




# Network

Recording the working lives of sociologists for 50 years

Issue 152  
Spring 2026

A close-up photograph of several hands of different skin tones cupping a small, vibrant green basil plant with soil. The background is softly blurred, showing more hands and a warm, natural light source.

## Tending plants: making research methods loved again

### Also in this issue:

- Almost one in ten people in Britain paid a bribe over a 12-month period
- Drinking the bar dry: 66 years of annual conferences
- 120 years of committing sociology at Liverpool
- The ISA declaration: a call to action, or a claim too far?

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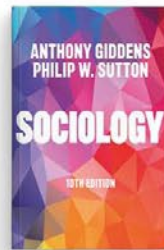
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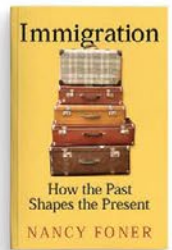
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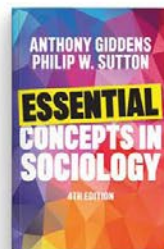
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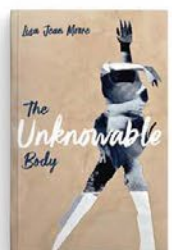


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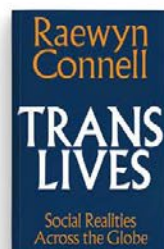
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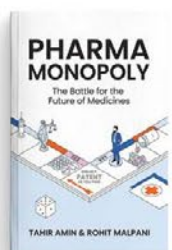
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# Issue 152, Spring 2026

## Main feature:

Tending plants: making research methods loved again

See page 25

Available online to members:

[www.britsoc.co.uk](http://www.britsoc.co.uk)

Longer versions of some *Network* articles may be seen at:

<https://www.britsoc.co.uk/members-area/network> (login needed)

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# News round-up



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UNIVERSITY OF SHEFFIELD

# NEW TOOL HELPS POLICE SPOT VICTIMS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING



**A new analytical tool is helping police forces across the UK identify potential victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation.**

The police often have difficulty identifying adverts posted by traffickers that offer sex with people they have trafficked from those created by other sex workers.

The Sexual Trafficking Identification Matrix works by analysing elements on the adverts such as photographs and language to produce a low, medium or high risk rating. The police can then decide whether to investigate and prosecute traffickers.

The matrix, developed by Dr Xavier L’Hoiry in collaboration with global partners, has been adopted by 16 police forces and two charities in the UK, four police forces abroad, and the Danish Centre Against Human Trafficking in Denmark.

Dr L’Hoiry, from Sheffield’s School of Sociological Studies, Politics and International Relations, worked with various national and international partners to develop the tool.

He said: “In the digital age, the use of some adult service websites by criminals presents a growing challenge in the battle against human trafficking and there is growing evidence that traffickers are using them to reach a larger customer base and operate with less risk of being caught by law enforcement.

“We wanted to help those working to tackle human trafficking to be more efficient in their efforts to reach out to those vulnerable to sexual exploitation. Previously organisations would need to look through thousands of adverts online manually, which can take a massive toll on those doing the work.”



**XAVIER L’HOIRY**



UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

## ALMOST ONE IN TEN PEOPLE IN BRITAIN HAVE PAID A BRIBE

**A**lmost one in ten people in Britain paid a bribe over a 12-month period, research has found.

An anonymous online survey of 1,000 UK adults, found that 16% had been asked to pay a bribe, and 56% of these had agreed – 9% of all interviewees.

Women were less likely to be asked to pay a bribe, but more likely to accept it if asked (65% of women to 52% of men).

The most common request was for money (48%) and gifts (25%) but also sexual favours (15%). Half of those asked for sexual favours complied.

Those working in the finance sector were most likely to be asked to pay a bribe (23%) followed by those in construction and manufacturing (8%) and estate agents (7%).

The report's researchers also looked at 'money muling', where people are

asked to receive or transfer funds from an unknown source through their bank accounts as part of money laundering.

Of the 1,000 interviewed, 11% were asked to participate in money laundering in the previous year. Two-thirds of these agreed to do this, amounting to 7% of all respondents, which would amount to 3.7 million UK adults.

**“CORRUPTION IS NOT  
SOMETHING THAT  
HAPPENS FAR AWAY OR  
ONLY IN HIGH-POWERED  
BOARDROOMS”**

Dr Jack Whittaker, co-author of the report, said: “These findings are

a wake-up call. Corruption is not something that happens far away or only in high-powered boardrooms, or in the movies. It is happening in everyday life – in workplaces, in financial dealings and in routine transactions.

“Most worryingly, people are being drawn in because it is presented as normal or easy and that normalisation is how corruption spreads.”

The survey was carried out in 2023 and the interviewees were quota-balanced by age, gender and region.

‘ISEC UK Bribery and Money Laundering Experience Indicator’, by the International Society of Economic Criminology. Authors: Mark Button, David Shepherd, Chloe Hawkins, Jack Whittaker and Branislav Hock.

<https://tinyurl.com/3z7b6aca>

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

# WOMEN USE THE INTERNET LESS THAN MEN IN LESS WEALTHY COUNTRIES

**W**omen are 19% less likely to use the internet and 8% less likely to own a mobile phone than men in low and middle-income countries, new research says.

Seven researchers used a novel machine-learning approach to estimate levels of internet use and mobile phone ownership among men and women in 117 low and middle-income countries between 2015 and the present.

The research drew on Facebook user-counts, geospatial data, development indicators and population composition data.

If their findings were extrapolated worldwide, this would mean that more than 320 million fewer women use the internet than men and 190 million fewer own a mobile.

The paper, published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, was written by Oxford's Department of Sociology's Professor Ridhi Kashyap, with Dr Casey Breen, Dr Douglas Leasure, Jiani Yan and Xinyi Zhao, also at Oxford; Masoomali Fatehikia from the Qatar Computing Research Institute; and Professor Ingmar Weber, of Saarland University.

The study shows that inequalities in internet use between men and women within countries are often as large as those between countries.

Dr Breen said: "Digital gender gaps varied greatly within countries – in over 40 countries, the gap between the regions with the highest and lowest female internet adoption exceeded 30 percentage points."

In Nigeria, a country with one of the largest sub-national disparities in women's internet adoption, over 70% of women in the relatively affluent and urban state of Lagos accessed the internet, compared to less than 20% of women in the rural state of Kebbi.

The research was conducted as part of the Digital Gender Gaps project based at the University of Oxford: [www.digitalgendergaps.org](http://www.digitalgendergaps.org)



**RIDHI KASHYAP**

UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

# ANTHONY HEATH SCHOLARSHIP LAUNCHED

**T**he Sociology Department is launching a new Anthony Heath Scholarship, which will cover course fees and provide a living stipend for UK students undertaking its MSc in Sociology next year.

The scholarship is named in honour of the Department's first head, Professor Anthony Heath, and selection will be based on academic merit, with one scholarship awarded each year.

It celebrates Professor Heath's contributions to British sociology and the department.

The current Head of Department, Professor Colin Mills, said: "We hope it will encourage students who are passionate about addressing pressing social challenges – from inequality to climate change – through rigorous and imaginative research."

UNIVERSITY OF THE  
WEST OF ENGLAND

# ECOCIDE NETWORK SET UP TO BRING SCHOLARS AND ACTIVISTS TOGETHER

**D**r Martin Crook is part of a group given £93,000 funding from the Danish Research Council to form an 'Ecocide network'.

The network will bring together academics, activists, advocates and policymakers to research the urgent challenges of ecocide and ecological destruction. It will use an interdisciplinary, multi-species perspective to study ecocide and explore new environmental agendas. It will be led by Dr Malayna Raftopoulos, of Aalborg University, and Dr Crook will sit on the steering committee.

Dr Crook is updating his chapter for a second edition of the *Handbook on Inequality and the Environment*, to be published in early 2027. He is also co-editing a volume on environmental

justice, to appear this year, and is writing a chapter for a volume, *War in the Anthropocene*.

Dr Finn MacKay published a *Guardian* newspaper opinion article on the 'right-wing feminisation' of the workplace: <https://tinyurl.com/bdz22yt8> and has made podcasts on feminism, masculinity and trans inclusion, and gender roles: <https://tinyurl.com/y7s85zed> and <https://tinyurl.com/ndb53snu>

Dr Sean Creaven had his conference paper on 'Epidemiological rift, zoonotic accelerationism and contagion capitalism: pandemics in the global age' accepted for oral presentation at the 17th Asian Conference on the Social Sciences in Tokyo in May. He has been appointed to the Review Committee for the conference.

ST MARY'S CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

# A THIRD OF ALL CATHOLIC PRIESTS 'CONVERTS FROM ANGLICAN CHURCHES'

**A** third of all Catholic priests ordained in England and Wales in the past three decades are converts from Anglican churches, research says.

A report, 'Convert clergy in the Catholic Church in Britain', shows that around 700 clergy of the Church of England, the Church in Wales, and the Scottish Episcopal Church have been received into the Catholic Church since 1992.

These include 16 former Anglican bishops, and the total equates to approximately a third of all Catholic priests ordained in England and Wales during this period.

The report's co-author, Stephen Bullivant, Professor of Theology and

the Sociology of Religion at St Mary's, said: "The numbers are much larger than most people would imagine. It was a much bigger phenomenon than a lot of people thought."

He identified two waves as major factors in pushing Anglican clergy to convert: the Church of England's general synod vote in 1992, which enabled women to be ordained as vicars, and the visit of Pope Benedict XVI to Britain in 2010.

The report was published by the St. Barnabas Society, which exists to support former clergy and religious people of various Christian denominations and other world faiths. <https://tinyurl.com/4r68whsu>



STEPHEN BULLIVANT

UNIVERSITY OF BATH

# WALKING TOUR CELEBRATES CONTRIBUTIONS MADE BY AFRICANS TO CITY



**A** walking tour that celebrates the wide-ranging but under-documented contributions made by Africans, Caribbeans and their descendants to the city of Bath has been created.

Dr Ben Radley, Dr Naomi Pendle, Dr George Gumisiriza and student Anissa Jatta in the Department of Social and Policy Sciences helped create 'Black Histories in Bath', a walking tour app, which takes in 10 stops across the city. These include the 'Syrian man' of Roman times, Black figures who attended social functions at the Assembly Rooms in the 18th century, and the five years the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie spent living in the city. More details: <https://tinyurl.com/2wcnfmd4>

In other news, the university's new Criminology Research Group held its first major event in October. This one-day symposium, entitled 'Justice beyond criminal justice', brought together 70 academics from criminology, law, sociology and

beyond to explore what it means to deliver justice outside of or alongside the criminal justice system. Topics included what the Post Office scandal tells us about lawyers' professional conduct, and the uses of AI in policing.

The Centre for Death and Society (CDAS) celebrated its 20th anniversary, and the Centre for Development Studies (CDS) its 50th. Activities have taken place to celebrate the work of the centres, including CDAS' Co-director, Professor Kate Woodthorpe, producing a book, *Death and Institutions*, published by the Bristol University Press, and CDS hosting the Development Studies Association annual conference.

Over the past year, PhD candidate Kristen Hope has worked with a group of young people to create a special section of the academic journal *Amicus Curiae*. The section, entitled 'Pushing the boundaries of intergenerational activism in an era of polycrisis', was published in November, and explores the power dynamics

involved in representing the views of children and young people in academia. More details: <https://journals.sas.ac.uk/amicus/article/view/5845>

Dr Omar Khan has launched a new criminology podcast series called Justice Focus. Each episode features conversations with people working in this area, including NGO projects, and in frontline practice.



NAOMI PENDLE



**DURHAM UNIVERSITY**

## RESEARCH EXPLORES IMPACT OF CHRONIC FATIGUE

**D**r Katharine Cheston is working with a charity to explore the impact of myalgic encephalomyelitis – also known as chronic fatigue syndrome – on people’s lives.

Every five years, the charity Action for ME runs a survey that guides its work, including its fundraising campaigns, advocacy, policy recommendations and provision of healthcare services.

The ‘2025 Big Survey’ is informed by Dr Cheston’s doctoral research on medically unexplained symptoms. She found that women living with complex, poorly understood illnesses like ME

experience high levels of stigma and shame. Many reported feeling that they are judged or blamed by others for their ill health.

Dr Cheston, who has personal experience of ME, will use medical humanities methods in the analysis of the survey responses to illuminate the complex burden faced by people living with the syndrome in the UK.

**UNIVERSITY OF NOTTINGHAM**

## SOCIOLOGY OF WORK BOOK TACKLES AI

**A** book that examines artificial intelligence as part of a broader view of the sociology of work has been published.

*The Sociology of Contemporary Work: What It Is, and Why We Need It*, by Professor Marek Korczynski, offers an overview of the field, including

analyses of: social structures around work, the voice and agency of workers, gig and service work, and the role and impact of AI at work.

Professor Korczynski is an Editor-in-chief of the BSA journal, *Work, Employment and Society*. <https://tinyurl.com/n6n8tamp>

# EXHIBITION RECONSIDERS ARCHITECTURE OF COVENTRY CATHEDRAL

**P**rofessor Nirmal Puwar curated the 'Absence/Presence' exhibition, which invited visitors to reconsider the architecture of Coventry Cathedral through the lens of people from the empire, refugees and the displaced people who helped build it.

Professor Puwar also wrote and hosted an eight-episode podcast, Hear Here, on the theme of 'listening anew to the Cathedral'. It was produced by the contemporary artist Duncan Whitley and edited by the artist and PhD student, Phavine Phung.

Also, the artists Prashant Kansara and Kushag Patel launched 'You should go back', an exhibition at the Herbert Art Gallery & Museum based on the collective book *Racist Tones*, launched amid the rise of the far-right.

Dr Meghan Tinsley and Dr Manuela Latchoumaya hosted a hybrid bilingual workshop at the University of Manchester entitled 'Commemorating and constructing the postcolonial nation'. The workshop invited academics, artists, heritage workers, policymakers and cultural activists from Barbados, France, Ghana, Guinea, Martinique and the UK to a critical conversation about how monuments may facilitate and impede the decolonisation of public space.

Study group members have published books and articles recently, including *The Modern World After Colonialism: Remaking the Social Sciences*, edited by Professor Gurminder Bhambra, Professor Ipek Demir, Dr Paul Gilbert, Dr Su-Ming Khoo and Dr Lucy Mayblin.

