all, but all minorities and all women especially. And there’s often blatant misinformation being used in this backlash against the progress of LGBTQ rights and representation.

It’s hard to keep up with at the moment because it’s constant. You could spend your days just trying to correct the most obvious scaremongering. It would be a full-time job just trying to correct the most outrageous falsehoods, never mind all of the connotations and the misrepresentation.

“We have to spend so much time defending ourselves and persuading the public that a certain case didn’t actually happen or it didn’t happen like that, or that storybook wasn’t actually used with younger children, et cetera, or that no, that gay person didn’t actually go into a primary school and teach little children about adult sex acts.

“A couple of summers ago openly fascist groups like Patriotic Alternative picketed in our towns and cities across the country on ordinary sunny afternoons, screaming and spitting in the faces of parents and toddlers, going into drag queen story-hours in their local libraries and shouting and screaming that gay equals groomer, and that LGBT equals paedo – and not a peep from our government. Not a hint of outrage, barely a mention in the national press. And in this context, our Prime Minister uses visceral language such as saying he will gut the Equality Act of trans rights. And indeed in just the last week has promised to deliver on that.

“So here we are, with rising reported hate crimes against LGBTQ communities, the recent murder of young teen Brianna Ghey, lured to a park and stabbed to death, and the recent murder of a man, a well-known drag queen, murdered after he left the pub where he was working in Cardiff city centre, beaten to death and left in an alleyway. I see a theft of empathy and a replacement of potential with hate – so far, so depressing.

“But I do try to cling on to what I see as evidence of hope out there. Whether people in power like it or not, change is coming. Younger generations are embracing progressive social justice in their lives, in their language, their cultures. They work in intersectional ways, they’re building their own communities and mutual aid. They build bridges between different groups, all working on different elements of justice. And that’s one reason I can stay hopeful in the work that I do.

“It’s also why I’m so genuinely and geekily passionate about our subject that we all share and that we’ve all come here this week to share together. Because this is our area, isn’t it? This is our turf. Sociology has given names to the workings of discrimination, has offered ways of seeing how power works, who it works for and who it works against. And, yes, the world is the way it is, but humans have built it so, as we know, and thus we can undo and we can rebuild.

“Every day in teaching I see students excited to learn that the fractures that they’ve observed in society have whole theories around them, academic names and books. It gives them a language to explain what they see and what they experience and what they have survived.

“So, yes, I do want to end on a positive note and there is much to be positive about. There is hope. Hope in all the wonderful work that we are doing in all of our universities and also our colleagues who are working in schools and colleges, the ones who send us future sociologists every year.

“That students of mine wish to build their careers in a way that bridges this gap between what is and what could be, is a source of pride and accomplishment.”

**Gurminder Bhambra told her plenary audience that an understanding of the importance of colonialism in the formation of nation states was essential**

Sociology is unable to effectively intervene in the modern world because it does not fully understand how that world came into being, Gurminder Bhambra told her plenary audience.

The discipline had begun as a central part of modernity's attempt to understand the nation-state, but had not recognised the part that colonial histories played in the creation of those states, Professor Bhambra said.

"I would suggest that a discipline that is based on the idea of modernity being an unassailable good, that does not recognise the history of colonisation that is central to it, is a sociology that is reproducing the asymmetries of the colonial world," she said. "It's not a sociology that is able to effectively intervene in the modern world because it doesn't understand how and why that world has come into being.

"This idea of modernity – that it's something that creates a new world, a modern world, that's organised in relation to the ruptures that are produced by the French Revolution and the industrial revolution – is standard in any sociology programme that you might want to go to.

"It's that idea – that somehow the French and industrial revolutions occurred endogenously within Europe, unconnected to broader colonial histories – that I'm contesting, by making the argument for us to recognise the colonial context within which those events are located.

"What I would like to do is to set out systematically how and why sociology as a discipline is complicit in such forgetting and why a more adequate account of how we got here is necessary for developing a different politics in the present."

In her review of the origins of sociology, Professor Bhambra, the BSA's President, said: "As political legitimacy comes to be understood as coming from the people, it becomes important to understand who the people are and how the state can support their development, what are their obligations and their rights.

"Social theory, and then later sociology, turned its attention to the state in the name of that society. In this way, sociology comes to be a central part of the modernising project of both the state and society alike

# 'Sociology must understand colonisation in order to be effective in the world'

and establishes itself as integral to the understandings of political legitimacy that organise the state.

"We can see this relationship between the state, society and sociology oriented to questions of legitimacy perhaps most clearly in the works of Max Weber. As Weber set out in his inaugural lecture in Freiberg in 1895, the purpose of social scientific knowledge was to further the political development of the national state and to secure the position of national citizens within it.

"The point of becoming a nation, according to Weber, was to become a world power, that is a colonial power. The economic strength of the nation was to be established through colonial political ambitions, specifically expansion. The national interest then was not the

**'A discipline that does not recognise the history of colonisation is not able to effectively intervene in the modern world'**

## Watch Gurminder's plenary

construction of a national state, but a colonial state.

"This focus on expansion and concomitant domination, however, was never explicitly theorised in the development of his understanding of the sociology of the state or the sociology of political legitimacy. This was not developed by Weber nor has it been developed by those who followed him.

"The social sciences are predicated on the unsaleable notion of the legitimacy of the modern social order, a social order that is defined as modern without any consideration of the colonial histories that have enabled it. Considering colonial histories opens up these issues and it requires us to rethink fundamental assumptions that have long been regarded as established and beyond contestation."

The period from the mid-17th century onwards saw the conquest of the Americas, Africa and parts of Asia by colonial powers including Britain, France, Belgium and the Netherlands.

"The period that is seen to give rise to the modern state is precisely a period of colonial expansion that saw some European states consolidate their domination over other parts of the world, and yet that external domination is rarely theorised as a constitutive aspect of the modern state itself, which instead of being understood as



a colonial state is understood in national terms.

"One aspect of the political legitimacy of the modern state is the association of the people with the state, and the idea that over time the people will become equal citizens within that state. While formal equality of status was hierarchically ordered in terms of class and gender, the standard sociological account is that an underlying equality will lead to the dissolving of these hierarchies.

"The situation is somewhat more complicated for those subjects whose relationship to the national state continued to be organised in terms of domination and not equality. For example, the situation of Polish people, Jewish people and Roma in the emerging German state.

"The asymmetry at issue here is perhaps most clearly highlighted when we consider taxation. Taxation was not simply organised within national boundaries, but it was applied also to the colonies and colonial subjects. Once Britain took over direct rule of India in 1857, for example, one of its first acts was to require the payment of income tax, in addition to longstanding taxes on land and goods.

"At this time, the working and middle classes of Britain did not have to pay any income tax and indeed didn't go on to pay income tax until the period of the first world war. They were, however, recipients of various forms of state welfare such as poor relief, national assistance and other public goods. Paradoxically, despite paying income

and other taxes, Indian colonial subjects were not entitled to any redistribution of that taxation, not even in the event of catastrophic famines produced by British colonial policies in India."

This was an important point, given that one present-day complaint made about immigrants was that some receive benefits despite having not yet paid any tax, she said.

"The argument that I'm making and wanting us to take seriously, is the fact that most of those migrants would have come from a population that was [historically] more likely to have paid tax than the families of working class and middle class people in Britain who didn't pay income tax until the first world war.

"And yet the discourse then comes, 'why should you get something for nothing?', without having understood that getting something for nothing was what organised welfare in Britain."

Another example was the claim that Manchester was the site of the origins of the industrial revolution.

"Most histories of the industrial revolution, including those presented within sociological texts and that sociologists rely on, suggest that the revolution began with the cotton mills in Manchester. The one thing that they all failed to account for is the remarkable story of how a country that did not produce raw cotton based its industrial revolution on cotton textiles." It was raw cotton from India

that fed the cotton mills to make clothing in Britain, but any finished cotton products made in India were hit with high tariffs when entering Britain to stop them undermining the British-made wares.

A recognition of colonial histories should lead to reparations being paid, she said.

"The injustices of the past cannot be repaired in the sense that suffering could be undone or the past restored, nor is it an argument for compensation of individual loss. In this view, reparations would go beyond liberal ideas of individual compensation and be organised instead in social democratic terms."

Part of this process was the idea of a reparatory sociology.

"If we were to recognise the role of colonialism in the very structuring of modern societies, then we would need to reconfigure what we understand sociology to be. Colonialism cannot simply be added as a topic to the discipline, it has to be the basis of a thoroughgoing reconstruction, a reconstruction that pays attention to how colonialism has structured our world and our knowledge claims. That is, while colonialism and colonial histories are responsible for the significant global inequalities that structure our world, any solution must be inclusive and available to all.

"A reparatory sociology requires both the repair of the social sciences as well as the collective address of the inequalities, implicitly legitimated by standard social science. Recognising the modern world as the colonial world enables us more adequately to contextualise events and processes that are often presented as separate and to understand them within a connected frame of reference. One that's committed to repair and transformation and a world that works for us all.

**'Colonialism cannot simply be added as a topic to the discipline, it has to be the basis of a thoroughgoing reconstruction'**

"I'm not talking about decolonising the curriculum. I'm talking about doing the work that is adequate to the standards of our discipline, and what would it mean to actually engage with the histories that have formed the world that we say we're investigating, and do the work that's necessary to transform the concepts and categories such that they're adequate to use them in the present."

• See page 36 for an article on this issue by Professor Bhambra

# ‘Sociology must listen to those who aren’t employed on university payrolls’

## Ali Meghji told his plenary audience that sociology can learn from emancipation struggles across the world

In his plenary, Professor Ali Meghji explored alternative visions of the role of sociology, in which sociologists listen and learn from wider movements.

He highlighted the way sociology today had overlooked how scholars, from Du Bois to Angela Davis, had developed their sociological analyses through engagement with social movements, such as Pan-African Congresses.

Professor Meghji, of the University of Cambridge, said that sociological thought had at times been used to maintain racism, but the discipline did not have to repeat this. Beginning with Du Bois and ending with examples such as the Zapatista invasion in Mexico, he examined how sociology had also been a key tool in anti-colonial and anti-racist social movements.

While scholars of public sociology had highlighted the flow of sociological knowledge to wider publics, it was, he said, more appropriate to think of the flow of knowledge formed through struggles, and how this could continue to inform sociology as a discipline.

In these alternative practices and visions we could see the calls for sociology and sociologists to listen and learn from wider movements and publics, and to embrace the principle of epistemic humility.

He told the plenary audience: “From its beginnings as a discipline, there has long been a recognition that sociology can play a role in creating a more just world system. Echoing the likes of Du Bois and Patricia Hill Collins, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva goes as far as saying that sociology would actually be meaningless if it were not related to the wider politics of social transformation. However, for sociology to be properly engaged in the wider social universe, it can’t just be what we can call a ‘gifting sociology’, a sociology that shares its analysis with wider publics. It also needs to be a sociology that listens to those who aren’t employed on university payrolls.

“There is a history, and a history which continues today, of sociologists recognising that sociological work happens far beyond the remit of universities. There is a practice



### Watch Ali’s plenary

of public sociology, which is multi-directional. It has a conversational approach which listens to, but also hears, those outside of the academy. And this vision of sociology is one in which we go beyond the gifting sociology where we almost seek to preach to uneducated followers, but instead we take seriously the many sociological analyses which are being formed and circulated, and struggles happening all across the world. And my argument is that we need to help foster this spirit in the practice of sociology, especially in a context where marketised UK higher education wants to sell students clear pathways from their degrees into particular professional employment.

## ‘Sociology would be meaningless if it were not related to the wider politics of social transformation’

“If our priority is critical social theorising, can we even be critical if we only engage with other university employees – if we advocate for public sociology, but only think about the flow of sociological knowledge from sociologists to wider publics? Is this really public sociology at all or is it sociology parading towards a hopeful universalism?”

“And lastly, if sociologists and the structure of sociology is to embrace epistemic humility, might we find that the issue currently plaguing academic knowledge production is not just disciplinary boundaries, but the very boundaries of so-called specialist and non-specialist knowledges itself.

“In other words, how can we have a truly liberatory sociology which acknowledges its place in wider social relations and struggles if we don’t even acknowledge that critical social theorising takes place in every single area of social space? There is so much more to sociological thought than just what sociologists do and what is contained in the narrow definition of sociology.

“I would assert that you don’t need a sociologist to tell you what does or does not qualify as sociological analysis. In fact, embracing epistemic humility might be the only way to maintain the relevance and more importantly the applicability, of our discipline in the coming decades.”

# ‘After four years away it felt like absence made the heart grow fonder’

Dr Mark Doige writes:

There is a proverb about absence making the heart grow fonder. This felt apt after the return of the BSA annual conference after an absence of four years. As sociologists, we know the importance of face-to-face interaction, networks and (for those of a Durkheimian perspective) the collective effervescence of regular congregation. That collective emotional energy was invigorating, as friendships and acquaintances were reignited and new relationships sparked into life.

The absence of the annual conference provided an important time to reflect. I’ve been involved in the BSA since I started my PhD in 2007. I’ve made many friends, and even more acquaintances. This is what Covid showed me. I missed the connection to a broader community of shared acquaintances. Those people who I say ‘hi’ to occasionally, those who I catch up with over coffee, and those whose face I recognise but have forgotten their name (sorry). The BSA annual conference, and the broader BSA activities, provide some respite from neo-liberal modernity that seeks to quantify and instrumentalise everything we do.

What I get from the BSA, and the conference, is not instrumental discounts nor specific resources. For me, the BSA puts the humanity back into our increasingly managerialised working lives. It’s the warm and fuzzy feeling of belonging. The BSA is a space to build relationships and be



Dr Mark Doige

intellectually and emotionally nourished, and it provides a safe space to talk about the things that are important to me. These spaces are increasingly restricted in HE, and Covid made this worse. Rather than anxiety-inducing emails about some unfulfilled action for a process that inhibits my research or teaching, there’s a shared experience and understanding amongst colleagues.

The strength of sociology is that it is everywhere; this is also its weakness. Many of us are not in sociology departments, so the opportunity to speak sociologically is difficult. When our institutions don’t nourish us in other ways, the BSA annual conference and associated events provide the sociological nourishment we need.

After four years away, the conference was an important refresher of the importance of the discipline and our work. Gurminder Bhambra and Ali Meghji’s scholarly arguments combined with Finn Mackay’s call to arms. The conference dinner celebrated the hard work of senior academics, Laurie Taylor in the media and Kerry Collins in the BSA staff. All embodied and explicitly said how important sociology and the BSA are to give us a home, a family and a sense of belonging. These were just the tonic to nourish the soul and give the much needed positive energy to go back into HE, and the world, to continue fighting for our discipline and fighting for social justice.

The BSA doesn’t always get it right. My experience is that it tries to improve. But then the BSA is members-led. We are the BSA, it resides in the ideas, time and love that we give it. It resides in the immense hard work of the convenors of our study groups and special interest groups like activism, applied sociology, and the PG and EC forums. The BSA is what we make it. And after four years away, it definitely felt like absence had made the heart grow fonder.

## Website acknowledges best ethnicity practice

The **acKnowledge website**, a repository showcasing best practice in race and ethnicity teaching within sociology, launched at the annual conference.

The launch marks the end of 18 months of work by University of Kent researchers Dr Barbara Adewumi, Dr Alex Hensby and Dr Triona Fitton.

On behalf of the BSA, the team conducted a national survey to collate and analyse teaching and recruitment policy and resources from 150 British universities, resulting in more than 80 submissions.

They then assessed which submissions demonstrated exceptional or innovative practice.

The team launched the website during their presentation, ‘Launching the BSA acKnowledge repository: advocating for racial equality’, which was followed by a roundtable discussion chaired by Dr Mark



Dr Barbara Adewumi

Doige on next steps for the project.

The discussion covered issues including how to create a sense of belonging for all in higher education, and how staff can be

supported in embedding good practice at a policy level.

Dr Adewumi said: “The acKnowledge website was extremely well-received by the BSA and conference attendees and it is hoped that the repository will evolve over time and respond to the demands of this important and dynamic subject of advocating for racial equity in sociology.”

Dr Fitton said: “Our next step is to work with student equality, diversity and inclusion leads at Kent to gather feedback on the utility of the repository as it is. We hope this will enable the BSA to further update and improve the resource going forwards.”

The acKnowledge website can be viewed at: <http://www.acknowledge.org.uk>

The contribution from Emma Mires-Richards, from the University of Kent’s Information Services, was commended by the team at the event.

# Manchester Reunited...

The sociological world came together in Manchester in April for the first in-person BSA annual conference for four years. Network takes a peek...



Photos: Tracey Gibbs



BSA

2024 VIRTUAL ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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# Crisis, Continuity and Change



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## Essay on Russia wins A-level competition prize for Samuel

An essay on how attitudes to Russia have changed since the start of the Ukraine war has won Samuel Fitzpatrick the 2023 **BSA Young Sociologist of the Year Competition**.

Samuel wins an iPad Mini for himself and £500 for his school, the Salesian School in Chertsey, Surrey. *He is pictured right*

In his essay, he explores how there has been an “overwhelming response” to the Russia-Ukraine war, but “little spotlight on ongoing wars in Yemen and Ethiopia, where the physical consequences of war are more devastating”.

The judges, BSA Trustees, Jonathan Blundell and Professor Nicola Ingram, said the essay gave a “timely look at how attitudes in the UK towards Russia changed because of the invasion of Ukraine. The essay uses primary quantitative and qualitative, and secondary, evidence. It draws out the role of the media in shaping attitudes and the

comparative neglect of

wars in Yemen and Ethiopia.”

There were 68 entries for the competition. Second place was given to Zhiwei Zhang, of Shenzhen College of International Education, whose entry, the judges said, “considers social media and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, analysing, for example, hash tags and emojis”.

Third place was given to Shona McKeever, of the Sacred Heart Grammar School in Newry, Northern Ireland. Her work, the judges said, “looks at how identities in Northern Ireland have been shaped by its history of conflict. The student conducted a survey with a wide range of people across the island of Ireland. Like all good sociology, it recognises complexity while picking out important factors.”