This book rethinks themes such as migration, citizenship, inequality and the environment. It has 30 chapters with learning objectives, summaries, discussion questions and reading lists. These have links to digital resources, including videos and teaching tools.

<https://tinyurl.com/bdhyhd66>

Dr Meta Cramer's book, *Colonial Legacies and Global Inequalities in the Anglo-Caribbean: Negotiating Social Knowledge Production in Research and Career-Making*, has been published. It explores how Anglo-Caribbean social scientists creatively work towards a regional science system. <https://tinyurl.com/2pt7r7bj>

Various journal articles have been published by study group members on subjects including

sustainability, reparations, global historical sociology, black reconstruction, creolization and Space Invaders.



**NIRMAL PUWAR**

## STS STUDY GROUP

# SOCIOLOGY-STS RELATIONSHIP EXPLORED AT PLENARY

**A**t the BSA annual conference in April, Professor Robin Williams, of the University of Edinburgh, will give a plenary talk on ‘The special relationship between sociology and science, technology and innovation studies’, which will argue that working with the different orientations of these fields can foster a mutually beneficial relationship.

The group continued its series of seminars last year with a talk on ‘The productive paradoxes of scaling data’ by Dr Saide Mobayed, of the LSE, which showed how the production and circulation of femicide data in Mexico is subject to epistemic and political struggle.

The seminar series will continue in 2026 and details will be announced through the group’s mailing list: <https://tinyurl.com/5y8y9d5h>

## GLOBAL HISTORIES AND SOCIOLOGY STUDY GROUP

# HISTORY GROUP INVITES RESEARCHERS TO JOIN

**T**he group’s convenors are looking to expand the group by inviting researchers to join.

Since September, its monthly reading group has brought together students, early career researchers and established scholars to explore classical and contemporary texts in historical sociology.

Each session focuses on thinking beyond traditional boundaries of history and sociology by asking questions such as how global power structures influence historical change, how sociology can move beyond traditional methodologies, and what it means to place colonial entanglements at the centre of social theory. Discussions prioritise accessibility without sacrificing rigour, and promote collaborative interpretation, cross-regional comparison and methodological diversity.

**“SOCIOLOGY THRIVES WHEN ARCHIVES ARE UNDERSTOOD NOT AS PASSIVE STOREHOUSES”**

The group aims to foster supportive scholarly exchange, deepen engagement with global historical sociological traditions, and cultivate collaborative networks that transcend institutional and disciplinary boundaries. It believes that historical sociology thrives when archives are understood not as passive storehouses but dynamic actors in global knowledge economies.

Those interested in joining should visit its website: <https://www.britisoc.co.uk/groups/study-groups/global-histories-and-sociology-study-group>

One of the group’s co-convenors, Dr Claire Cunnington, of the University of Sheffield, presented her research at the LSE Women’s Library in October alongside Caroline Derry, Professor of Feminism, Law and History at the Open University. The talk entitled ‘The London scandal: sexuality, exploitation and law reform in 1885’, explored child trafficking, legal history and modern parallels.



**CLAIRE CUNNINGTON**

## SOCIOLOGY OF MENTAL HEALTH STUDY GROUP

# SEMINARS EXPLORE ADHD, STIGMA, FATIGUE AND RECOVERY

**T**he study group will run an online seminar series this year that will feature new areas of interest such as: ADHD and *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* diagnoses; minority stigma; activist fatigue; and roads to recovery.

As a result of the high number of submissions from scholars to the series, the organisers are convening one-hour sessions comprising a presentation and a questions and answers discussion on the first Monday and third Thursday of each month.

The series aims to showcase a broad range of topics using a variety of theoretical and methodological approaches, highlighting

interdisciplinary perspectives that share a concern for the advancement of the sociology of mental health. The organisers hope to provide an open space for conversations on the latest issues in the field.

In September the group held a symposium at the University of York entitled 'Advances in the sociology of mental health'. The two-day event featured researchers from around the UK at various career-stages talking on themes including lived experience, policy reform, trauma narratives and inequalities in mental health. The symposium was funded by the Foundation for the Sociology of Health and Illness.

## FAMILIES AND RELATIONSHIPS STUDY GROUP

# NEW CONVENORS LAUNCH EVENTS SERIES

**F**our researchers have taken over as convenors of the group and have launched a series of events that present members' work exploring new and innovative families and relationships research.

Alice Ferrari, Hanna Andersen, Natalie Bennet and Polly Maxwell have met regularly to discuss mutual interest in 'queering' family and relationships research.

**“WE ARE IN URGENT NEED OF A POLITICS THAT PUTS CARE FRONT AND CENTRE”**

The events began in January with a discussion of the Care Manifesto written by The Care Collective, which argues that we are in urgent need of a politics that puts care front and centre.

As part of their event series, the study group will run monthly readings on a topic related to families and relationships research. Each event has a suggested text, but it is not necessary to have read it to attend. The group will also arrange a meeting for FAR members at the BSA annual conference in April.

“Our conversations have been deeply reflexive, both of our own work and that of family and relationship scholarship more broadly,” the convenors said. “It is our hope that we

can now open up and continue these discussions with all of you.

“Queering the family extends beyond a focus on LGBTQ+ families, to all those marginalised by the family norms of the Global North. For example, single-parent families, platonic co-parenting arrangements and polyamorous families, alongside all those underserved by iniquitous healthcare and welfare policies.

“We want to invite the study group to consider how research and practice reflect the experiences of contemporary families and how all families and relationships are impacted by patriarchal, colonial and cis-heteronormative ideals.”

# ALMOST HALF OF BRITONS APPROVE OF SOCIOLOGY DEGREES

**A**lmost half of Britons approve of sociology degrees and around one in five disapproves, a new survey has found.

A YouGov survey of 4,090 adults in Britain found that 20% strongly approved of sociology, 28% somewhat approved, 33% had no opinion or didn't know, 12% somewhat disapproved, and 6% strongly disapproved (rounding to 99%).

Sociology came 12th out of 16 subjects in the public's approval in the survey.

At the top of the table were medicine (80% strongly approved), mechanical engineering (65% strong approved), law (62%) and chemistry (58%). At the bottom were media studies (15%), performing arts (16%), and anthropology and philosophy (19% each).

When asked which degree courses left graduates better off, sociology again was 12th out of 16, with 29% saying that graduates would be better off and 43% saying they would not. The top and bottom three subjects were the same as for 'approval' question.

The survey's overall conclusion was that 45% of Britons thought too many young people go to university, and almost half thought an apprenticeship better prepared young people for the future than did a degree.

Even among graduates, the number who believed apprenticeships were superior to degrees was more than triple the proportion who thought the opposite (33% to 10%).

<https://tinyurl.com/52mt3vhz>

## GIDDENS' INTRODUCTORY TEXTBOOK GOES TO 10<sup>TH</sup> EDITION

**T**he 10th edition of *Sociology* by Anthony Giddens, a book that has sold more than one million copies in English and has been translated into more than 20 languages, was issued in March.

The book was first published in May 1989, when personal computers were rare. Professor Giddens used a Dictaphone to record the text for the original book while he was Head of the Department of Social and Political Sciences at Cambridge, and the cassettes were typed up by a secretary.

The first edition was 815 pages long and printed in black and white, with no photographs, compared with the full-colour 2026 edition, with 948 pages and 196 images, available digitally as well as in print.

Throughout its 10 editions, published by Polity, a few fundamental topics

have remained constant, but others, such as the sociology of organisations, have taken a backseat. The 10th edition reflects recent thinking in areas such as post-colonial theory, intersectional inequalities, digital media, climate change, pandemics and genocide.

After Professor Giddens left academia and retired from his directorship of the LSE, Polity brought on board Phil Sutton, a co-author with experience of university teaching.

"Tony Giddens is unique among contemporary sociologists," said Polity's Director John Thompson. "*Sociology* reflects Tony's lucid, accessible style, and the qualities that have made his work globally influential – an original theoretical vision, his extraordinary intellectual range, and a rare ability to use sociology to illuminate the major social and political transformations of our time."



**ANTHONY GIDDENS**

© Eirik Helland Urke

# JOURNAL SPECIAL ISSUE PROMOTES WORK OF MINORITY SCHOLARS

**T**he *Sociology of Health & Illness* journal has published a special issue to promote the works of racially minoritised scholars working in medicine, health and illness.

The issue, comprising nine papers, is part of various initiatives run by the journal in support of the Black Lives Matter movement, including making

freely available articles that focus on race and ethnicity in healthcare.

Topics tackled in the special issue include incivility experienced by minority hospital staff, the impacts of living with long Covid, and migrants' healthcare experiences.

<https://tinyurl.com/2cent28r>

## SPECIAL ISSUE ON DECOLONIAL RESEARCH PUBLISHED

**A** special journal issue on decolonial research methods and methodologies has been published.

The issue, entitled, 'Decolonial research in the social sciences', is published in the *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*. It tackles themes such as how decolonial research compares to other critical research approaches, and how it is implemented.

It took more than four years to prepare as it has been compiled so that the eight papers respond to each other, in order to promote a progressive and critical understanding of decolonial research.

An online launch for the issue was held in January.

<https://tinyurl.com/msz8exwf>

## 'SOCIAL SCIENCE SHOULD BE BETTER USED IN GOVERNMENT'

**A** new report says that social science should be better used within government.

The report, by the Academy of Social Sciences, found that only four of the 21 chief scientific advisors to government departments had a social science background.

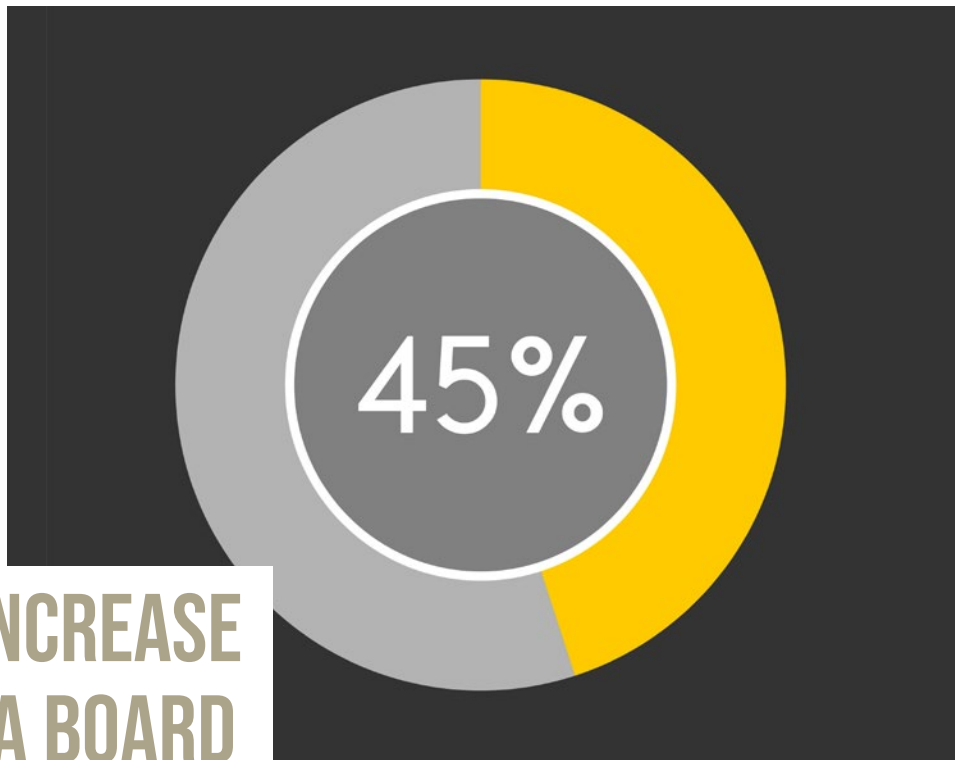
This was despite the fact that policy and operational questions in 'Areas of research interest' in government departments "were largely questions that relate to social science", it said.

"We focus on social science evidence in this report, because this was felt by

many to be currently underweighted," the report says. "The UK Government Office for Science - as the science evidence and advice hub in government - should explore ways to ensure that there is clearer leadership of and support for social science advice and evidence within UK Government structures, including its own."

Researchers spoke to more than 40 senior figures in Whitehall for the report, 'Enhancing the evidence ecosystem: improving outcomes for government and citizens'.

<https://tinyurl.com/5dcwars2>



## NEW TRUSTEES INCREASE DIVERSITY OF BSA BOARD

**R**ecent additions to the BSA's Board of Trustees have brought the proportion of members who are non-white to 45%. Dr Shoba Arun and Dr Kindy Sandhu have joined the Board, taking the number of members from ethnic minorities to five, out of 11.

The five are: Dr Maryam Sholevar (Treasurer), Dr Paul Campbell and Dr Sandhu (Membership Services Directors), and Professor Jason Arday and Dr Arun (Publications Directors).

The BSA's Board is more diverse than average for charities. A Charity

Commission report in 2017, entitled *Taken on Trust*, revealed that 92% of charity trustees in England and Wales were white and two-thirds were male – on the BSA Board men comprise less than half of members (five out of 11).

The other members of the Board are: Professor Chris Yuill (Chair); Dr Jennifer Remnant (Vice Chair); Jonathan Blundell and Dr Mark Doidge (Membership Services Director); and Professor Angharad Beckett and Professor Vanessa May (Publications Directors).

# AWARD WINNER CALLS FOR 'ULTRA-VIGILANCE' IN FACE OF FASCISM

**T** winner of the 2025 Distinguished Service to British Sociology Award, Professor Bridget Fowler, has warned of the need to remain ultra-vigilant in the face of a rise in fascism and militarism.

"I am deeply honoured by this award, but I would like to take this opportunity to refer to the perils that menace sociology at present," said Professor Fowler, of the University of Glasgow.

"I was born in 1943 – our generation enjoyed, through the 1960s and early 70s, a period of unprecedented access to material necessities and scholarships for both middle-class and even most working-class people.

"Those conditions have long gone, instead, we see the rise of unemployment and of militarism.

"In a world as dangerous as the present, in which the threat of fascism comes even from our allies, we must anticipate and practice acts of solidarity and resistance.