Next year’s competition invites responses to the question: ‘To what extent, and in what ways, is patriarchy alive and kicking?’ Details at:

<https://tinyurl.com/mwek6r6c>



### Meet the PhD: Lin Ding

‘One aspect that took me by surprise was the sheer number of competing theories within my chosen field of research’

My research focuses on the interplay between family social class and parenting styles, and their effects on children’s academic and non-academic performance. I aim to determine whether effective parenting strategies can aid working class families in overcoming the academic obstacles associated with socio-economic disadvantages. I also study potential biases teachers may harbour against working class students and the impact this prejudice may have on the latter’s educational outcomes. I use quantitative methods, specifically the analysis of secondary data drawn from a longitudinal survey.

My motivation for researching this particular area stems from the educational policies driven by the New Labour ideology. Notable initiatives, such as the ‘Supporting Families’ programme launched in 1998, were implemented with the intention of assisting parents in improving their children’s educational outcomes. This programme, which offers a range of enriching extracurricular experiences to a segment of working class children, continues to be in operation today.

However, despite these considerable efforts, I observed a disconcerting reality: the educational landscape nowadays appeared no more equitable than before these reforms were introduced. This observation incited my curiosity and directed my scholarly pursuit towards understanding the intricate dynamics of social class, parenting and educational outcomes, in the hope of contributing to more effective and truly equitable educational policies.

My research also found that the direct academic assistance parents provide – such as helping their children with maths – offers only a minor enhancement to the students’ academic outcomes at the primary level. This finding received unexpectedly extensive media coverage at the BSA conference.

One aspect that took me by surprise was the sheer number of competing theories within my chosen field of research. Prior to embarking on this academic voyage, I hadn’t anticipated the complexity of sifting through these myriad theories, each presenting its unique perspective. Equally challenging yet intriguing, is the application of appropriate statistical

methods to substantiate these theories.

Before embarking on my PhD in sociology, I had spent seven years studying public management in China. While this background certainly enriched my understanding of political systems and public interest, it also presented a unique hurdle. I found it challenging to grasp the nuanced conversations prevalent in the field of sociology and, specifically, to understand the intricate aspects of the UK political system from a local perspective.

The most substantial challenge in pursuing a PhD isn’t necessarily about intellectual prowess but the frequent introspection and questioning of your own motives. If you’re someone who is highly pragmatic, you may find it challenging to identify quick and immediate feedback in the academic sphere, whether in terms of tangible societal changes or economic rewards for yourself. Embark on a PhD only if you’re genuinely passionate about delving deeper into a subject matter and are prepared for a journey where the rewards may not always be immediate or tangible.

‘Social stratification of creativity in the UK’, Department of Sociology, University of Manchester 2020-2024

**Dr Christoph Wu tells Network about his work as a hedge fund manager, which forms the basis of his prize-winning new book**

# Hedging his bets: from classroom to stock market and back

Many sociologists have experience of other worlds before they enter academia: a *Network* feature on researchers' careers in 2015 revealed a former accountant, sports coach and typesetter, for instance. But Christoph Wu's CV is unusual even for an inclusive discipline – before he stood at the lecture rostrum he was a fund manager on the stock market, responsible for more money than the largest grant application any researcher could hope to apply for.

After a first sociology degree at Sussex, Dr Wu studied for a master's at the LSE, where his thesis was an ethnographic study of corporate culture. This opened the door to a job in the City, where qualitative methods of analysing the market were being introduced alongside the more traditional econometric approaches.

He worked as a research analyst for two hedge funds based in London and another in Singapore, looking at companies' strengths and weaknesses with a view to investing or disinvesting in them.

From analyst, he stepped up into the role of fund manager, where he managed the investments of many millions of pounds of clients' money, drawing on his knowledge of the market to get an edge in a fiercely competitive world.

"Back then the hedge fund world was expanding in terms of its research methods," he told *Network*. "So there wasn't really only a quantitative focus – you started to engage with other methods, qualitative methods and interviews, and that was my link into the finance world. It's not a natural progression usually for a sociologist to go into finance but I think it worked in the end through these connections."

His work involved collecting data about investable companies and building models from this.

"In sociology, in organisation studies, you have these analyses of different sorts of social systems. In a sense that is what we did. It was always referred to as the 'food chain' back then – analysing suppliers and customers. In financial analysis you look at growth and other things and then you start to do financial modelling around it.

"You have to develop methods to gauge what market actors are doing, and that requires a lot of different interactions with peers and other market actors.

He also tackled the big themes that might affect the market – the political situation in various countries, how a population was ageing and urbanising, and the increasing use of hi-tech, for instance. He drew on contacts he established during his ethnographic study and on the sociological skills his degrees had given him.

"You have to do political analysis a little bit, as well as macro analysis. You build quite a lot of different models to track these things.

"The work involved researching a range of issues, for instance, sustainability or elections, or reform in India. One area, for example, was the iPhone – in the early to mid-2010s, there was a big transformation for many markets in Asia in the sort of tech hardware used.

"In essence, you really apply your research in a monetary way. So you have certain ideas

**“The finance world is very separate from ordinary day-to-day lives. It's part of the rat race and there's a certain cyclicity to it as well. Time flies very quickly”**

about ageing populations or urbanisation, or financial inclusion, all these sort of big themes.”

Fascinating as he found the work, Dr Wu did not pursue his career to the point of launching his own hedge fund, feeling that the job had placed him in a world that was as detached socially as much as physically.

"The finance world is very separate from ordinary day-to-day lives. You are really at the top in socio-economic terms and it's removed also in the sense of time spent in offices. It's part of the rat race and there's a certain cyclicity to it as well. Time flies very quickly.

"I left the industry because the main motivations of colleagues and contacts were not really aligned with my own sort of motivations, though I met quite a lot of interesting people and friends."

He felt the pull of sociology drawing him back. "That was always at the back of my mind. It's certainly not easy to straddle these two worlds unless you can add value from either side. It's a complicated way of doing things. But during my career with hedge funds, I followed social studies of finance and made my own notes on that from the real world. So I really had a lot of ideas I wanted to work on in sociology."

He went to the University of Cambridge to research a PhD and it was this work that formed the backbone for his first book, *Central Banks in Organizational Networks: Entangled Market Actors*, which won the Philip Abrams Memorial Prize at the BSA annual conference in April.

The BSA President, Professor Gurminder

Bhambra, gave out the award, saying the book, published by Routledge, was "a very sophisticated and complex project that triangulates its findings to build its analysis. It is an excellent piece of research, well thought out and executed, and makes a significant intervention across the fields of social studies of finance and organisational sociology."

In his book, Dr Wu carries out an extended analysis of social links within the financial system. Sociologists have analysed the way that a capitalist class is at the helm of different corporations and are often found together on the boards of different companies. But Dr Wu pushed this further by recording the networks of shareholders and the way that a certain class of investors are found investing in the same companies.

He then turned to what happens when a central bank enters this network when it buys securities as part of quantitative easing. He looked at the way that the European Central Bank populates its advisory committees with a limited class of investment bankers and asset managers, recommending extending membership of these committees to wider groups, including politicians.

"Central banks are always portrayed as very scientific and independent and actually that is really not the case if you look at it in more detail," Dr Wu said.

"We have to acknowledge that you can't actually be that independent if you participate in markets. So why not then engage a wider group of stakeholders into the policy making process?"

"There was a move in the '90s towards independence and to get the politics out of central banks. But there has to be some sort of stakeholder representation in these policy groups or in some part of the process in order for general society to be more accepting of central banks."

As his book points out: "Rather than dictating what the market is supposed to do, the ECB takes significant market actors' expectations, intentions and potential courses of actions into consideration, particularly in the technical implementation and the size of the purchases. As a result, it becomes striking how, through market-based monetary policy, the ECB becomes entangled in networks of financial market participants."

Dr Wu believes that finance is an area that sociologists could explore further. "I think political economists have picked it up quite a bit. But I don't see it that much in sociology.

"Some people from a science and technology studies background have moved into that field, and a lot of researchers working on finance moved to the business school in the '80s, '90s and early 2000s. Some social studies of finance people also moved more into the business school as well.

"But I think there has to be a new generation to re-engage with finance. I'm



Dr Wu receiving his award from the BSA President, Professor Gurminder Bhambra

not saying that it's completely absent – there are plenty of sociologists who look at finance, especially now in *WES* (*Work, Employment and Society* journal), where there have been a lot of different publications recently on the financial elite."

He is branching out from the study of pure finance and going more into the area of management studies by looking at what kind of network behaviours there need to be to create sustainability initiatives.

He doesn't miss his old career. "I liked the intensity of the work, but actually you get this same intensity or this buzz giving lectures, holding seminars, and also on research calls. If you're working on publications, you also get this intense bonding with colleagues on certain topics."

**“I liked the intensity of the work, but actually you get the same intensity or buzz giving lectures, holding seminars, and on research calls”**

• The Philip Abrams Memorial Prize is given each year by the BSA to a researcher's first and sole-authored book within the discipline of sociology in the past year. It was established in honour of Professor Abrams (1933-1981), whose work contributed substantially to sociology and social policy research in Britain. The other books shortlisted for the 2023 prize were: *The Everyday Lives of Gay Men in Hainan: Sociality, Space and Time* (Palgrave Macmillan), by James Cummings; and *Fighting Identity: An Ethnography of Kickboxing in East London* (Routledge), by Amit Singh.

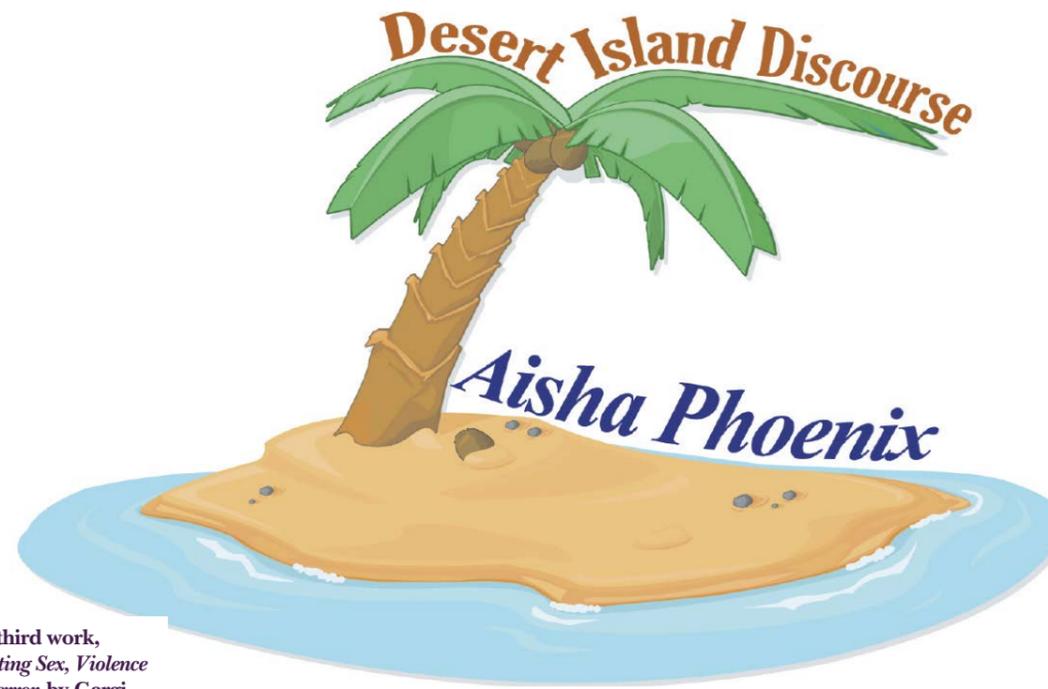


**Do you have news to share?**

Network is looking for news, features, opinions and book reviews. If you're interested in having your say please contact Tony Trueman, at [tony.trueman@britsoc.org.uk](mailto:tony.trueman@britsoc.org.uk) or on 07964 023392. The next issue comes out in December and the copy deadline is early October.

## Aisha Phoenix

Dr Phoenix is a social justice lecturer at the School of Education, Communication and Society at King's College London. She is a UKRI Future Leaders Fellow and principal investigator of the 'Understanding colourism among young people in the UK' research project. She conducted the first major sociological study to explore colourism in the UK, with Dr Nadia Craddock



Your first choice is *The Art of Listening*, by Les Back – why did you choose that?

We are living in an age where people like to shout in debates and arguments on and off-line. People seem to have increasingly entrenched positions and to be intolerant of anyone who does not share their perspectives. Often it feels as though when one side talks, the other is not listening. In this socio-political moment, *The Art of Listening* by Les Back is a wonderful text to return to, inviting, as it does, readers to listen carefully and attentively with critical scrutiny, openness and humility, an approach I seek to take in my work.

I first read *The Art of Listening* when I was transitioning from being a journalist to becoming an academic. I found it inspiring and considered myself particularly fortunate that Back had agreed to supervise my PhD in Sociology. I was struck by the lyricism and clarity of arguments in the book, including when Back weaves the ideas of theorists and other scholars into his writing, presenting and engaging with their work. He ensures his text is both thought-provoking and accessible. Back's text is also generously open and deeply personal. As I re-read the book I can imagine Back recounting stories aloud.

*The Art of Listening* is a poignant book that is almost haunting in the way in which it focuses attention on the significance of 'ordinary' people and highlights how extraordinary they, and their life stories, are. Back's strong commitment to social justice runs through all his academic endeavours, and *The Art of Listening* is no exception. For example, Back highlights the immigration debate and argues that legacies of racism and colonisation determine how it is framed. Throughout the book he includes photos of people and places that are often overlooked. He explores how people navigate particular landscapes, and at times examines the significance of the tattoos inscribed on their bodies in a powerfully moving way. When so many people seem determined both to put up and shore up barriers between themselves

and others, and are so reluctant to listen to other perspectives or ways of looking at the world, this book, and Back's approach more generally, seem urgent.

What made you choose your next book – *Rock My Soul*, by bell hooks?

Growing up in the UK in the '80s and '90s, I knew that for large swathes of the population I didn't belong because I wasn't white, and for many people of colour I was too dark. One of my earliest memories of being called dark was when I was six at a celebration in a gurdwara and a Sikh boy of a similar age and skin shade called me "darkie". Another is of my mixed race school friend choosing to ice skate with a white stranger instead of me because the girl she'd only just met told her I was too dark. My parents tell me I'd even been subjected to overt racism as a baby. My experiences heightened my intellectual curiosity about the effects of being subjected to racism and colourism (skin shade prejudice) and I was drawn to the work of the Black feminist scholar bell hooks.

When I first read *Rock My Soul* in my 20s, I found her exploration of legacies of trauma, shame and self-esteem among African Americans both illuminating and refreshing. I have chosen the text because hooks spoke to my experiences in her intersectional exploration of racism and colourism, even including the lines, "Every day somewhere in our culture a child is telling another child: 'I can't play with you because you are too dark'" (2004: 42). Importantly, she focused on, rather than glossing over, the psycho-social impact of colourism and racism on Black people.

I have also selected the text because it considers how colourism developed among African Americans and the processes through which colourism is sustained and passed down the generations. In *Rock My Soul*, hooks engages with issues I am exploring in my UKRI Future Leaders Fellowship on 'Understanding colourism among young people in the UK'.

Why did you select for your third work, *Dangerous Brown Men: Exploiting Sex, Violence and Feminism in the War on Terror*, by Gargi Bhattacharyya?

I selected Gargi Bhattacharyya's *Dangerous Brown Men* for my third book because it has been valuable as I have reflected on, and written about, young Muslims and belonging in the UK in the context of the 'War on Terror' or 'the long war', increased anti-Muslim racism, and the UK anti-terror strategy. The demonisation of Muslims is a subject that I have been preoccupied by since I was an undergraduate studying Arabic and Modern Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Oxford. As part of my degree I studied Arabic in Syria for a year, living with a wonderful Muslim Syrian family in Damascus from early October 2001. Together we would sit watching international news in the aftermath of the attacks on the USA that September, wondering, with much trepidation, what the implications would be for Muslims and the Muslim world. Bhattacharyya conceptualises the 'War on Terror' as a cultural project that attempts to redraw the boundaries of belonging and to frame particular minoritised ethnic people as 'enemies within'. She argues that framing certain groups as enemies who are acting against the interests of the state makes it easier for states to justify removing their rights, even as consensus policing is retained for the majority of the population.

Importantly, Bhattacharyya highlights how, in the UK, the government has been able to stoke up anti-migrant sentiment to gain public acceptance for anti-migrant laws and the exclusion of certain groups from legal rights. Her work has been particularly useful as I have explored how Somali Muslim sixth-formers and Muslim university students have negotiated their positioning within hierarchies of belonging in the UK. It has been valuable as I have examined the effect of the Prevent strategy on how Muslims negotiate belonging. The text also provided useful contextualisation when I was working

as the postdoctoral researcher on the 'Re/presenting Islam on campus' research project. We explored how Muslims negotiated life on university campuses, how non-Muslims related to their Muslim peers, and understandings of Islam. One of the issues we examined was the effect of constructions in mainstream feminism, and other dominant discourses, of Muslim women as victims in need of saving, and of Muslim men as oppressors and a terrorist threat, issues with which Bhattacharyya engages in *Dangerous Brown Men*.

Your fourth choice is *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, by Judith Butler – why this book?

I read a lot of work by the philosopher Judith Butler when I was doing my Masters in Social Research and PhD in Sociology. *Gender Trouble*, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*; and *Frames of War* are all texts I return to. I have selected *Frames of War* for the desert island because it really helped me to think through the narratives of the Palestinian university students I interviewed in the West Bank for my PhD. In the text, Butler explores what constitutes a life and argues that in certain theories of knowledge some lives are not grievable or framed as having been lived because they were not conceived of as living in the first place. When developing the arguments in my thesis and analysing narratives from participants who argued that "like a dead person you live in

Palestine" and that Palestinian lives were seen as dispensable, Butler's work was invaluable. In an unexpected way, it also built on my understanding of dominant ideas around what qualifies as newsworthy, which developed when I studied for a postgraduate Diploma in Newspaper Journalism at City University, and later when I worked for Bloomberg News. Who, and what, is framed as important, as grievable, as living, is at the heart of decisions editors and journalists make, and yet the epistemological underpinnings of such framings are very rarely stated explicitly. The contrast between this, and the attentive approach of many social scientists who seek to interrogate and explain their epistemologies and centre positionality in their work, led me to want to pursue sociological studies after working in journalism.