**"I SEE SOCIOLOGY AS PARTICULARLY VULNERABLE FOR EARLY TARGETING BY UNIVERSITIES"**

"I see sociology as particularly vulnerable for early targeting by universities. In the months to come, we need to remain

ultra-vigilant so as to stand up not just for our discipline, but also for critical racist, feminist, social-democratic and Marxist thought more broadly, for exiled academics and immigrants, and for the rejection of redundancies."

Professor Fowler specialises in the sociology of culture, Marxist-feminist thought and social theory more broadly. Her books include *The Obituary as Collective Memory* (2007); *Reading Bourdieu on Society and Culture* (2000); and *The Alienated Reader: Women and Romantic Literature in the Twentieth Century* (1991).

In an interview with her colleague, Professor Les Back, she recalls that she was a founding member of the Department of Sociology at Glasgow, where she is now Emeritus Professor.

"In the 1960s sociology was not really considered a proper subject in Glasgow either, even though 'social economics' had been taught there from 1919, and social stratification had been taught in the Scottish Enlightenment. So, we were part of Politics, and we had a certain degree of struggle to be accepted.

"I really do think that as sociologists, we were invaders into the university: we always had big classes, we grew very rapidly.

"John Eldridge, Greg Philo and Paul Walton got the [Glasgow University] Media Group together and wrote those now celebrated books about the news, which deeply antagonised the BBC upper echelons and beyond. So, we were associated with dangerous, risky work."

She also recalled the culture in universities when she began work. "The older universities had some elements that were very undesirable. In some departments, they had professors who were like little kings and who ruled like autocrats. If you had a conflict with one of those kings, you sometimes had to leave the university or at least leave the department in order to survive. Luckily, I have had mainly good heads of subject: my experience has been very positive in that respect."

However, in some respects, things had not improved. "I don't think I would have survived if, when I first started to have children, we had operated with the sort of rules we have in place now, particularly the REF rules. I wouldn't have managed to produce that amount of research when they were young."

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'Notes, index cards and reminiscences: a sociological life: Bridget Fowler in conversation with Les Back' *The Sociological Review*, online October 2024

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/00380261241258579>



**BRIDGET FOWLER**



## NEW PRESIDENT PLEDGES TO WORK WITH SOCIOLOGY TEACHERS

**T**he new BSA President, Professor Les Back, has pledged to work with sociology teachers in schools across the UK as one of his main aims.

Professor Back took up the role in February, stepping up from Vice President and replacing Professor Rachel Brooks.

Professor Back, Head of Sociology in the School of Social and Political Sciences at the University of Glasgow, said: “One of my priorities this year is to connect with sociology teachers in schools across the UK.

“I plan to visit as many schools as I can to speak with sociology students across the UK. I have already been to Nelson and Colne Sixth Form in Lancashire, where C.L.R. James lived in the 1930s. I’ve also just recorded a podcast with Katie Tyler and Duncan Hall for the Sociology Staffroom Podcast.

“As well as supporting early- and mid-career colleagues in these difficult times in HE, I want to bring the ideas

we cherish into public discussions. I’ve just written a celebration of broadcaster Laurie Taylor at 90, and the newly elected BSA Vice President and I are soon to record a conversation with Laurie on grand theory and the future of sociology for his BBC Radio 4 programme, Thinking Allowed.”

The BSA has thanked Professor Brooks for her leadership over the past two years.

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Professor Imogen Tyler has been elected as the BSA’s Vice President.

Professor Tyler, of Lancaster University, is internationally renowned for her contributions to social theory and the sociology of inequalities. Her research covers topics such as stigma, social justice, activism, social class, poverty, race and citizenship.

She will spend the year working alongside Professor Back, before stepping into the role of President in 2027.



**LES BACK**

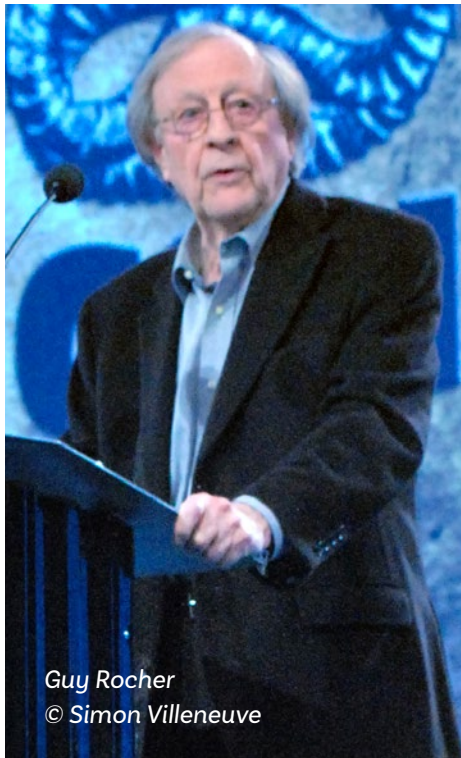
# ALL AROUND THE WORLD

## NETWORK TAKES A LOOK AT SOCIOLOGY BEYOND OUR SHORES

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### CANADA

## ARCHITECT OF FRENCH LANGUAGE IN QUEBEC IS HONOURED



**T**he eminent sociologist Guy Rocher has died, aged 101.

The Quebec government held a state funeral for Professor Rocher, who was a member of the Parent Commission, which laid the foundations of the modern education system in the state.

He was also one of the architects of Bill 101, which made French the official language of Quebec in 1977.

At the ceremony, held at Montreal University, Quebec's Premier François Legault recalled the sociologist's "immense contribution" to Quebec.

"I and my government still use Guy Rocher's writings to draw inspiration from the place of secularism in our shared values," he said.

Pauline Marois, a former Premier of Quebec, recalled once asking Professor Rocher what he was most proud of among all his accomplishments.

"He told me, 'it was my 50 years of teaching because I was a facilitator, I helped people become responsible citizens.' And that was his greatest contribution to Quebec," she said.

## AFGHANISTAN

# TALIBAN GOVERNMENT BANS ALL BOOKS WRITTEN BY WOMEN

**T**he Taliban government has banned all books written by women from the university teaching system.

As part of the new restrictions, 140 books by women, on subjects such as human rights and sexual harassment, were found to be of “concern” due to “anti-Sharia and Taliban policies”.

The government also banned the teaching of 18 subjects, including ‘women’s sociology’, gender and development, and the role of women in communication.

The country’s universities were told they were no longer allowed to teach the subjects, with a Taliban official saying they were “in conflict with the principles of Sharia and the system’s policy”.

## “IT ALSO BANNED FIBRE-OPTIC INTERNET IN AT LEAST 10 PROVINCES”

The decree is the latest in a series of restrictions which the Taliban have brought in since returning to power four years ago. It also banned fibre-optic internet in at least 10 provinces, on the orders of its supreme leader.

Women and girls have been particularly hard-hit by the Taliban’s restrictions, as they are barred from accessing education beyond the sixth grade, with one of their last routes to further training cut off in late 2024, when midwifery courses were scrapped.

## GERMANY

# GOOD LOOKS PAY OFF AT WORK, SAYS STUDY

**G**ood-looking people earn more at work, new research has found.

The study, published in the journal *European Sociological Review*, found that attractive people earn on average two to three per cent higher hourly wages than less attractive people.

These effects persist even when numerous influencing factors such as age, education, professional experience, working hours and health are taken into account.

The researchers analysed data from the German Family Panel, a representative long-term study that follows the lives of over 12,000 people in Germany from

1971, including their income. The panel’s interviewers also rate their participants’ appearance on a scale from ‘very attractive’ to ‘less attractive’.

“Beauty may seem superficial, but it can have real consequences,” says Professor Reinhard Schunck, of the University of Wuppertal, who led the study.

“Our results show that social perceptions of attractiveness can create lasting inequalities in the labour market – even in a highly regulated labour market like the German one, which offers less discretion for employers when setting wages compared to other countries.”

## NETHERLANDS

# PEOPLE TRAVEL FURTHER TO STAY IN SAME ETHNIC GROUP

**People are willing to travel 10 minutes further for their daily shopping if this means they do not have to live near migrant communities, research says.**

Researchers asked thousands of people to choose between neighbourhoods they would like to move to and communities they would like to join.

The results, published in the journal *PNAS Nexus*, showed that people consistently choose environments with more peers – people with the same background and level of education.

The only exception found was that respondents without a university

degree had no bias against interacting with people with a university degree.

The research was conducted by sociologists Professor Jochem Tolsma of Radboud University, Netherlands, and Dr Rob Franken of Utrecht University.

**“PEOPLE PREFER TO ASSOCIATE WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE VERY SIMILAR TO THEMSELVES”**

“People prefer to associate with people who are very similar to themselves,”

said Professor Tolsma. “When given the choice, they opt for a neighbourhood or association with ‘people like us’.

“This finding makes it likely that segregation and preferences for one’s own group reinforce each other. We must try to prevent deeper social divisions in society, because these divisions erode social cohesion, which could pose a threat to democracy.

“One thing that could help is to require sports clubs to meet certain quotas in order to promote diversity. Or to make neighbourhoods so attractive that people from different backgrounds are willing to interact with each other more often.”

## UNITED STATES

# UNMARRIED RELIGIOUS WOMEN JUST AS LIKELY TO HAVE ABORTIONS

**Unmarried women who are strongly religious are just as likely to have an abortion as others, a new study has found.**

Professor Amy Adamczyk used data from a US survey which tracked the lives of 5,000 women from the mid-1990s to early 2000s.

She found that about 25% of women who became pregnant outside of marriage for the first time decided to have an abortion, regardless of how active their religious life was.

In her book *Fetal Positions* (2025), Professor Adamczyk, of the John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York, analysed data on religious affiliation, frequency of attendance at services, participation in church activities, regularity of prayer, and subjective importance of religion in life, for the study.

She found that women who belonged to conservative Protestant churches as teenagers were less likely to have an abortion compared to Catholic and moderately religious Protestant women, even when they had the same level of religious activity.



**AMY ADAMCZYK**



UNITED STATES

# NO NEW SOCIOLOGY PHD STUDENTS TO BE ADMITTED TO HARVARD

**No sociology PhD students will be admitted to Harvard University after the 2026/27 academic year.**

The Sociology department has opted to enrol six new PhD students for the 2026-27 academic year, and to forfeit its slots after this.

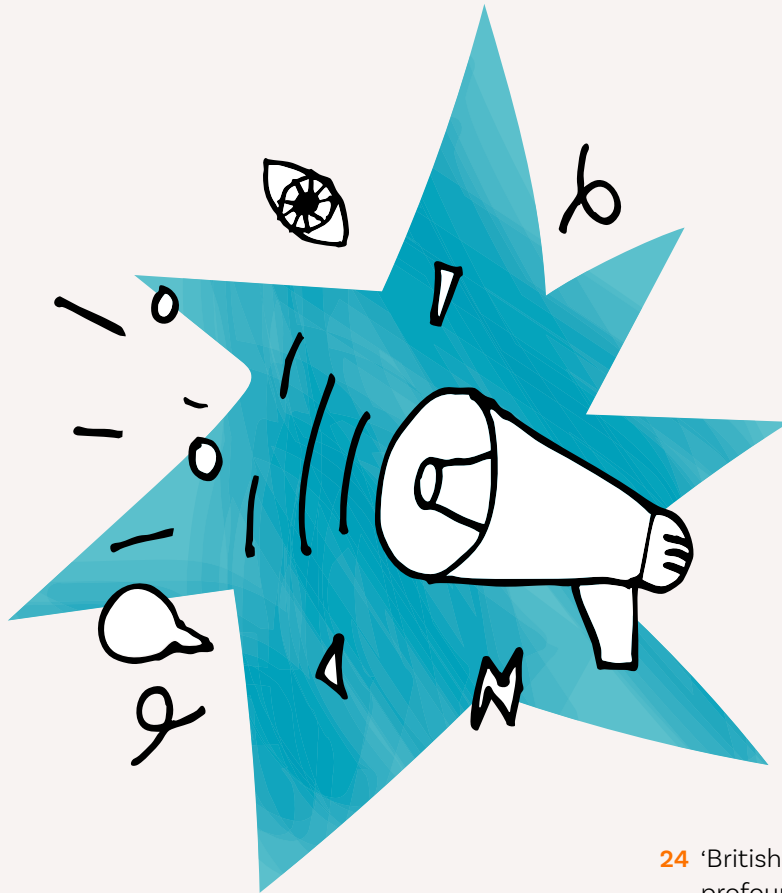
This is part of a widespread reduction in PhD admissions slots at Harvard. Over the next two years, the Science division will see a cut of more than 75% in admissions, and Arts and Humanities 60%.

The decision to cut PhD student admissions is because of financial

pressures on the university. Republicans raised taxes on college endowments in last year's 'Big, Beautiful Bill', a rise of up to 8% for some of the wealthiest universities in the country. This is expected to cost Harvard \$300 million.

In the fiscal year 2025 report, Harvard had an operating loss of \$113 million, its first budget deficit since 2020, its student newspaper reported. The university has also taken other measure to offset financial pressures, such as hiring freezes.

# Features



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# 'BRITISH SOCIOLOGY IS AT A PROFOUND INFLECTION POINT'

## OUTGOING BSA CHAIR, PROFESSOR CHRIS YUILL, REFLECTS ON WHAT SEEMS LIKE A PIVOTAL MOMENT IN OUR HISTORY

**B**ritish sociology is at a profound inflection point. Our intellectual output is world class—innovative, rigorous, and internationally respected. Yet the institutional foundations that once supported this work are weakening. Redundancies at all levels of academia, shrinking research budgets, and the erosion of the wider academic infrastructure are reshaping the landscape in ways that none of us can ignore.

No political party is offering the kind of long term vision that would allow sociology, or academia more broadly, to thrive. At the same time, the global political environment is becoming more volatile and more unforgiving. The post war settlement is long gone, and the emerging post neoliberal order is likely to be harsher and more destabilising than anything we have previously experienced.

It is not about imagining that the BSA can reverse these forces. We cannot. Our task is to navigate them with clarity, honesty, and purpose. That means focusing on what the BSA can realistically do—and doing those things well. It also means being transparent with the BSA membership about our limits, our priorities, and the choices we must make.

This requires us to revisit some fundamental questions about our identity. Are we primarily a charity that supports sociology through conferences, journals, and

professional networks? Are we an activist organisation pursuing political agendas—and if so, whose? The two are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but how could we combine the two in a complex regulatory framework? How responsive should we be to the membership, and in what ways? These questions have always been present, but the current pressures are bringing them to the surface in new and unavoidable ways.