Your last book is *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race*, by Paul Gilroy – what led you to this?

I had the pleasure of taking Brett St. Louis's Race, Politics and Ethics course when I was studying MA Social Research at Goldsmiths, University of London. The course was both tough and transformative, forcing me to re-examine my understanding of racialisation and my own identities. One of the texts I returned to on that course was *Between Camps*. In the book, Gilroy calls for the liberation of humankind from 'race-

thinking', which I take to mean a move away from giving primacy to the arbitrary social construct of 'race' in our efforts to define ourselves, and navigate and structure our societies. Gilroy recognises that those who accrue benefits from 'racial hierarchies' will be reluctant to give them up, just as those who have invested significantly in reclaiming a particular 'race' as a source of pride, and an integral part of their identities, will seek to hold onto the saliency of 'race'. However, Gilroy argues that rejecting 'race-thinking' would facilitate efforts to dismantle 'racial hierarchies'. He points to what he terms "planetary humanism" and suggests that a "radically nonracial humanism" (p.17) would facilitate a focus on human dignity.

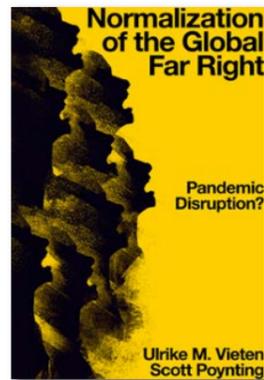
While both nationally and globally it seems we are very far from being able to reject 'race-thinking' – the idea seems utopian given the vested interests Gilroy outlines – what is possible and worth striving towards is people coming together more, irrespective of how they are racialised, to work to achieve important planetary and social justice objectives. I selected *Between Camps* as my final book for the island because it presents a radical, hopeful alternative to the status quo, one that allows an alternative future to be imagined and, in doing so, invites self-reflection and interrogation of the often unexamined logics that govern how we relate to each other, structure, and navigate our societies.

And for your luxury?

I agonised over the luxury. Faced with the prospect of being isolated on a desert island, I would want to sneak my daughters into my suitcase, along with my favourite music, my piano, saxophone and violin, novels and short story collections, paper, pencils and pens, a solar-powered robot and a photo album. As that's a little more than one luxury, I wondered if I could have a multifunctioning solar-powered robot. It could serve as a companion and include a laptop that contains my music and photo albums. It would be equipped with an electronic piano, Microsoft Word and drawing packages. If that is still pushing the one luxury rule, then I would like unlimited notebooks and pens so I can write speculative fiction, poetry, essays, articles and general musings, and draw to my heart's content.

### Dr Phoenix's choices:

1. *The Art of Listening*, by Les Back (2007) Berg
2. *Rock My Soul*, by bell hooks (2004) Atria Books
3. *Dangerous Brown Men*, by Gargi Bhattacharyya (2008) Zed Books
4. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?*, by Judith Butler (2010) Verso Books
5. *Between Camps: Nations, Cultures and the Allure of Race*, by Paul Gilroy (2004) Routledge



## Normalization of the Global Far Right: Pandemic Disruption?

Ulrike M. Vieten and Scott Poynting

Emerald  
2022

112 pages  
£60 hbk

ISBN: 9781839099571

The rise of far-right politics around the world has been one of the most concerning developments of recent times. *Normalization of the Global Far Right: Pandemic Disruption?* by Ulrike M. Vieten and Scott Poynting is a timely and important book that provides a detailed analysis of the rise of far-right politics around the world. In the book, the authors examine the historical, social and cultural roots of this phenomenon, outlining the ideological elements that have contributed to its normalisation.

One of the key themes of the book is the historical and structural embedding of the far-right. The authors provide an in-depth exploration of the critical contributions of intellectuals from the Frankfurt School in exile, who analysed the processes of 'othering group difference' during socio-economic and political crises. They also discuss the work of contemporary witness Paul Massing, who analysed the establishment of Nazi terror from a communist perspective.

The authors argue that the normalisation of the global far-right is linked to collective processes of othering minority differences and specific gendered and culturalist dynamics of anti-semitism and anti-Muslim racism. Furthermore, the authors examine the transnationalising of far-right racist populism, exploring the role of the internet in transmitting right-wing racist populism and how this is accelerated and targeted using social media.

The authors also explore the ideological elements of racialised othering, particularly

Islamophobia, in the populism of the far-right. They argue that the ideology of white supremacy, conveyed in anti-gender discourses and xenophobic everyday neo-colonialist claims of Christian-European culturalism, has gone viral globally.

Overall, *Normalization of the Global Far Right: Pandemic Disruption?* is a valuable contribution to the field of far-right studies. The authors draw on a range of sources, including historical texts, contemporary research and first-hand accounts to provide a nuanced and detailed understanding of the far-right. They offer a range of theoretical perspectives to help readers understand the complex and interconnected factors that have contributed to the rise of the far-right. Its comprehensive analysis of the far-right and its impact on society is a particular great strength of the book. The authors provide a deep dive into the underlying factors that have contributed to the normalisation of the far-right, offering readers a thorough understanding of its historical and structural roots. They also explore the impact of the far-right on society, examining the ways in which it has affected the lives of people around the world.

However, the book does have some limitations. It primarily focuses on the far-right's impact on Western countries, with minimal discussion of its impact in other parts of the world, such as Asia, Africa and South America. Additionally, the book is heavily theoretical and may be difficult for

## What is Sexual Capital?

Dana Kaplan, Eva Illouz

Polity Press

2022

140 pages

£26.25 hbk, £9.99 pbk

ISBN: 9781509552313 hbk

*What is Sexual Capital?* adds the metaphor of sexual capital to the expanding repertoire of conceptualisations of capital. Dana Kaplan and Eva Illouz investigate how neo-liberalism has transformed sex and sexuality, which in turn enters and impacts the material domain of production.

The coupling of sex and capital is not new. Kaplan and Illouz distinguish four ideal-types of sexual capital through history. Chastity (sexual capital by default) has been traditionally valued for facilitating women in securing material stability through marriage. Secondly, women have historically transacted sex as a commodity (surplus-value of the body) in sex work and contemporary sex industries. The third type, embodied sexual capital, works indirectly, wherein a range of



# Bookends

some readers to follow, particularly those who are unfamiliar with academic theories.

In conclusion, *Normalization of the Global Far Right: Pandemic Disruption?* is an essential read for anyone concerned about the rise of the far-right and its impact on society. The authors provide a thorough and insightful analysis of the far-right, exploring its historical and structural roots and examining the ideological elements that have helped to normalise it. While the book may be challenging for some readers, it is an essential read for anyone seeking to understand the complex and interconnected factors that have contributed to the rise of the far-right and its impact on society. The book offers valuable insights into the nature of the far-right and its impact on social and political life, making it an important contribution to the ongoing debate around the rise of the far-right and the challenges it presents to democratic societies around the world.

■ **Karmvir Padda**  
PhD student, University of Waterloo, Canada

industries invest in, augment and profit from the sexual forces of the body, by producing cultural images. Kaplan and Illouz add neo-liberal sexual capital to this repertoire, whereby the subjects' attractiveness and sexual experiences help them garner self-esteem and social status, and thereby enhance employability.

The book posits neo-liberalism as the explanatory variable in the emergence of sexual capital, by transforming the realm of sexuality as well as the job market. Following Foucault, one may argue that rather than being intensely privatised, sexuality has become central to modern subjectivity. Coupled with consumerism's shift from mass production to a "logic of singularities", sexuality, as a distinct and truest expression of

## Reviews of recent books in social science and sociology

### Sorting Machines:

The Reinvention of the Border in the 21st Century

Steffen Mau

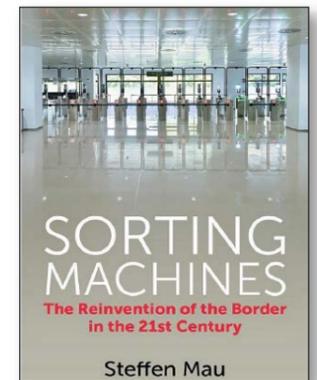
Polity Press

2022

184 pages

£50 hbk, £14.71 pbk

ISBN: 9781509554348 hbk



limited to physical walls and fences. The book explores how the old border-control model of people's mobility has been replaced by new border arrangements and policies through which states attempt to control cross-border movements.

*Sorting Machine's* analysis of modern borders demonstrates that globalised borders have three main characteristics. First, they filter people on the basis of trustworthy/low risk and non-trustworthy/high risk. Second, the control of mobility is not limited to the borderline, rather it's diffused to everyday spaces that digitally and physically observe people's movements. Third, the globalised border produces unequal movement opportunities, generating a global hierarchy of unequally distributed mobility rights.