We also need to rethink the practicalities of governance. The academic world in which the BSA's structures were designed was one of comparatively lighter workloads, greater stability, and more time for activity beyond the workplace. That world has changed. All members of the BSA - as do all academics - now work under intense pressure, with limited capacity for long meetings, extensive committee structures, or the informal knowledge sharing that once happened around in-person events. We must adapt by becoming more agile, more focused, and more selective about what we take on.

**“DOING LESS, AND DOING IT BETTER, IS NO LONGER A STRATEGIC PREFERENCE—IT IS A NECESSITY”**

Doing less, and doing it better, is no longer a strategic preference—it is a necessity. We need to identify what is essential, what is desirable, and what is simply no longer feasible. And we need to do this with care, with openness, and with a commitment to sustaining the core of what makes the BSA valuable to its members and to the discipline.

At this moment the main task for the BSA is clarity: clarity of purpose, clarity of identity, and clarity about the constraints we face. It is also about holding space for the discipline—protecting what we can, nurturing what matters, and ensuring that sociology continues to have a collective voice even in difficult times.

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Network would welcome feedback from members on Chris's thoughts.

Please email:  
[judith.mudd@britsoc.org.uk](mailto:judith.mudd@britsoc.org.uk)



**CHRIS YUILL**

# FABLES, PLANTS, BALLET AND BEES – MAKING RESEARCH METHODS LOVED AGAIN

HOW SHOULD WE TEACH SOCIOLOGY TO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN THE UK? NETWORK TAKES A LOOK AT RECENT JOURNAL PAPERS TO SEE THE LATEST THINKING BY EXPERTS IN THE FIELD.

**To answer this question, we can best start with an article from a recent special issue of the BSA's *Sociology* journal, written by Les Back, Michaela Benson and Maisie Tomlinson. In it, they, ask the question: 'Why are research methods courses so unloved?'**

In answering this, they offer a “diagnosis of what is wrong with the way qualitative research methods are taught. We situate this in a disciplinary context which has highlighted a continuing empirical crisis, identifying digital culture and the rise of big data as an existential threat to sociology and which has led to calls for a reconsideration of the discipline’s strengths and values...”

The authors note that “in Britain, the focus on sociology as a discipline that provided general education led to research methods being understood as generalist tools rather than as requiring specialist knowledge.

## “STUDENTS DO NOT SEE THEMSELVES AS RESEARCHERS-IN- THE-MAKING”

“The unpopularity of methods of learning and teaching for students may be that their starting point is one of confusion about what research constitutes and/or [students] do not see themselves as researchers-in-the-making. This is further exacerbated by the seemingly bloodless and abstract way research methods are taught, which curbs any enthusiasm and excitement for enquiring into social life.”

The cuts in higher education meant a shift from seminars to lectures to large groups. IT technology often did not work properly, preventing audio and video being played to students.

They also note that in America there is a “dedicated quarterly peer-reviewed journal, *Teaching Sociology*, published by the national subject association, and TRAILS, an online peer-reviewed library of high quality teaching resources.

“We do not have anything like this in the UK, which may be explained by the fact that teaching and pedagogy have long sat outside the remit of subject associations. In earlier iterations, the Higher Education Academy (now Advance HE) was organised through networks that brought together scholars from cognate disciplines in conversations about teaching and learning, including the network for Sociology, Anthropology and Politics. This was established in 2000 and led to the publication of several monographs and edited volumes through which these conversations could be shared more widely. However, within Advance HE priorities have shifted, and these subject networks have been replaced with a broad social science cluster.”

As an alternative, the authors say that in their own teaching practice, “we have included practical exercises that get students out of the classroom and into the social world, encouraging them to complete a series of practical tasks, from small exercises in attentiveness and observation and making field notes, to writing questions, conducting interviews, collecting visual data or collecting quantitative evidence.

“This ethos was at the heart of the groupwork Les and Michaela ran while co-teaching at postgraduate level at

**Article continues >**



**MICHAELA BENSON**

Goldsmiths. Delivered to a group of 15-20 students each year, this included a student-led and instructor-supported urban ethnography in areas close to the college. It involved careful planning to avoid it becoming something close to an intrusive 'sociological safari'. Sites were selected where either Les or Michaela had conducted their own research, which was then also shared with the students. Students worked in small research teams to first design, and then conduct and report on, a group ethnography pilot study.

"The output from this was a poster and five-minute presentation, prepared and delivered by the group, that offered a clear and concise message about the research that communicated the research questions, data and methods, and two to three findings from the research supported by examples.

## **"JUST GETTING OUT OF THE CLASSROOM AND INTO THE SOCIAL WORLD ENCOURAGES STUDENTS TO UNDERSTAND THE SOCIAL DIMENSIONS OF BEING A RESEARCHER"**

"Just getting out of the classroom and into the social world encourages students to understand the social dimensions of being a researcher and that we are inside and part of the things – culture, history and society – that, as sociologists, we are trying to understand."

One student reflected in an email: "One moment that has stayed with me is the walking ethnography exercise in Catford (South East London). Wandering through everyday streets with a researcher's lens – notebook in hand, conversations with locals unfolding – was my first real taste of ethnographic fieldwork. The social research course didn't just teach me

how to do research – it taught me how to see like a researcher."

The authors also created *Fieldwork Fables*, a series of short films that dramatise aspects of sociological fieldwork as an aid for teaching students. The films, which last around five minutes, use professional actors who enact challenges that researchers have experienced in their work.

Topics tackled include: the dangers of asking questions in a way that is laden with values or where the researcher runs the risk of presuming that they already know the answers; the need to reflect on the gendered and other power dynamics that play out through the research encounter; and what should a researcher should do in the face of an interviewee's apparent racism. The films have been used in more than 80 university courses.

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**How else might we teach students? Recent papers in sociology journals reveal a potpourri of ideas and approaches, and any selection is, literally, selective, but here are *Network's* choices:**

In '**Free to learn: ungrading in sociology courses**', three US researchers described the effect of not grading their students at a large Midwestern university for their courses on 'class, race and gender', 'American poverty' and 'urban social problems'.

"Across all courses and semesters, we ... eliminated all grading throughout the semester while still maintaining the final grade, recognizing that many students rely on the grades to obtain a degree and its promise of greater job prospects," they write in the journal, *Teaching Sociology*.

"Final grades were determined by a final self-assessment in which students qualitatively evaluated their [own] performance across a variety of categories and assigned themselves a score for each category, which was then averaged. We retained the right

**Article continues >**

to adjust grades if students had not evaluated themselves fairly based on their coursework. Fewer than five students in each course received a lower final grade than their self-assigned grade.”

After completing the course, 85% of students found ungrading to be slightly less or far less stressful than traditionally graded courses.

One student said: “It was hard initially taking this new approach to learning and grading but overall it was so helpful in making me feel less stressed about this class and to really focus and trust myself on what I know and what I wanted to learn about.”

Another said: “Because of the freedom we had [in] this class, I was able to focus more on truly enjoying learning and found myself coming back to topics simply because I was curious.”

When asked about how much they felt that they learned in the ungraded course, 90% of surveyed students reported learning at least the same amount in the ungraded course compared to their other courses, and about 60% reported learning more in the ungraded course.

The authors, Alex Kempler, Dr Sam Mitchell and Dawson Vosburg write: “Not only did most students report lower levels of stress and anxiety compared with their traditionally graded classes, but students also point to other benefits, such as creative freedom, less fear of failure, and increased agency in their own learning. When released from the pressure and stress of grading, students were free to learn.”

In their article, **Professor Pilar Rojas-Gaviria, Dr Chloe Preece and Dr Emma Surman** relate how they sought to unsettle her students by having them work with the Birmingham Royal Ballet.

“We sought to nurture students’ sociological and empathic imaginations and prompt critical reflection on positionality, privilege and the social norms embedded within ballet, norms that mirror wider

marketplace inequalities,” they write in their *Sociology* article.

“Ballet, an art form synonymous with aesthetic perfection, celebrates agile bodies yet remains financially, culturally and physically exclusionary for many.

“This experiential unsettlement activates the sociological imagination by revealing the structural forces that shape consumption practices, and [also activates] the empathic imagination, by fostering emotional and ethical engagement with the unequal social worlds those practices reflect and reproduce. For this unsettling to occur, we suggest that students need to feel out of place.”

The three write that they ran a module at an unnamed institution over 11 weeks in 2022-23 involving 265 students, 90% of whom were international.

Activities included “guest lectures from the [Birmingham Royal] Ballet’s management team, close observation of two professional performances at the Ballet, voice coaching and a dance workshop led by the Ballet’s dancers, where students acted as both performers and choreographers.

“In actively co-choreographing the dance workshop, students could further consider their own identity as part of the group, analysing and deconstructing power relations in a visceral, physical way.

“To further support empathic understanding, the module incorporated a variety of embodied and reflective creative practices including inspiration walks, collage, poetry, journaling, meditations, and design thinking. This diversity of approaches allowed the students to explore theory through different modalities, providing them with new perspectives to question their realities.

“While workshop attendance was compulsory dancing was not, yet all

**Article continues >**



**SAM MITCHELL**



**PILAR ROJAS GAVIRIA**

students chose to participate, with some even joining additional workshops.

“Working in teams, students presented their recommendations to BRB, applying sociological insights to enrich their understanding of ballet’s audience and, crucially, those individuals from the wider community who do not attend.”

## “ISN’T IT THE POINT OF ART TO MAKE PEOPLE MORE BENEVOLENT AND APPRECIATIVE OF OTHERS AND THEIR EXPERIENCES?”

One student said: “As soon as the music started and the dancers took the stage, I was completely taken aback. Despite the fact that I had little understanding of the ballet techniques, storylines, or songs played by the orchestra, I was astonished because of the performance. The day I watched ballet for the first time has personally taught me a deep appreciation for all types of artistic expression. Isn’t it the point of art to make people more benevolent and appreciative of others and their experiences?”

Another said: “The way I typically learn was redefined in this course, it allowed us to experience things we had never even considered or dared to, rather than just using slides and textbooks to deliver presentations...To fully comprehend something, one must put oneself in the shoes of the subject in order to interact with them. As I worked on the assignments for this course, I felt that my creativity had increased and that I had many imaginative ideas that I had never considered.”

The authors write that “a dancing pedagogy enables students to question the world around them ... experiences of discomfort and perceived exclusion can cultivate

empathic imagination, allowing students to reorient from a position of disempowerment toward meaningful learning through self.”

In her article, **Dr Giulia Carabelli**, of Queen Mary University of London, describes her third-year undergraduate module, ‘More than human politics’, about the environmental, social and political significance of plants.

This is an elective module that contributes to the sociological components of the Politics and Sociology degree programme and has one weekly lecture and one seminar class for 12 weeks for 50 students.

Dr Carabelli writes in *Sociology*, “Instead of gardening (which is prevented by the winter season when this module takes place), we invite students to grow plants from seeds at home. In the first week, I provide students with two types of seeds of edible and non-edible plants. The choice of plants is determined by what might grow better in our climate and so far, we opted for beans, herbs, coleus and sunflowers based on my co-convenor’s gardening experience. I also give them soil and pots with basic instructions on how to sow seeds indoors.”

Students are asked to write a reflexive diary where they discuss what they learnt from plants while growing them from seeds. The second assignment is a 2,500-word essay written with attention to the environment as it shapes human selves and life journeys.

“This year, in the first seminar, students kept asking what plants had to do with politics. They could not see the point, though they enrolled in this class with curiosity. My answer – to give plants a chance – left them unsatisfied. I told them to be patient and to give me a chance too. The class is difficult because it challenges existing understandings of the world. It asks, in many ways, to undo the learning done at university and embrace a different mode of looking at how the world is made, and politics happen.

**Article continues >**



**GIULIA CARABELLI**

# “THE EMOTIONAL BONDS CREATED WITH PLANTS ARE CAPABLE OF ORIENTING STUDENTS TO REFLECT ON THEIR POSITIONALITY IN THE WORLD”

“From the essays and feedback, it is clear that the emotional bonds created with plants are capable of orienting students to reflect on their positionality in the world, their societal roles and the steps that need to be taken to change what exists.

“For example, this year students reported spending morning time with their seeds, checking on them for water at scheduled intervals, introducing their pots to friends visiting their accommodation and talking about this project with people outside the classroom.”

One student wrote about dates in Islamic teachings, investigating their properties from the Koran and Hadiths and then comparing religious knowledge with scientific discovery. Another wrote about chrysanthemums and the memories of bitter teas he was made to drink as a child in China.

One said: “This module has been one of the best I’ve experienced in terms of active participation. Getting us a plant was so fun and engaging. Academically, this also may have been one the most intellectually challenging because it is so completely out of perspective and the challenge has helped me truly engage.”

In their *Sociology* article, **Professor Marina Adler and Dr Tino Schlinzig** write that, “One of the key challenges faced by sociology programs is how to prepare students to apply their academic knowledge in practice and to translate their sociological imagination into meaningful work after graduation.

“Having graduate students leave the safe and predictable world of in-class instruction in order to get involved in the messy process of primary data collection, often in very unfamiliar spaces, involves a certain amount of apprehension but will ultimately give them invaluable opportunities for personal and academic growth.”

They worked with graduate students in two marginalised communities in the southernmost point of Baltimore City – Brooklyn and Curtis Bay. Baltimore has a long history of economic and ethnic inequality, intensified by racially segregating neighbourhood practices in the 1930s leading to high rates of unemployment and child poverty, shootings, low income and poor infrastructure.

Students wearing university logos and colours, and holding clipboards, carried out interviews, focus groups and spatial analysis to examine community wellbeing with special attention to access to green spaces, healthy food, housing and the environment.

“When doing their projects in the field, they use a group app to stay in touch, have a known meeting/safe space, always walk at least in pairs, leaving the community before dark,” the authors write.

“The concern that students may feel unsafe in an unfamiliar community with a challenging environment was countered by repeated group visits in the community and friendly encounters with residents.

“Ethical behaviour – respect, friendliness and cultural humility – guide all encounters with residents, and students are taught how to deflect aggressive or inappropriate behaviours. In order to protect residents’ identities, photos and film do not contain recognizable faces unless permission is given.”