Examining the examples of border regimes in Europe, North America and Africa, the book highlights that 'border' is not only fixable but can also shift away from territorial entry points. The flexible and fluid nature of globalised borders goes in two directions: inward and outward. Through inward direction, borders expand control and checks to everyday life that are carried out by social service providers, employers, landlords, transport companies and ordinary citizens, who are expected to perform surveillance and control, such as identifying people's legal status before providing support. This can be seen in many migration practices that require employers to check applicants' legal status before hiring them. Furthermore, in moving

borders outwards, states extend their migration-related control beyond their national borders through international and multilateral cooperation. A prominent example of border externalisation is the exchange of information and logistics that enables countries to control mobility before people leave their country of origin and when they are on transit routes. Remote control of borders is designed to prevent 'undesirable' and 'unwelcome' travellers from entering their destination country by rejecting visa applications, surveilling in-route transit and converting whole countries or areas into border zones.

While *Sorting Machines* sheds light on diverse factors such as class and citizenship, and states' political and economic goals in producing categories of desirable/undesirable and low-risk/high-risk groups, the book doesn't overtly discuss the role of race and racial hierarchies in influencing border regimes' policies and practices. This discussion is especially important because the majority of Western borders function is based on the racialised systems of migration that exclude, abandon and exploit racialised people.

In sum, *Sorting Machines* is an informative read and highly recommended for its rich and nuanced analysis of globalised borders.

■ **Neela Hassan**  
PhD student, University of Waterloo, Canada

one's self, gets embraced as a unique selling point in the workplace. The authors further argue that the "increasing incorporation of sexuality into the economic field" is also enabled by the changing nature of work itself.

First, work in neo-liberal capitalism, instead of being only a part of people's lives, has taken over entirely. The boundaries between the public and the private, production and reproduction (of society, and labour power, we might presume) have blurred, and sex has spilled over to temper the coldness, rigidity and demandingness of work. Additionally, as job markets become unstable and precarious for middle class subjects, they are left with no resource but what is most innate to them – their emotional intelligence and sexual attractiveness – to navigate choppy waters and

progress up the professional ladder.

While the book makes important linkages between sex and economy, based on an extensive study of literature, this work could benefit from greater examination and clarity on a few fronts. Firstly, the book is informed by critical literature tracing the neo-liberal, exclusionary impulse behind sexual-queer liberation. In that light, an acknowledgment of the politics of the production of this book, funded by Israeli institutions (known to pinkwash human rights violations by adopting a progressive queer agenda) would have been appreciated. Secondly, the focus on sex and sexuality as part of human capital should not divert focus away from how collective, classed schemes of valuation enable a gendered (re)production of

precariousness, by creating a sub-layer of haves and have-nots, a point that risks being an afterthought in such a study. The authors make note of the study's exclusive focus on upper and middle class employability, but acknowledge its exclusions in passing. The consequences, however, run deep – the working class continues to be associated with production, as if sex, sexuality and culture have no relevance to their lives, while the middle class is almost exclusively analysed from the lens of cultural capital. The research on class and sexuality would benefit from pondering the class politics of the cultural turn in sociology and thinking through the choice of concepts.

■ **Akanksha Pathak**  
PhD student, Jawaharlal Nehru University, India

# Colonialism's significance to social science structures remains neglected

**Gurinder Bhambra examines the recognition of colonialism within the social sciences since the publication of her work, *Rethinking Modernity***

It's been 16 years since the publication of *Rethinking Modernity: Postcolonialism and the Sociological Imagination* and over 20 years since I first started working on the issues as part of my DPhil at the University of Sussex. Then, there was no postcolonial sociology and there were only a few attempts, mostly in anthropology, to bring the insights of a largely humanities-focused postcolonial theory into the social sciences.

Although issues of colonialism and postcolonialism had been fairly widely discussed within the humanities – especially, in the West, following the publication of Edward W. Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 – there had been little systematic discussion in the social sciences, including in sociology. Today, with the publication of the second edition of *Rethinking Modernity*, the situation, ostensibly, is quite different.

There is greater recognition of the continuing legacies of colonialism and empire within contemporary societies; however, I suggest that the significance of colonialism to the disciplinary structures of the social sciences remains a relatively neglected topic. So, too, does thinking through how we account for these histories in the present as part of a renewed sociological imagination.

In the preface to the second edition, I trace the development of my understanding of these issues from rethinking one of the central framing devices of the discipline – modernity – to examining how that rethinking could enable us to reconstruct sociology and social theory differently within the frame of a reparatory sociology. In terms of the former, there are two key deficiencies within the historical narratives used by sociology that need to be addressed.

First, that what were claimed to be endogenous processes deemed significant in understanding the key events of modernity had broader conditions of emergence and development. That is, that the Renaissance, and the Industrial and French revolutions were not constituted solely by processes internal to Europe, but also through global ones.

Second, that other global processes, usually not addressed by sociology, were also significant constitutive aspects of the shift to



Professor Gurinder Bhambra

modernity. These include, for example, the histories of appropriation, dispossession, extraction, colonialism, enslavement and indenture, as well as histories of resistance such as the Haitian Revolution and the first war of Indian independence, more commonly known as the Indian Mutiny.

Given that, as I suggest in *Rethinking Modernity*, colonialism is absent from the mainstream repertoire of sociological concepts that make up its central research programmes and its curricula, then the first thing that is needed is to put colonial histories in. This is because issues of inclusion and exclusion are not a matter of intersubjective relations but of the nature of colonial modernity itself and its modes of representing itself and others.

Arguments for a simple pluralization, or diversity of voices, are insufficient to address this. The emergence of what are initially seen as 'new voices' must call into question the structures of knowledge that had previously occluded such voices and, further, necessitate a reconsideration of the theoretical categories that had been constructed on the basis of such exclusions.

The point, as Qadri Ismail has set out in his powerful article in *Kronos*, 'Exiting Europe, exciting postcoloniality', is not to beseech inclusion in the canon, but to besiege the disciplines themselves. What is needed, he argues, is to put history itself to question, as it is this that unsettles the structure of the modern episteme. Colonialism and empire have to be made central to the curriculum as topics of research and teaching in order that the limitations of current frameworks for understanding modern societies can be exposed.

Any 'adding', then, requires a consideration of the consequences of the previous omission and necessarily involves a reconstruction of the curriculum. This, it has to be stated, is not specific to calls to decolonise the curriculum, but is a process of reconstruction and renewal evident in the recognition of any form of exclusion. My argument that colonialism matters is far from being an argument that only colonialism matters. However, colonialism matters also to understanding differently what we previously thought mattered.

While *Rethinking Modernity* did not set out to 'decolonise' sociology, it was one of the first systematic accounts to consider the importance of postcolonial theory to the social sciences. It provided, I hope, a measured critique of Eurocentrism, an engagement with questions of historiography, and a reconceptualisation of sociology based on such considerations.

These issues have now become urgent as the climate crisis is forcing us to extend our concerns with 'national' calls for redistribution to address issues of global distribution. This is also occurring in a situation where 'national' advantage is increasingly understood as deriving from colonial appropriation, such that achieving global justice would require not only redistribution but reparation.

• Palgrave MacMillan will give 20% off the printed book or eBook price of *Rethinking Modernity*, second edition. Enter this coupon code at the checkout at [link.springer.com](https://link.springer.com) to apply the discount: H5DoMQW47RT2HD Valid from 31 July to 28 August, 2023.

# 'Sociology is good at impact – we need to share this knowledge'

**The Chair of the Sociology REF sub-panel, Sylvia Walby, and BSA Chair Louise Ryan write about demystifying the creation of impact case studies for the REF exercise**

Sociology did well in REF2021. Submissions to the Sociology sub-panel went up (from 29 in REF2014 to 37 in 2021), the quality level went up and the QR income increased by 16%. Sociology is good at impact. However, there is still a perception, within some universities, that demonstrating an impact on policy makes for a more straightforward impact case study than changing public discourse.

In an effort to help demystify impact, and encourage a broader view as to what counts as impact, we worked alongside Karim Murji, Judith Mudd and members of her team at the BSA office to organise a BSA funded hybrid event in November 2022. We also collaborated on a special event at the BSA conference in April 2023. Both events were informed by earlier conversations between members of the REF Sociology sub-panel, Haps (Heads and Professors of Sociology) and the BSA.

In preparation for the event in November 2022, Louise worked with Judith Mudd to select a range of different kinds of case studies, demonstrating varied kinds of impact in terms of reach, significance and users.

There were five presentations by those who had conducted the impact case studies.

Professor Giorgia Dona, University of East London, spoke about her case study: 'School of hard knocks: building inclusion for refugees and forced migrants in HE'. This was an example of an impact case study drawing together various collaborative projects undertaken by several researchers over many years. The case study demonstrated how colleagues at UEL had built a model for refugees' access to and progression in HE. The model had 'reach' on several levels and with different users. The model directly informed initiatives implemented at UEL to support students with refugee backgrounds. Moreover, beyond the university, numerous accredited short courses were rolled out in other locations, including in the infamous



Professor Sylvia Walby



Professor Louise Ryan

'Jungle' in Calais, and also taken up by education charities in refugee camps in Lebanon and Jordan.

An example of an impact case study that grew directly out of one particular project was presented by Professor Kate Reed, University of Sheffield, on the highly sensitive topic of foetal and infant autopsies. The particular research project underpinning the impact case study was initially funded by a British Academy grant, then an ESRC grant and Impact Accelerator funding. A key output was a touring exhibition entitled *Remembering Baby*. Impact had significant reach with diverse users ranging from bereaved parents to clinicians, to charities and the general public, raising awareness and challenging taboos around the topic of infant autopsy. Kate noted that gathering evidence on changing public attitudes is very challenging but this was achieved, in part, through tracking public reactions to the travelling exhibition.