The research was instructive. “Students were shocked to learn about the seniors’ fear of leaving the house, difficulty negotiating unsafe sidewalks, health and food access, and transportation issues.

“The students saw the dearth of educational opportunities in the community and organized a field trip for

**Article continues >**



**TINO SCHLINZIG**

the community youth to the university. This experience was transformational as the students became ‘temporary big brothers/sisters’ for the teens.

“They also thought learning new skills, such as mapping and interviewing ‘real people’, was exciting.

“Although the students did very good work, some struggled with key skills and/or lacked the time on weekends and after class to complete the required field time hours.

The fieldwork component demands a significantly higher time commitment for students compared with conventional graduate courses. Student evaluations highlighted the dual nature of the experience: intellectually demanding yet deeply rewarding.”

In ‘Digital ethnography as high-impact practices for teaching methods in introductory sociology’, **Dr Nicholas Baxter**, of Indiana University, writes about his digital ethnography project which requires students to work in groups of four to six to conduct a semester-long digital ethnography of an online social group.

Student topics have included occupations (such as beekeepers), local fan groups (such as Marvel fans),

support groups (adults with autism, parents of children with disabilities), social movement groups (a local Black Lives Matter group, a regional animal rights group), and subculture groups (goths, flat-earthers).

The students’ final grade is based on a combination of research reports, a presentation, and an appraisal of their ability to make connections between research questions, course concepts and literature.

Ninety-two per cent of all students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, ‘The project helped me better understand sociology as a scientific discipline’.

Also, 94% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement, ‘The project helped me to better understand the research process’, and 91% were also able to connect the project to a better understanding of their target group’s social behaviour. Further, 72% were able to connect the project to at least one sociology concept from the course.

However, writes Dr Baxter, “the most significant [difficulty] with the group dynamics [was that] some students said they had ‘free riders’ who did little to no work but received a similar grade.” ■



**NICHOLAS BAXTER**

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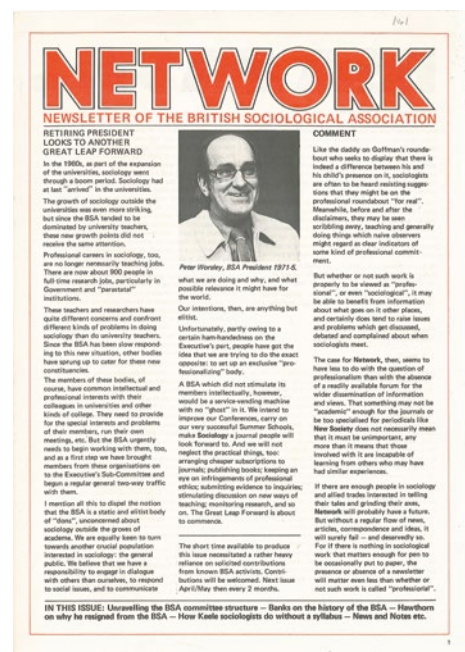
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# THE BSA ANNUAL CONFERENCE: MARXISTS, ALTHUSSERIAN, KOCIANS AND EAGLENIANS DRINK THE BARS DRY OVER 75 YEARS (WITHOUT FIGHTING)

**N**ext month the BSA's annual conference takes place in Manchester. The event is entitled '75 Years of Sociology' and celebrates British sociology, and the work of the association to promote it, since the BSA's founding in 1951. It is notable for attracting 1,982 abstracts, the highest number in the BSA's history.

The next issue of *Network* will cover the conference in full but this is a good moment to take an unserious look at the history of these events, which are the largest annual sociological gatherings in the UK and, as the BSA says, are "an intellectual commons where scholars from every corner of the discipline meet - not only to speak, but to listen".



First Network, 1975

This year's event isn't the 75th held because conferences were not staged annually in the early years of the BSA. The first events were run in London in 1953, 1955 and 1957, and then one in Brighton in 1962. The next event, in 1964 in Nottingham, marked the start of conferences being held regularly each year, a schedule adhered to faithfully until 2020, when the conference was cancelled because of Covid. This year's event is, then, the 66th.

Inevitably, the conferences then were smaller affairs than today as the BSA itself had fewer members than today's total of 2,380 - 400 in 1952, for instance. The 1957 conference in London drew in 243 attendees, and the 1964 Nottingham conference only 112, the lowest attendance. By the 1970s the numbers had risen to between around 200 and 500. By the BSA's 60th birthday, in 2011, the conference had grown to 1,000 attendees and 900 presentations.

The 1974 conference, in Aberdeen, was the first outside England, and Wales had to wait until 1981, with an event in Aberystwyth.

Conferences in the early years had a different ethos: delegates came to hear talks by prominent researchers rather than to present their own research. In the 1950s, only about a dozen non-plenary talks were given, so that only around 6% of the attendees spoke. The 1990s were more participative, with around 180 non-plenary papers given, so that about half of attendees spoke. The figures for the 2026 conference

are (at the time of going to press) 783 bookings and 740 presentations - today it is hard for researchers to get funding to attend unless they are presenting.

The themes of the early conferences reflected emerging and pressing concerns. In 1964, at the height of union power, it was the development of industrial societies; by 1969 it was race and racialism and in 1974, sexual divisions and society.

The 1974 event is internationally recognised as being important for the history of sociology, primarily as it was one of the first occasions when sexual divisions were discussed collectively from a sociological perspective. The organisers made a strong effort to involve more women than was usual for BSA conferences until that time: around half of delegates were women, and they gave most of the papers. The event led to the founding of the Women's Caucus in the BSA.

Some early events had crèches, as Dalail Bujra relates in the Autumn 1983 issue of *Network*. "I have been asked to compare the crèche at Cardiff [in 1983] with other crèches I have been to. The crèche was held in a little flat near to where we were staying. There were nine children and I knew two of them already. They were all boys except for one day when one girl came. It was a bit noisy but I did not mind. There were lots of things to do and they were nice. We made masks and pom pom balls and paper aeroplanes and ships. We went to a visit a computer

*Article continues >*

unit at the university which was interesting. I think the crèche was one of the best I have been to.” Dalail was nine.

Martin Parker’s conference experience was less nice and more noisy. In the May 1992 issue of *Network* he relates how he was accidentally locked in the toilet during the event at Kent, needing hours of effort by the porters to free him. At his next conference he returned late from the pub and found himself locked out of his room – more prolonged work by porters to find the keys to let him in. “Should I be paranoid? Will I go to any more conferences? If you see someone with a sledge hammer tucked in his file at your next conference you may assume the answer to both questions is yes,” he wrote.

Then, as now, not all presentations went well. G. E. C. Paton, of Aston University, wrote about the 1977 event at Sheffield: “It was particularly disconcerting to witness the first speaker’s inability to talk ‘to his paper’ – an apparently dying art not helped by the traditional besetting sin of BSA conferences of writing too much for and thinking too little about their presentation.

Fortunately, at the subsequent sessions attended one was generally impressed by the lucidity and concision of speakers. The overall impression of an impressive BSA conference was that it confirmed the first law of sociological conferences, viz. that the quality of sessional proceedings is inversely proportional to the number of Professors present.”

It wasn’t just that conferences were different in those early days: sociology was too, divided as it was into factions which were as impressive-sounding as they were obscure. One delegate to the 1978 conference at Sussex wrote: “Before I got to the conference, I’d thought it would be like Hobbes’ nightmare of the ‘War of All Against All’. Full-scale ideological and personal conflict in all directions. Classical Marxists versus Althusserians. ‘Screen-ites’ versus ‘Cahiers’ devotees. Kocians versus Eagletonians. Radical feminists versus Socialist Feminists. Proletarian culture heroes versus feminists. To say nothing of the more conventionally sociological

Having made what appeared to be the same choice for starters on Wednesday as most others, especially post-graduate students anxious to learn at second-hand what Althusser and Gramsci had to say on Ideology in Capitalist Society, it was particularly disconcerting to witness the first speaker’s inability to talk “to his paper” – an apparently dying art not helped by the traditional besetting sin of BSA Conferences of writing too much for and thinking too little about their presentation. Fortunately, at the subse-

## EMPIRICAL IMPACT

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Well, there was enough conflict to keep the Hobbesian image with me through the four days, but it was also surprisingly civilised and positive: I went home feeling optimistic about the variety, originality and vitality of much of the work now emerging on “culture”. Particularly, empirical

**They must be heavy drinkers, this lot. We were out of everything last night, and that’s not happened before, we’ve never been drunk completely dry, not even by the Open University. (Bar Staff)**

conflicts. Well, there was enough conflict to keep the Hobbesian image with me through the four days, but it was also surprisingly civilised and positive: I went home feeling optimistic about the variety, originality and vitality of much of the work now emerging on ‘culture.’”

It was remarkable that the conference stayed civilised, given the amount of alcohol drunk. Overheard at the event was a member of the bar staff, who said: “They must be heavy drinkers, this lot. We were out of everything last night, and that’s not happened before, we’ve never been drunk completely dry, not even by the Open University.”

Perhaps a more fundamental divide within sociology than Kocians and Eagletonians was that of gender. One writer described the 1982 event on

Gender and Society at Manchester: “Where were the professoriat, the senior lecturers, the men anxious to explore masculinity and male gender roles, to critically evaluate their use or non-use of the concept of gender in their own sociological work? There were some, but they were few, and few stayed for long.

**“THE CONFERENCE WAS OVERWHELMINGLY A CONFERENCE ABOUT WOMEN, BY WOMEN, FOR WOMEN”**

Article continues >

“One senior member of the profession, who admitted to being there ‘only for the business meetings’, confessed to inhibition in contributing to the discussion at a session he had attended, as one of the few men present: ‘Now I know what women must feel like when it’s all men’. There were men giving papers and some of these represented interesting challenges to prevailing theory, evidence that some men are taking gender seriously, but the conference was overwhelmingly a conference about women, by women, for women.”

By 1990 the conference was attracting positive press interest. Nick Fox related in *Network* that “The reorganised press office of the BSA had a busy time at the Surrey conference proving the value of a more organised relationship between the Association and the Press. Interviews and information were supplied to LBC, IRN, Radio City, Radio Nottingham, ‘Today’, ‘PM’, The Guardian, the Independent, the Daily Mail, THES and others.”

That high profile carried over to some later events. In 2013, in his introduction to Polly Toynbee’s plenary at the London conference, Laurie Taylor said: “I’ve never heard so many mentions of sociologists in my life as there have been recently. Every time I seem to turn on the news, there are sociologists speaking sociology.

The Six O’Clock News – I just turned it on the other night and there were suddenly very interested-looking journalists talking about the importance of cultural capital.”

Other measures of conference success came into play more recently. A survey of delegates to the 2014 annual conference held at the University of Leeds (793 attending, from more than 40 countries) found that 98 per cent of those giving feedback said they were either satisfied or very satisfied. Around 7,000 tweets were recorded using the conference hashtag, #britsoc14.

## “THERE’S AN ATMOSPHERE OF COLLEGIALLY WHICH IS REALLY IMPORTANT AND WHICH YOU DON’T ALWAYS GET AT CONFERENCES”

The 2018 event in Newcastle also proved praiseworthy. It had “lots of energy, lots of ideas and lots of things to take away and try to

spend the summer months working on – it’s a kind of intellectual refresh,” according to Professor Linda McKie. For Professor Janice McLaughlin, “there’s an atmosphere of collegiality which is really important and which you don’t always get at conferences as sometimes people are competitive – here, people listen and engage.”

Over time, new features were brought in to the events. The BSA annual conference in 2017, held at the University of Manchester, introduced a novelty of pecha kucha (presentations a few minutes long with slides up for only 20 seconds). A recent development has been the offer of free places to help BSA members who may find it difficult to obtain funding for attendance including the unwaged, ECRs, students and teachers (20 of these places are supported by the main conference sponsor, Sage).

By 2021, the BSA’s 70th anniversary, Covid had forced the conference online, but it still attracted an attendance of 795 people from 41 countries, giving 479 presentations. By 2023 the conference was back in the flesh, with an event at the University of Manchester, whose venue will welcome us again in April, for our record-breaking 67<sup>th</sup> event. See you all there... ■

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### Stats from:

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BSA own records.

# A CENTURY OF COMMITTING SOCIOLOGY: PRESERVING AND RENEWING TRADITION AT LIVERPOOL

**R**esearchers at the Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology at the University of Liverpool reflect on their 120<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

As people often say, 120 years is a long time in sociology. Certainly, a lot has happened at the University of Liverpool's Department of Sociology, Social Policy and Criminology (SSPC) since our origins in 1905. We are marking this anniversary of sorts with a year-long programme of events, including public lectures, a series of social science walking tours of Liverpool, and our new 'Talking Culture' conversation sessions housed at the city's famous Bluecoat arts gallery. Our hope is that these free, public-facing events will both capture the intellectually curious spirit of academic and community-based research and activism that has characterised the department since 1905, and be of interest to those inside and outside universities.

## **Foundations of social science in Liverpool**

Founded by pioneering figures Eleanor Rathbone and Elizabeth Macadam, the department's early character was shaped by interventionist principles. Born into a wealthy, merchant family, Rathbone was



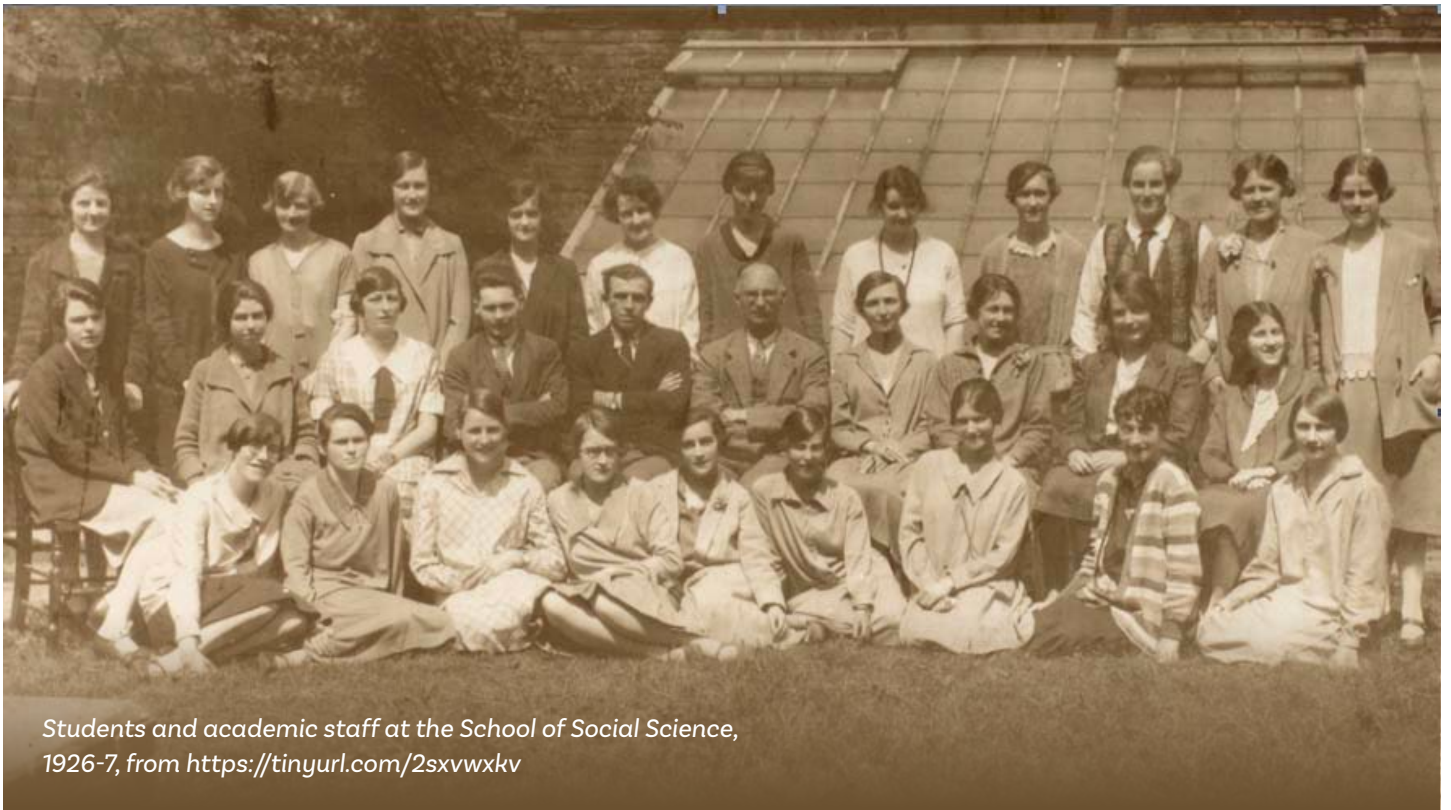
*Portrait of Eleanor Florence Rathbone, 1933, by Sir James Gunn (reproduced with permission from the National Portrait Gallery)*

a tireless advocate for women's rights in politics as well as academia. The first woman to be elected to Liverpool City Council (1909) and an MP representing Combined English Universities (1929-1946), Rathbone successfully led a campaign for the Family Allowances Act (1945) that provided child benefit directly to mothers, and was a vocal and staunch supporter of refugees' rights during world war two. On campus, Rathbone has a building, a lecture theatre, and an SSPC public lecture series named after her, as well as an endowed Chair (most recently occupied by Sandra Walklate, who followed previous occupants J.B. Mays and Robert Moore). Rathbone's

remarkable contributions are also commemorated through a garden in a public park in south Liverpool, halls of residence, built on the grounds of her family home, and even a Royal Mail stamp.

Rathbone's life-long collaborator, Macadam, was crucial in shaping the department's early years. A key figure in both the suffrage and the settlement movements, Macadam was warden of the Southwark settlement in London and - working with Rathbone - of Liverpool's Victoria settlement (founded in 1898). A

**Article continues >**



Students and academic staff at the School of Social Science, 1926-7, from <https://tinyurl.com/2sxvwxkv>

proto-social work intervention, this settlement is a crucial part of the story the department's foundation, characterised by social scientific analysis allied to a reformist zeal. The early 20th century saw the department and the settlement collaborating closely, sharing teaching and co-ordinated attempts to alleviate the gendered outcomes of poverty.

The initial name of the department – School for Social Science and Social Work Training – reflects this context, and perhaps an ambivalence about embracing 'sociology' per se. However, it did become a rendezvous point for early sociologists and other social scientists. For example, the Liverpool-native Charles Booth, although he never worked directly for the department, had several close connections. The Charles Booth Trust's substantial bequest to the university allowed for the establishment of a Chair (most recently occupied by Barry Goldson) and a lectureship in his name, while the Rockefeller Foundation-funded *The Survey of Merseyside* (1929–34) explicitly followed Booth's study of London. An early example of the type of empirical account that was

to define British sociology in decades to come, the survey featured both demographic statistics and narratives of working class people, addressing issues of poverty, housing and the spatial implications of the declining docks, the survey was published at a time that welfarist ideology was supplanting Poor Law ideology. Arguably it also included some early participatory methods, wherein – in a precursor to later mass observation studies – participants carried out some of the ethnographic data collection.

This era in the department's history was full of contradictions, however, and should not be celebrated uncritically. For instance, and in spite of the progressive radicalism of Rathbone and Macadam, the appointment of Sir Alexander Carr-Saunders to the Charles Booth Chair in 1923 – though intended to put the department squarely in emergent academic sociology – lent credence to his discredited eugenicist thinking upon which his books *Eugenicism* and *The Population Problem* rested. Carr-Saunders' first appointment as Head of Department was David Caradog Jones, a mathematician-turned-sociologist

who edited *The Survey of Merseyside*, and who – as per his presentations to the Eugenics Society – also considered eugenicism a plausible explanation for poverty, and a framework for intervention in such.

### The stabilisation of empirical sociology

The department's early-mid period was led by Tom Simey (Head of Department and Charles Booth Chair, 1939-69) and Margaret Simey (née Todd, a member of sociology's first degree-awarded class, 1928). The Simeys wrote a still-definitive intellectual biography of Booth and continued forging SSPC's links to the city. Although Margaret Simey never held a formal academic position at the department, she was an extremely influential scholar-activist in the mould of Eleanor Rathbone, authoring several books, working as a councillor in Granby, and speaking out against the police's institutional racism in the period around riots in the city in the early 1980s. She also coined a phrase that now adorns the Museum of Liverpool's wall: "The magic of Liverpool is that it isn't England."

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During this period in the department, a Liverpool University Press book series known as the Social Research Series (initial run, 1952-1973) was an important outlet for the empirical studies that came to characterise SSPC's research. The 20 or so books that were published in the first iteration of the series contained statistical analysis supplemented by ethnographic vignettes of Liverpool and its people. Edited by J.B. Mays, who was SSPC Head of Department at the time, the books addressed a wide range of topics that remain a focus in the department today: inequality, industrial sociology, studies of 'delinquency' and urban disorder (reflective of May's own interests), religious communities, migration, gender and education.

One of the many reasons why re-narration of departmental histories is subject to distortion is that some time periods, individuals and events are given undue prominence, while many others are overlooked. In the case for SSPC, paradoxically there is a great deal written about the early days of the department, but far less so about later periods. Here we continue this trend, saying less about the decades since the 1970s than we do about

those before (an oral history of this more recent time is currently under way). In what follows, we will identify just a few contemporary things.

### **Some histories of the present**

Of course, a great deal has changed, in sociology and the world, since 1905. The department is now home to circa 35 full-time equivalent staff, around 775 undergraduates and 40 PhD researchers. Yet, at SSPC, we remain committed to a vision of critical social science that seeks to be meaningfully widened to publicly beneficial ends.

## **“THE RESOURCES OF SOCIAL SCIENTIFIC SKILLS SHOULD BE SHARED AS WIDELY AS POSSIBLE”**

This approach shapes our taught programmes as well as research. SSPC's flagship Interchange initiative sees students collaborating, with academic supervision, with local voluntary and community organisations to address their 'real world' knowledge needs.

Interchange speaks to the profound sense – as our founders believed – that the resources of social scientific skills should be shared as widely as possible.

Since the 1950s the Department has also been a centre for studies of what were then called 'crime and deviance', and on this basis an undergraduate programme in Criminology became a core part of SSPC's degree offer in the mid-00s and is now the subject of a MA in Criminology and Criminal Justice. A MA Sociology course planned for September 2027 intake will further bolster our taught offer.

A relaunched Social Research Series, with Liverpool University Press, is now accepting proposals for monographs that reflect the geographically, politically and intellectually widened scope of social science. The Booth-inspired walking tradition continues in undergraduate provision, connecting students to the city, and creative methods across STS, visual studies, urban sociology, criminology and social policy studies are characteristic of an approach to innovative teaching that encourages students to, to coin a phrase, 'commit sociology', so preserving and renewing sociological tradition at the University of Liverpool. ■

# THE ISA DECLARATION: OVER-CLAIMING SOCIOLOGY'S CONTRIBUTION IS UNWISE

## MARTYN HAMMERSLEY OUTLINES HIS RESERVATIONS ABOUT A TIME FOR SOCIOLOGY

**A**s sociologists we frequently claim to be reflexive, my comment here is intended in that spirit. I welcomed the International Sociological Association's declaration about the importance of sociology (A Time for Sociology), which is supported by the BSA; indeed, I signed to endorse it – but not without misgivings. I agree that, especially in the current climate where there is frequent appeal to 'facts' that are simply made up, or seriously distorted by bias, there is a need for rigorously produced social science. And since the value of this is frequently neglected, or even denied, in the public sphere, it must be vigorously promoted. However, I have reservations about some other aspects of the Declaration.

There are three areas where I believe the assumptions underpinning the Declaration are open to question: its virtual silence about relations with other disciplines; its exaggerated presentation of the capacity of sociology to provide answers to societal problems; and its hitching of sociology as an academic discipline to a particular political position, albeit a broad one.

My initial thoughts when I looked at the ISA declaration were: Who is the intended audience? What is the statement's purpose? Is it designed to motivate and rally sociologists so as to promote the discipline? Or is it aimed at persuading outsiders of the importance of sociology, thereby gaining wider recognition for it? I can't speak for the intentions behind it, but I suspect that it is likely to be much more successful with the first than the second type of audience, for several reasons.

### “ARE WE, ONCE AGAIN, DREAMING THAT OURS IS THE QUEEN OF THE SCIENCES...?”

Among the wider audiences will be other social scientists. What will be their response to this declaration? It makes little reference to interdisciplinary complementarity, and will probably be read as designed to advance sociology against the competing missions of their own disciplines. But do we really believe that sociology is the only important social science? Are we, once again, dreaming that ours is the queen

of the sciences, in the spirit of the founder of the discipline, Auguste Comte? This appears to be implied by the Declaration's call for a “general sociology” “that resists the risks of hyper-specialization and fragmentation and addresses the urgent issues of our time”.

The Declaration also prompted a second set of questions: why do we expect that sociology can have the high level of impact implied in the Declaration, with its listing of major problems for whose solution the discipline is essential? What do we know about the way in which academic work connects with political and practical activities? Does this suggest that the hopes expressed in the Declaration can be realised? The answer to that last question, I would say, is 'no'. Academics rarely succeed in becoming 'legislators', to borrow Bauman's terminology, and when they do they are no longer academics. Furthermore, sociologists are by no means the only 'interpreters' of the world: even aside from representatives of other academic disciplines, there are many commentators out there in the public sphere, and most people have opinions and even some knowledge about many of the topics that sociologists research. This means that, at best, any impact of the discipline is likely to be highly mediated, which implies that it will be relatively weak by comparison with what appears to be claimed for it.

To some extent, the Declaration recognises this mediated role in denying, at one point, any claim to sociological 'superiority', but it

**Article continues >**

does not address the question of just how sociological knowledge is to be brought into dialogue with other kinds of knowledge, and with people's experiential understanding and opinions. How is the adjudication among potentially conflicting sources to be achieved? Just what kind of (albeit limited) intellectual authority are we claiming as sociologists? In its opening statement, the Declaration suggests that this rests on the discipline's status as a science, but sociologists today do not agree on whether it is a science or, if it is, what kind of science it is. Nor is there much agreement about what is and is not well-established sociological knowledge. This is a poor basis for trying to save the world.

## “TO POLITICISE THE DISCIPLINE BY TYING IT COLLECTIVELY TO A SPECIFIC POLITICAL ORIENTATION IS TO THREATEN ITS ACADEMIC STATUS”



MARTYN HAMMERSLEY

Finally, the Declaration ties sociology to a particular political position, a vaguely expressed one on the Left. This is not far from my own views, but it is not intrinsic to sociology: not all sociologists would agree with it. Indeed, historically, we can find sociologists right across the political spectrum, including old-fashioned liberals (Aron), nationalists (Weber), and even fascists (Hans Freyer). Moreover, to politicise the discipline by tying it collectively to a specific political orientation is

to threaten its academic status, and its capacity to produce the rigorous knowledge required. In addition, doing this invites, indeed justifies, external attacks on the discipline as being politically motivated and therefore as in breach of its the primary academic commitment to the production and dissemination of factual knowledge.

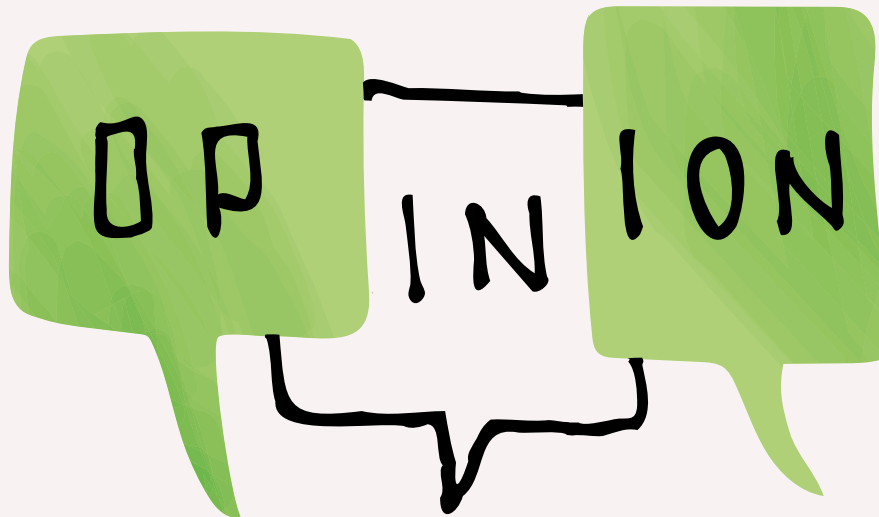
The authors of the Declaration suggest that sociology's political goal is to “defend the common good”, but how is the common good to be identified, and by whom – can sociologists do this? And what hope is there of widespread agreement about the type of transformation of society required to achieve it? Exactly whose side are we going to be on, and why? Indeed, will we not find ourselves on different ‘sides’ in the battles that take place, for example in much the same way that feminists have come to oppose one another over the transgender issue?