Other speakers were: Professor Jane Monckton-Smith, University of Gloucestershire, who spoke about her work on 'Intimate partner homicide'; Professor Michaela Benson, Lancaster University, who spoke about her impact case study, with Professor Karen O'Reilly, on the impact of Brexit on Brits abroad; and Professor Hannah Smithson, Manchester Metropolitan University, who presented her impact case study on young people in the criminal justice system.

The November event concluded with a Q&A session with members of the REF

sub-panel, chaired by Sylvia. A recording on the event is available at:

<https://vimeo.com/showcase/10040192>

The second event was a special event at the BSA annual conference, in which members of the REF sub-panel, chaired by Sylvia, discussed REF and impact with sociologists. This included the report made by the Sociology Sub-Panel that is on the REF website, which discussed methodology as well as findings. For example, more than 10 times as many books were double-weighted in REF2021 as compared with REF2014.

## Several recommendations on how to build an impact case study

**First**, start preparing early, during the design of the research.

**Second**, think about using the full range of different kinds of impact, not just policy.

**Third**, consult the guidance on the REF website, which contains helpful examples – <https://results2021.ref.ac.uk/impact>

**Fourth**, think about both reach and significance – impact can be deep for a small group or less deep for a wider group.

**Finally**, it is worth emphasising that sociology is good at impact – we need to document it and share this knowledge.

# Mike Neary, 1956-2023

## Professor Richard Hall, of De Montfort University, and Dr Ana Dinerstein, of the University of Bath, write about their friend and colleague, Mike Neary

### Professor Richard Hall:

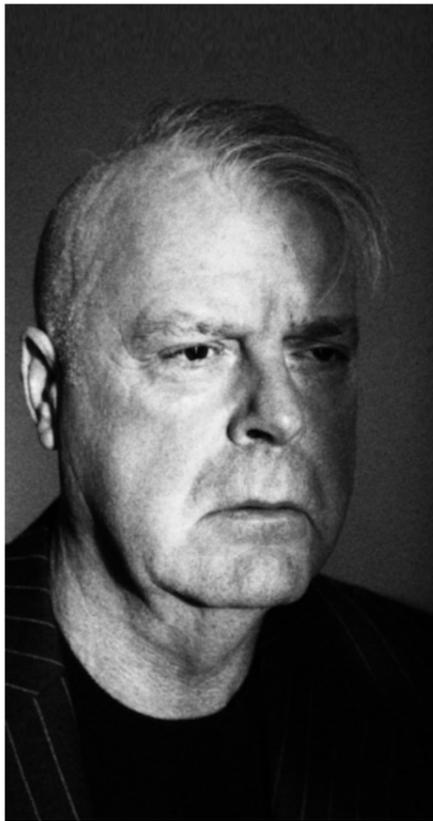
I first met Mike Neary at the time of the student-led protests against the imposition of new student finance arrangements, in 2010. Mike took an activist-academic role. His thinking, doing, and being demonstrated how protest, opposition and alternatives, both inside-and-against, and beyond, the university might be conceptualised and realised. He appeared to me in the role of an elder, giving voice, security and safety to the practices of others.

Mike was instrumental in a series of radical, concrete interventions in the world, which signalled his national importance in rethinking the idea of the university, and the revolutionary potentialities of teaching and learning.

He was pivotal in the formation of the Lincoln Social Science Centre, which was constituted and governed as an independent, higher education co-operative. It attempted to live the ideals of democratic ownership and daily running, which could then enact Mike's theoretical commitment to student-as-producer. At the same time, as Dean of Learning and Teaching at the University of Lincoln (which he joined in 2007), he renewed the university's learning and teaching strategy based upon this same radical commitment. Building on his earlier Learning Landscapes project, Mike's strategic work sought to give academics control of their pedagogic environments.

At the core of this was Mike's desire to refocus the idea of the university, predicated upon co-operativism. As a UK National Teaching Fellow and Principal Fellow of the HEA, he helped us to sketch how research-engaged teaching might generate a common struggle between student-workers and teacher-activists. This struggle is not for the university, rather it is against what the university has become.

His final book crackles with social critique and intellectual creativity – *Student as Producer: How Do Revolutionary Teachers Teach?* is a work on avant-garde pedagogy, on revolutionary teaching and on



integrating the radical history of working-class co-operatives. Mike gave the most radical, intellectual lead of any thinker about higher education in the last 15 years.

Mike's practice pivoted around voice, and encouraging us to find our voices through struggle. This was noticeable to me, when listening to Mike work with his own stammer, and in his generous, co-production of critical work with a range of other scholars. In this, Mike's practice vibrated with the possibility that we might liberate what has been stolen from us – our ways of knowing the world otherwise. In his passing, this is what I take forward.

### Dr Ana Dinerstein:

Emeritus Professor Mike Neary was a critical sociologist, open Marxist and radical educator.

I met Mike when I started my MA in the Department of Sociology at Warwick University in the late 1990s. Mike had just started his lectureship there and ours was 'friendship at first sight'.

I was impressed by Mike's sophistication, unpretentiousness, sense of humour and warmth. He became my anchor in England, honouring me with his friendship, calling me "my sister".

During my PhD years with the late Emeritus Professor Simon Clarke, we taught political sociology together. I experienced first-hand Mike's commitment to radical scholarship and radical pedagogy. I saw the appreciation of his students and institutional leaders for his excellence in teaching and research and his warm-hearted personality.

Mike was an original Marxist sociologist, who fought against structuralist interpretations of Marx's work, emphasising movement and struggle. My fond memories go back to 1999, when we convened 'The labour debate' seminar at the Centre for Comparative Labour Studies, aiming to reposition the open Marxist debate from the 'state' to the 'labour'. The presenters included John Holloway, Harry Cleaver and Simon Clarke and we had a passionate debate about labour, class, fetishism, abstraction, subjectivity and resistance.

In 2002, we published the papers as an edited collection: *The Labour Debate: An Investigation into the Theory and Reality of Capitalist Work*, translated into Turkish (2006) and Spanish (2009). I treasure this book. In the acknowledgement we recognised each other because writing together is a much more enjoyable experience: cuando jugamos de memoria (when you know, without saying, what is in each other's minds).

Mike Neary was a human galaxy: full of stars, darkness, black holes, planets, temporalities, storms, craters, light and beauty. Spanish poet Miguel Hernández beautifully expresses how I felt when Mike died, in an excerpt from his *Elegy to Ramón Sijé*:

A hard slap, a frozen blow,  
an invisible and murderous stroke of the axe,  
a brutal shove has brought you down.  
I weep for all my misfortunes  
I feel more about your death than my own life.  
I walk on the stubble of the dead,  
and with warmth from no one and inconsolable,  
I make my way from my heart to my daily business

# Simon Clarke, 1946-2022

## Dr Ana Dinerstein writes about her friend and colleague, Simon Clarke

On the 27th of December 2022, Simon Clarke, Emeritus Professor of Sociology, Warwick University, my former PhD supervisor, mentor and friend, passed away in his home in Devon, surrounded by his family. He has left a tremendous intellectual legacy based on his theoretical and methodological revolutions within Marxism, critical sociological theory and the sociology of labour. But I have too many fond memories of him being a strong man of principle, and critical, humble, generous and affectionate with his colleagues, students and family.

Simon Clarke was an extraordinary Marxist sociologist. He joined the Conference of Socialist Economists (CSE) created in 1969 in the UK, by participating in the Warwick Study Group. With other CSE members, he founded the journal *Capital & Class*, initially a bulletin, where he published his theoretical, empirical and methodological revolutions that enriched Marxism and critical sociological theory.

The CSE aimed to advance a socialist critique of Marxist orthodoxy and neo-liberalism and became a platform for theoretically informed political debate among various groupings of the British Left. CSE fellows wanted to understand the relationship between domestic policy and international developments and the capitalist State's internationalisation within globalisation during the Thatcher years.

One of their contributions was to expose neo-Ricardian reformist views of the State as an institution criss-crossed by class struggle only at the point of distributing wealth in favour of the workers. By advancing an open Marxist form analysis, Clarke and fellows suggested that the State was the political form of capitalist social relations. Hence, neo-Ricardians missed that wealth distribution via policy reforms was also limited by capitalist accumulation. The problem was not finding an efficient way to distribute money, but money itself as "value in motion".

In *Keynesianism, Monetarism, and the Crisis of the State* (1988) Clarke discusses money as a central issue for the Left, arguing that "[t]he distinctiveness of Marx's theory lay ... in the idea of money as the most abstract form of capitalist property and so as the



supreme social power through which social reproduction is subordinated to the power of capital" (p.13-14). In *Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology* (1982), a book based on his sociology course on Marx's social theory, Clarke uniquely links the development of modern economics to the emergence of sociology. He exposes the ideological dimensions of political economy and modern social science, opening a valuable space for a discussion of the limitations of those disciplines (Burnham et al., 2023).