These comments may be read as overly pessimistic, as putting a dampener on the enthusiasm that is essential for the success, perhaps even for the survival, of the discipline. That is certainly not my aim. But overclaiming one's potential contribution is usually undesirable, and sometimes disastrous. Externally, it can lead to ridicule, and, where believed, it is likely to result in subsequent disappointment and recrimination. Internally, it tends to generate excessive optimism about what has been achieved and about what can be successfully attempted. Such overreach is likely to expend effort and resources on tasks that the discipline cannot tackle effectively, while leading to a neglect of those that it can. ■

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Professor Hammersley writes this issue's Desert Island Discourse – see page 41

# Opinion



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# Desert Island Discourse





## MARTYN HAMMERSLEY WRITES ABOUT THE BOOKS THAT HAVE INSPIRED HIM

**M**artyn Hammersley is Emeritus Professor of Educational and Social Research at the Open University. His early research was in the sociology of education, but he is probably best known for publications about social research methodology. These include *Ethnography* (co-authored with Paul Atkinson), *Methodology*, *Who Needs It?*, and *Questioning Qualitative Inquiry*. More recently, he has written about sociological and methodological concepts as well as producing a dictionary of terms relating to research methods. He has also produced critical assessments of the notion of research-based policymaking and practice, and of ethnomethodology.

**Your first book is Robert Merton's *Social Theory and Social Structure* – why did you choose this?**

Many books have shaped my thinking over the years, but I would have to start with Robert Merton's book. I was introduced to this by a teacher when I was doing A-levels. I didn't study sociology then – it wasn't an option in my school – but there was a Use of English course and the teacher of that recognised what I was interested in and borrowed this book from a colleague who had studied sociology at university. Incidentally, that English teacher had an enormous influence on me: she responded to an essay I had written advocating relativism, arguing the opposing case, to which I replied, and she then responded. This was probably my first experience of a sustained intellectual dialogue, something that I came to think ought to be central to academic work. Since I was the first person from my family to go to university (within living memory – a remote ancestor had apparently preceded me), and having spent five years in a secondary modern school,

this comprehensive school teacher provided me with essential preparation.

I can't say I read all of Merton's book at that time, but I looked at some of it. I was particularly struck by his model of the social production of deviance through anomie. I returned to thinking about this later when a colleague at the Open University, Peter Woods, used it to understand the adaptations of students to secondary schooling. In giving me a sense of what sociology is about, Merton's approach complemented my reading of Karl Mannheim's *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction* around the same time (see 'Encounters with Karl Mannheim' *Network*, 139, 2021). Already, though, one of my burning questions was starting to emerge: how can a field addressing diverse topics from discrepant perspectives be a single discipline?

**Why did you choose Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality* for your second book**

I went to LSE to study sociology and I was undoubtedly shaped by the courses and people there, but in my

[Article continues >](#)

second year I started to deviate into reading Howard Becker and other interactionists, especially Herbert Blumer (their work was not on any of the courses I took). But the most influential text for me at that time, also not included in my LSE curriculum, was Berger and Luckmann's *The Social Construction of Reality*. This gave me access to a quite different sociological perspective from those with which I had previously been familiar. I was fascinated by the concept of philosophical anthropology, which they introduced through the ideas of Max Scheler and Arnold Gehlen. That book also introduced me to the work of Alfred Schutz, which I went on to read avidly. Curiously, even though Weber was very definitely on the menu at LSE, it was through Schutz that I later became interested in Max Weber's methodological writings. Of course this was not the only (largely) extra-curricular reading that any self-respecting LSE student in the late 1960s would do, so I also sampled Althusser, Gramsci, and Marcuse (compared with this, Wright Mills seemed small beer). Indeed, from that direction I was told that phenomenology was right-wing ideology and that Schutz was a capitalist and Gehlen a fascist; though it's worth noting that *Being and Time* (in the original German!) was on the reading list that Robin Blackburn gave us, and Heidegger was also a fascist. From this experience, I discovered that one could learn even from those with whom one disagreed profoundly.

Berger and Luckmann's social constructionism was still central for me when I became a postgraduate student in the sociology department at the University of Manchester in the early 1970s. The dominant approaches there at the time, or so it seemed, were ethnomethodology and conversation analysis. I remember the excitement of finally getting hold of a copy of Garfinkel's *Studies in Ethnomethodology* and reading the then unpublished materials by Harvey Sacks. But while the work of ethnomethodologists influenced me, I

never gave up Berger and Luckmann's broader conception of sociology. Their work also provided me with a form of constructionism that avoided the relativistic and sceptical versions that later emerged, ones which I saw as threatening to undermine sociological work completely.

### **Your next book is Abraham Kaplan's *The Conduct of Inquiry*, what led you to that?**

I became interested in social research methodology initially because I had decided to carry out empirical research for my PhD: I did ethnographic work in two inner-city secondary schools, using interactionist and conversation analytic ideas to understand classroom interaction, as well as exploring the perspectives of teachers and students. I sought to document the teachers' exercise of social and cultural power and the responses of working class and ethnic minority students. This was at the time of 'the new sociology of education', and the subsequent rise of Marxist theories concerned with the role of schooling in the reproduction of capitalism. Indeed, when I left Manchester to get my first permanent post, at the Open University, I was immediately thrust into the 'Marxist bias' scandal of the mid-1970s. But, more important for my subsequent development was that I joined a team producing a research methods course at the OU and I started to think more deeply about the philosophical assumptions underpinning sociological research. That course brought me into contact with people whose approaches to social inquiry were very different from mine, notably quantitative researchers of various kinds, as well as some with whom I shared more in common (notably, Jeff Evans, who was then on secondment from Middlesex University).

Kaplan draws heavily on philosophical pragmatism, recommending a catholic attitude towards the selection of methods and a fallibilist conception of knowledge. This helped me in thinking about how different theoretical and methodological approaches were related, and his book led me later into reading quite a lot of literature in the pragmatist

tradition, especially that by and about Charles Sanders Peirce. This seemed to me to provide the resources for solving a lot of the methodological problems that were contested issues within social research, such as those relating to realism and constructionism, and how qualitative work ought to be assessed. Kaplan's book showed me that the problems with which I was concerned were far from new, and that one must consider *all* the various attempts to resolve them, rather than simply opting for what seems most appealing.

## **“ENGAGING WITH THOSE WE DISAGREE WITH HELPS TO REVEAL OUR OWN PREJUDICES AND BIASES”**

### **Why did you choose Bruun's *Science, Values and Politics in the Methodology of Max Weber* for your fourth book?**

I mentioned Max Weber earlier, and my next book could well have been Shils' translations of some of his methodological writings (or Bruun and Whimster's more recent translations), but instead I will nominate one of my main guides to his work: Bruun's *Science, Values and Politics in the Methodology of Max Weber*. Weber's own writings are fascinating, but they are not easy to understand. Bruun's book is a model of textual scholarship which manages to provide a clear and detailed account of Weber's complex methodological ideas without oversimplifying them or ignoring their problems. Weber's arguments have been the basis for much of my criticism of 'critical' and 'normative' versions of sociology. I do not believe that sociology should ever become the vehicle for one's personal resentments or political commitments, even though these may be important and useful stimulants for sociological work. The idea that sociology is intrinsically

**Article continues >**

political is a dangerous half-truth. Historically, one can find sociologists' political views ranging across the whole of the political spectrum. And, as Weber emphasised, that is all to the good, since engaging with those we disagree with helps to reveal our own prejudices and biases, and how these may have shaped our work.

**Your final book is Susan Haack's *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate*, why have you chosen that?**

I could have picked any of her other books, not least *Defending Science – Within Reason: Between Scientism and Cynicism*. Her writing is engaging, thoughtful and forthright in explaining and defending a distinctive, fallibilist view of science, and indeed of reason and knowledge more generally. It is a model I have tried to follow in thinking about methodological issues, thereby relying on a more subtle concept of realism than the naive one whose rejection is frequently used as grounds for adopting radical forms of constructionism, or standpoint theories of knowledge. Like me, Haack is a fan of the work of Peirce, using his phrase 'critical commonsensism' as the label for her position. She emphasises 'The will to learn', which necessarily implies a primary concern with discovering what is true, or at least what is false. She dismisses 'pseudo-inquiry', where the aim is simply to make a case for what is already believed (with *ad hominem* arguments often being deployed

against those who are not convinced). As a result, she is a sharp critic not just of some more recent claimants to the pragmatist tradition, such as Richard Rorty, but also of any sort of dogmatism or radical scepticism. I believe her work provides the basis for a strong defence of sociology as a social science, and that this is essential at the present time.

**Finally, what luxury would you like to take to the island?**

I'd hate to be on a desert island, I don't like gardening and would not survive for any great length of time. A laptop with a solar-powered battery, loaded with books and music and a dongle for communication with family and friends, would keep me happy while I waited for whatever fate had in store. ■

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**Professor Hammersley's books are:**

Robert Merton *Social Theory and Social Structure*, (1957, second, enlarged edition, 1968), Free Press.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (1967), Anchor.

Abraham Kaplan *The Conduct of Inquiry* (1964), Chandler/Harper and Row.

Hans Bruun *Science, Values and Politics in Max Weber's Methodology* (1972, second edition, Routledge 2007), Munksgaard

Susan Haack *Manifesto of a Passionate Moderate* (1998), University of Chicago Press.



# ‘GOVERNMENTS ARE PULLING THE CHAIR OUT FROM UNDER SOCIOLOGISTS, REMOVING THEM FROM THE TABLE ENTIRELY’

**DR VALARIE FINDLAY, AN OTTAWA-BASED EXPERT ON IDEOLOGICAL VIOLENCE AND SOCIAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE, WRITES ABOUT THE CHALLENGES THE DISCIPLINE FACES FROM GOVERNMENTS**

“**What has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.**” – Ecclesiastes 1:9

While historians might slow-clap that verse, the idea that the past is vital to unravelling our societal conflicts is delectable for some sociologists and loaded with futility for others. Whether we are stuck in endless loops interrupted by generational memory is debatable, but our discipline is certainly revisiting unresolved pains from decades ago.

As examined in the previous issue of *Network*, a clear-eyed, objective analysis of human society and social behaviours is not always welcome, particularly where political ideologies stand to benefit from the turmoil. To the delight of some ruling parties, the social disarray stemming from rapidly formed societal norms in an increasingly grievance-based society is accelerating polarization and societal decline. In these difficult times, it is essential that we reflect on the origins of sociology and its enduring popularity.

Sociology, in some form or another, has been contextualising problems arising from social interactions within groups and larger collectives since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. During the Enlightenment, a significant turning point in social history, sociology stood at the precipice of social chaos and emerged as the secular, scientific alternative to theological explanations of social order.

Intellectualising the tension between social order, structure and rapid change, sociology was central to this massive transition, which elevated the exploration of human rights, individualism, the separation of church and state, and constitutional government, grounded in reason, rationality and empirical observation.

By the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the rise of large sociology departments in UK universities and the proliferation of European traditions, salon concepts, and open debate indicated sociology’s acceptance as a science that influenced political and social policy. In recent

decades, specifically from the 1960s through 2023, university enrolment and graduate data showed a steady overall increase, signalling a renewed interest in sociology, likely in response to the counterculture movement and its many social ideologies<sup>1</sup>.

Despite administrative and methodological challenges and criticism of qualitative methods that provided insights that quantitative research could not, this long-term trend materialized.

In 1970, American sociologist Alvin Gouldner published *The Coming Crisis of Western Sociology*, which described anticipated political, methodological, and theoretical attacks on sociology and the threat posed by structural functionalism and establishment sociology<sup>2</sup>. Gouldner posited that sociologists would increasingly be used as instruments of management and social control, falling prey to institutional

**Article continues >**

mandates and to instantaneous solutions from other disciplines (and now, emerging technologies).

To some extent, Gouldner's predictions were tempered by the rise of reflexive, critical, and radical sociologists (ibid). But what Gouldner did not envision was future governments pulling the chair out from under sociologists, despite decades of valuable contributions, removing them from the table entirely. Rigour and defensible findings would not be enough.

Since sociology does not rely on universal laws but rather on trends and patterns in constant social change, sociologists produce substantial amounts of information. In a (little-known) 1975 Norbert Elias Foundation video, 'Lessons in sociology', Norbert Elias, the founder of process sociology, underscored this. According to Elias, there was no shortage of sociological data. The real struggle was in producing solid, empirical knowledge due to various internal and external reasons<sup>3</sup>.

Elias also argued that in order to best understand our largely undiscovered human world, the main tasks of sociologists were to "steer the sociological ship between the 'Scylla' of reification and determinism on the one hand, and the 'Charybdis' of individualistic reductionism and voluntarism on the other". To strike that balance, Elias urged social researchers to employ a combination of theory-based reasoning and empirical observation without allowing either to dominate<sup>4</sup>.

## **“THE EXTREME IDEOLOGIES THAT CONFRONT SOCIOLOGY LOATHE PROGRESS AND AN INFORMED, FREE-THINKING PUBLIC MIND”**

Keeping that in mind, the extreme ideologies that confront sociology loathe progress and an informed,

free-thinking public mind, as they rely on contradictions, inconsistencies and distortions. The longer logic can be held at bay, the more effectively extreme ideas, misinformation, and social stereotypes can prop up an inequitable belief system, social order or yearning for the past.

The 'frontlash' and 'backlash' from conservative, right-wing and neo-liberal perspectives are verily twisted up in political and media contestation and scapegoating. Therefore, sociological research on inequalities in education and housing, structural racism, Islamophobia, and immigration face hostile attacks if they do not conform to a particular narrative or fail to serve existing power structures or attempt to deconstruct or refute polarizing narratives.