Clarke's 20-year journey as a critical Marxist took a new turn in the 1990s, when he saw a unique opportunity to research the transformation of labour relations in the former Soviet Union, later extending this study to China and Vietnam. The Centre for Comparative Labour Studies (Warwick) hosted his Russian research programme, under which Clarke and his team (PhD students at Warwick) collaborated with young Russian researchers associated with the ISITO network created by Clarke in Moscow, to produce hundreds of case studies and publications featuring many

aspects of the historical transformation of the FSU (former Soviet states).

Hence, Clarke has been treasured in Russian sociology since then, revitalising Russian labour sociology and his original interpretation of the FSU's transition, which challenged Russian mainstream and predominant Western analyses. Given the hybrid character of the Soviet Union, and other factors such as Russian enterprises not being subordinated to the law of value, and labour not fully subsumed in capital, Clarke uniquely claimed that we could not assume that the former Soviet Union was in transition to capitalism: "While such a transition is a possibility, it can only be as a result of struggles that lie ahead. Far from the fate of the Soviet system having been resolved, all is yet to play for." (Clarke, 1993: 11).

Clarke's massive contribution to critical sociological Marxist research and labour studies came from an exceptional individual: a generous, caring and family man. Those like me who met him and enjoyed his company will never forget his overwhelming presence irradiating critical optimism and guiding us. I will hold on to his intellectual legacy and preserve his energetic and loving presence forever. Goodbye, dear Simon. RIP

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# Carol Thomas, 1958-2022

Alison Wilde and Rebecca Fish write about the life and work of Professor Carol Thomas, of Lancaster University



We began writing this short tribute on the way back from an international Disability Studies conference at the Nordic Network on Disability Research (NNDR) in Reykjavik, compelled by the void left by Carol's absence. Not only was her presence at Lancaster University's biennial conference a taken-for-granted highlight for us and many others, her international reputation as a leading figure in the development of disability studies, and the ubiquity of references to her work in the NNDR presentations, served to remind us of who and what we have lost.

Carol was a paradigm-shifter, taking the power, politics and passion of the social model of disability forward in more nuanced and inclusive ways. Her theorisation of the social relational model of disability built on feminist materialist foundations, making room for embodied experience using the concept of impairment effects. In doing this, she entwined the growing number of feminist, anti-racist and impairment-based critiques into a bolder, critical, more expansive and potentially more inclusive theory, which remained true to the essence of social model principles. She continued to fight for better understanding of models of disability as ideas simultaneously became ever more polarised and more crudely drawn, explaining that the social model of disability "contains a social relational kernel that now needs to be rescued and developed" (2004, Thomas: a and b). As such, she was a pivotal figure in shaping the wealth of disability studies, in all its variants, including: the sociology of health and illness; sociology of impairment; critical disability studies; cultural and literary disability studies; and autocritical disability studies; as well as theories of disablism and 'ableism'.

Carol built on the work of many deaf and disabled women to highlight experiential perspectives, drawing on parallel developments in the sociology of the body, and early post-structuralist and phenomenological accounts of disability and impairment (e.g., Shildrick and Price 1996), sharpening the gender divisions along a political continuum within disability studies. In 1999 Carol pointed out that an important consequence of this division was that

disability and 'the personal' had (wrongly) been set apart. Based on the insights that ensued from this, she became well known for her theorisation of the psycho-emotional dimensions of disability.

She wrote: "This is a form of disablism that works with and upon gendered realities; it operates along psychological and emotional pathways and frequently results in disabled people being made to feel worthless, useless, of lesser value, unattractive, a burden ... limits are placed on who disabled people can be by the shaping of individuals' inner worlds and social behaviours. This interacts with social barriers that restrict what disabled people can do "out there" in the "public" arena. Limitations on what we can be and what we can do fuse together in a toxic disablism mix ... But resistance has become possible through the self-organization and collective struggle of disabled women and men, and through the winning of allies and supporters among non-disabled people." (Thomas, 2006: 182)

Although theorisations of disabled people's identities and their capacities for independent living and decision-making have been used by successive UK governments to work against disabled people's best interests (e.g. spurious notions of increased choice and control in personalisation policies since 2007 used alongside cuts made in the name of austerity), Carol's insights into psycho-emotional dimensions of disabled people's lives, and her social relational emphasis, provided an invaluable counter-hegemonic reasoning which was taken up by many academics and activists alike. Debbie Jolly, for example, extended her work on the psycho-emotional aspects of disability to show how the government's regime of cuts should be understood as a destructive new paradigm,

misappropriating the scholarship, and imposing a bio-psycho social model on disabled people in order to blame them for their new plight (Jolly, 2012). As such, Carol's reputation is widely acknowledged for its strengths, resistance and political campaigning by the disabled people's movement, activists and academics alike.

Disabled women remained central to her work, as they should, having played a fundamental role largely unacknowledged in the development of disability studies across all areas. Carol was an exemplary doctoral external examiner (for Alison) and supervisor (for Rebecca), leading to memorable experiences that are common to all those who have had the privilege of her mentorship. She was a role model for what Tara Brabazon (2022) refers to as "stropky feminists" in navigating the troubled terrain of academia, inspiring teaching, learning and politics with integrity, generosity and intellectual pride.

Despite considerable health challenges and the restrictions imposed by residential care, Carol continued to work on academic projects and mentoring up to her death in September 2022, supportively sharing her passion and commitment to the relational model of disability to the end. She is much missed, personally, politically and academically, and we feel immensely privileged to have known her.

Dr Alison Wilde, Leeds Trinity University  
Dr Rebecca Fish, Lancaster University

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# Events listing 8 September – 8 December 2023

As at 11/6/23. For a complete and up to date list see: [www.britisoc.co.uk/events/key-bsa-events-lister](http://www.britisoc.co.uk/events/key-bsa-events-lister)

8 September	Online	Medical Sociology Study Group Event: Connecting Early Researchers in Medical Sociology
13-15 September	Glasgow Caledonian University	Work, Employment & Society Conference: Repositioning Resistance in the Workplace
13-15 September	University of Sussex	Medical Sociology Conference
28 September	Leeds University Business School	Early Career Forum Regional Event: Digital Transformations of Work and Employment in the Professions
5 October	Online	Auto/Biography Study Group Seminar: Celebration of Student Research and Creativity Activity
1 November	University of Birmingham	Postgraduate Event: Approaching Rest, Work and Activism through the Lens of Disability Politics
8 December	City, University of London	Deconstructing Donation Study Group Conference

## Margaret Archer, advisor to Pope Francis, dies

The BSA was greatly saddened to learn of the death of Margaret Archer in May, aged 80.

Professor Archer, born in January 1943 and brought up in Derbyshire, was a prominent sociological theorist whose public roles included President of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences, the Vatican's advisory body.

She was drawn to sociology after becoming an active supporter of nuclear disarmament at the age of 15. She was awarded a first degree in sociology at the LSE in 1964, and went on to complete a PhD there in 1967 on the educational aspirations of English working class parents. She carried out post-doctoral study at École Pratique des Hautes Études, Sorbonne, Paris, where she worked with Pierre Bourdieu.

She lectured at the University of Reading from 1966-73, and was a Reader at the University of Warwick from 1973-79 and a professor there from 1979. She was Director of the Centre for Social Ontology, established in 2011 at the École Polytechnique Fédérale de Lausanne, which later moved to the Sociology Department at the University of Warwick.

Professor Archer wrote on educational systems in *Social Conflict and Educational Change in England and France 1789-1848* (1971, written with Michalina Vaughan), which developed her interest in understanding the interplay between structure, culture and agency.

This led on to works that marked her as an important theorist in the critical realism



Professor Archer with Pope Francis

school, including *Culture and Agency: The Place of Culture in Social Theory* (1988); *Realist Social Theory: the Morphogenetic Approach* (1995); *Being Human: The Problem of Agency* (2000); and *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation* (2003). She also edited or co-edited a dozen books. She was editing her latest book, *Morphogenesis Answers its Critics*, just before she died.

Professor Archer edited the International Sociological Association's journal *Current Sociology* from 1972 to 1982 and was the ISA's President from 1986 to 1990, the first woman elected to the post.

Her presidency of the ISA and her Catholic belief made her a natural choice to be nominated as a founding member of the Pontifical Academy, sitting on its governing Council. The Academy was established by

Pope John Paul II in 1994 to advise him on social teaching.

In 2014 she was appointed as the Academy's President. Under her, it held plenary sessions and workshops on topics including human trafficking, modern slavery, climate change and migration.

She was given the BSA's Lifetime Achievement Award at its annual conference in April.

When she was asked in an interview for *Network* what she did for fun, she replied, "Nothing at all – I find it in the interstices of routine, even mundane events, when some exchange suddenly turns on the lights. I could also say scrambling in Chamonix with Freya, my grand-daughter, and Maximus, our Bernois dog, and that would be true too." *A longer appreciation of Professor Archer's life and work will feature in the next issue*

# NETWORK

Summer 2023

“There is a proverb about absence making the heart grow fonder – this felt apt with the return of the BSA annual conference after an absence of four years, which was a tonic to nourish the soul”

“The crucial thing about academic freedom is that it should be interpreted to mean autonomy from both government interference and university management – the worry is that the Bill doesn’t respect that”

“There is a price to be paid for putting one’s head above the parapet – I have become used to being called a child abuser, a safeguarding risk, a handmaiden, a men’s rights activist, a sellout, a rape apologist and a former feminist”

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