What is worrisome is that these narratives have influenced legislation. A highly politicised topic in the UK, terrorism research has faced significant challenges due to political pressures that interfere with ethics, objectivity and the fundamental effectiveness of studies. The UK government's Prevent counter-terrorism strategy has been central to this, given its impact on academic freedom, restrictions on data access, and the perception of state-approved narratives.

Prevent is a multi-agency strategy within the 'Contest' framework, emboldened by the Prevent Duty introduced in the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015, designed to prevent involvement, recruitment and support for extremist movements, focusing on early intervention, support for vulnerable individuals, rehabilitation and the dismantling of ideological causes<sup>5</sup>.

Criticised for prioritising certain ideologies over others – and pointing back to Prevent's post-9/11 development – the Prevent Duty requires that universities "have due regard to the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism". Universities must police course content, restrict speech and guest

**Article continues >**



VALARIE FINDLAY

speakers, and this has developed into a culture of academic self-censorship, particularly in Palestine, Islamism or critical terrorism studies in the sociological domain<sup>6</sup>.

As in the US and Canada, UK laws and Countering and Preventing Violent Extremism programmes have been criticised for being vague, relying on dubious criteria and low base-rate data, and jeopardizing fundamental human rights. The pressure to interdict non-violent or intellectual extremism within the Prevent agenda limits academic freedom and the ability to explore the root causes of extremism, leading to less robust and scientific understandings of ideological terrorism<sup>7,8,9</sup>.

Further, this outdated framing of extremism and terrorism ignores recent manifestations of ideological violence associated with youth and

the common phenomenon of multiple ideological themes<sup>10</sup>.

The 'establishment sociology' that Gouldner opposed has not been slain; it has morphed into a more ominous institutional enemy. However, even in the face of academic erasure, many sociologists continue to peel back the social, political, structural and cultural layers of pressing issues. While the argument for more connected, resistant, grassroots – maybe outlaw – sociology remains, so does the concerted rejection of the marriage of sociological analysis to partisan politics.

Lastly, it is worth ruminating on UK sociologist Michael Burawoy's notion that those who gravitate toward sociology seek its moral purpose and altruistic explorations of human interactions for the benefit of society, harkening back to its classical origins<sup>11</sup>. ■

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# POSTCARD FROM OSLO



## BSA PRESIDENT, LES BACK, SHARES HIS EXPERIENCE OF THE NORSK SOSIOLOGFORENING WINTER SEMINAR

**I**t's late Sunday afternoon as I sit down to write this postcard from Oslo airport. I have been in Norway to attend the Norsk Sosiologforening Winter Seminar. I have been coming to Norway for a long time and have many colleagues here, like Mette Andersson who is a frequent visitor to the BSA. This is the equivalent of our BSA Conference, and I am here representing our association, giving a keynote lecture, and participating in discussion panels. The event is held at the Storefjell Hotel, 1001 feet above sea level in the mountains of central Norway, and it's been bone-breakingly cold, with temperatures as low as -20 degrees one night.

Pål Csaszni Halvorsen, the leader of the association, explains: "The Winter Seminar, as we call our national conference, has been run for around 50 years, and has always been in the mountains, making it very different from other conferences. It is the most important thing we do as an association, and we gather around 170

sociologists annually at different career stages for both an extensive program, working sessions and a lot of fun: discussions, skiing and dancing!"

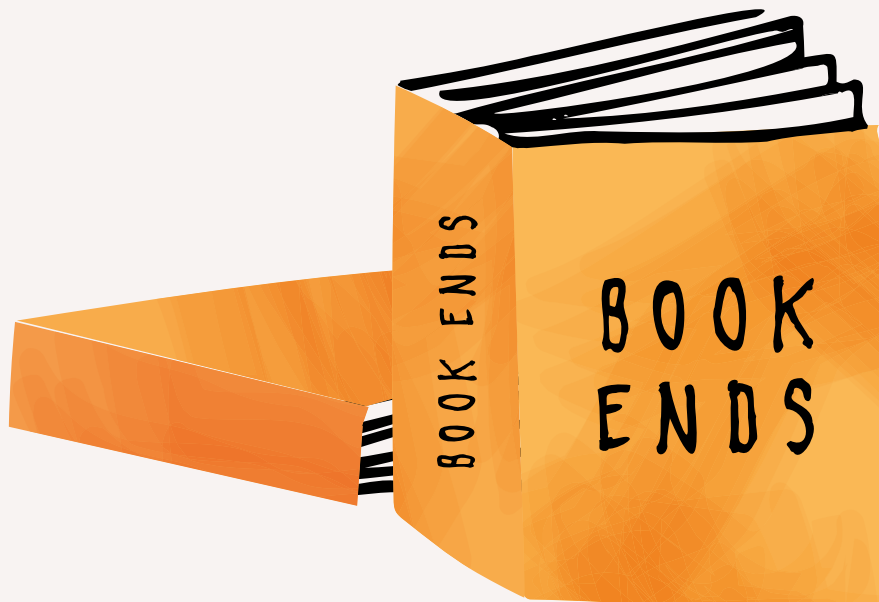
It's been very inspiring, and the fact that it is held in this old hotel, a bit like a labyrinth with stuffed bears and taxidermy birds of prey decorating the corridors. The old parts of the building have been extended with state-of-the-art conference facilities. Pål said that he'd enjoyed my testing the bass on the lecture hall sound system in my keynote. It wasn't found wanting. Pål said: "We are able to combine these activities across generations, making it an event many come back to. We always invite international guests as well, and it is bilingual - while we as an association of course have a special attention connected to Norway's two written languages." Sociology is taught at nine universities in Norway, and the winter Seminar brings sociologists together with studying and teaching at all of these, as well as many sociologists working at research institutes and in

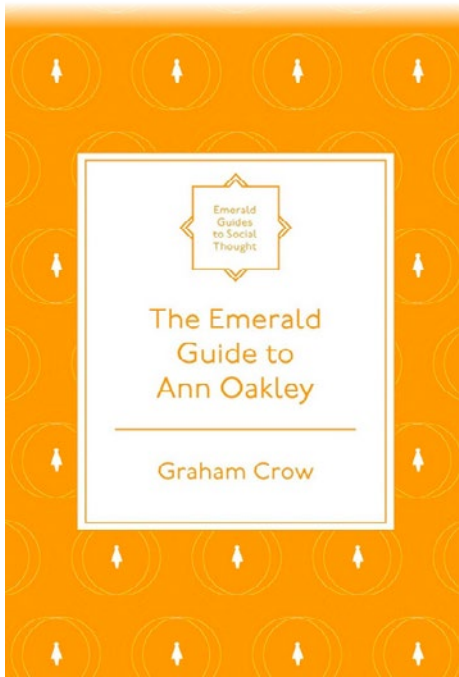
both the public and private sectors. Norwegian sociologists are very attuned to British sociology, and I am not sure we have always reciprocated that interest; the originality and quality of the papers presented were high. I've learned a lot about Norwegian farmers, white Muslims and Norwegian anti-racists over the past few days.

The banquet last night was wonderful - speeches, prizes and video messages projected onto screens like a rock concert that looked like TikTok posts. The feast was followed by late-night carousing and group singing of Norwegian songs in the bar. The association has a tradition of sending a 'telegram' to someone in public life who has a degree in sociology. They are, in turn, asked to send a message to the Winter Seminar, which is read out to the attendees of the Winter Seminar. I think I might just borrow that idea. Let me know if you have any ideas. Okay, they have announced my flight... better go more later.

# Bookends

Reviews of Recent  
Books in Social  
Science and Sociology





# THE EMERALD GUIDE TO ANN OAKLEY

**GRAHAM CROW**

Emerald Publishing, 2024

216 pages

Paperback: £16.99, ebook £16.14

ISBN: 978-1800715646 pbk

**T**his book provides a rich, insightful study of Ann Oakley's extensive contributions to feminist sociology. It comprises eight chapters, each balancing deep respect for Oakley's work with critical insight, using both chronological and biographical perspectives to map her intellectual journey. The book highlights Oakley's engagement with themes such as gender, power, knowledge production and ethical inquiry.

The volume positions Oakley's career at the intersection of personal experience and scientific inquiry, reflecting her unique ability to merge empathy with empiricism. Her work shows how scholarly investigation can be methodologically rigorous while remaining socially relevant. Oakley's influence on the development of feminist sociology is highlighted by foundational texts such as *Sex, Gender and Society* (1972) and *The Sociology of Housework* (1974), works that challenged traditional notions of gender roles and domestic labour.

Crow further elucidates Oakley's leadership roles in research institutions: she established the Social Science Research Unit and the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI-Centre). These initiatives have marked Oakley's sustained commitment to linking research with policy and practice, a means through which feminist inquiry might inform tangible real-world outcomes. The support she has given to evidence-based methodologies, such as mixed-methods approaches and randomised controlled trials, reveals her methodological flexibility and intellectual openness.

A major strength of the book is its attention to Oakley's work on overlooked female reformers, as well as her bridging of sociology and literature. This interdisciplinary sensibility, combined with her ethical reflexivity, showcases the breadth of

Oakley's sociological imagination. Crow captures how Oakley's feminist lens has influenced not just research topics, but also the practice and politics of knowledge production.

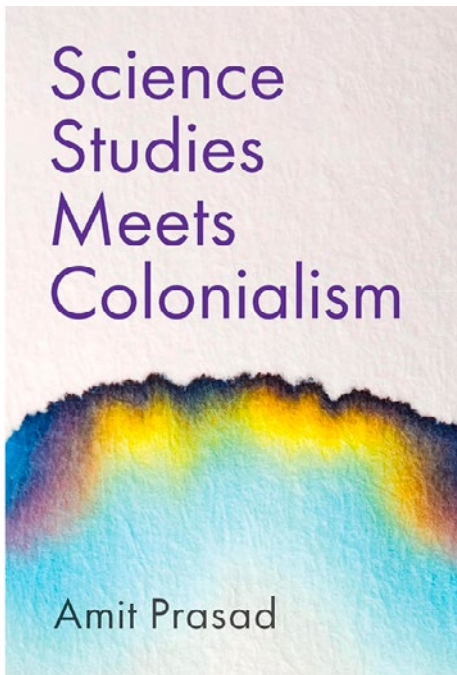
The book also contextualises Oakley's scholarship within broader intellectual shifts such as the 'paradigm wars' of the 1970s and the rise of evidence-based policy in the 1990s, tracing how her work both shaped and responded to changing academic landscapes. Importantly, Crow recognises Oakley's role in recovering the intellectual legacies of women neglected by mainstream historiography, and her sustained critique of gender bias in science.

Empathetic, clear and accessible language with thoughtful analysis is used throughout the chapters. The author succeeds in making Oakley's complex contributions intelligible to both academic and general readers. The book bravely and directly confronts the tensions in Oakley's career, such as debates around the legitimacy of quantitative methods in feminist research, and treats them as productive points of engagement. It offers valuable insight into how Oakley's personal experiences informed her professional commitments, without reducing her scholarship to biography alone.

Ultimately, this work stands as a fitting tribute to a pioneer of feminist sociology. It not only demonstrates the evolution of Oakley's thought but also highlights the ongoing relevance of her ideas in contemporary debates about gender, evidence and research ethics. For students, researchers and policy-makers interested in feminist theory and the sociology of knowledge, Crow's book offers an engaging and informative portrait of one of the field's most influential voices.

**SHWETA TRIPATHI, DOCTORAL CANDIDATE**

Banaras Hindu University, India



# SCIENCE STUDIES MEETS COLONIALISM

**AMIT PRASAD**

Polity Press, 2022

200 pages

£50 hbk, £17.99 pbk; £16.99: e-book

ISBN: 978-1509544417 hbk

**A**mit Prasad's *Science Studies Meets Colonialism* is a relatively short book, but it raises big questions. His main claim is that colonialism has not really ended; it has simply changed its form. The flags have changed and empires have formally gone, but many old ways of thinking still shape how we talk about science, expertise and the non-West. The book comes from within science and technology studies, yet it speaks more broadly to sociologists interested in empire, knowledge and today's anxieties about 'post-truth'.

Prasad begins with two recent examples: the Covid-19 pandemic and the technology rivalry between the United States and China. He does not focus on checking whether particular claims are true or false. Instead, he asks why debates about 'science versus anti-science' so often repeat older patterns. In these patterns, the West appears as rational, law-bound and liberal, while China and the non-West appear as secretive, dangerous or somehow 'behind' in time. When he analyses US congressional hearings on China, or Western discussions of China's century of humiliation, he shows how ideas formed in the colonial era continue to shape apparently technical or security-related arguments.

The central chapters move to the history of how we write about science. Prasad compares Joseph Needham's famous celebration of Chinese science with Herbert Butterfield's classic story of a uniquely European 'scientific revolution'. At first glance, these accounts point in different directions: one highlights China's achievements, the other insists on Europe's uniqueness. For Prasad, however, both still keep Europe and the West at the centre. Modern science still looks like something whose final standard and direction are Western. The rest of the world appears as latecomers, as if waiting to catch up, or as sidestreams feeding a main European river. This is one of the strongest sections of the book, especially for readers who are used to treating Needham simply as a cure for Eurocentrism.

In the last main chapter, Prasad turns to STS itself. He revisits well-known studies such as work on Zimbabwe's bush pump, and historical accounts of Portuguese voyages. He also discusses major postcolonial STS scholars such as Sandra Harding and Warwick Anderson. His point is not to label these thinkers as colonial.

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Rather, he suggests that even critical and post-colonial STS sometimes ends up fixing the non-West as a stable object, or treating colonialism as just a background setting. In his view, STS has been very successful in criticising the idea that science is ‘a culture of no culture’. But it has been less willing to see its own place within imperial histories and English-language academic networks.

## “COLONIAL AND RACIAL EXPECTATIONS SHAPE WHAT IS SEEN AS PROPER RESEARCH”

Prasad draws on thinkers such as Foucault, Bhabha, Said, Mbembe and Derrida. Even so, the writing is mostly clear and avoids heavy jargon. The autobiographical preface is particularly effective. Here, Prasad describes being repeatedly encouraged to work on caste and tribe as more suitable topics for an Indian scholar. This experience grounds the book’s arguments in his own academic life and shows how colonial and racial expectations shape what is seen as proper research.

Some readers may look for more detailed case studies beyond the US-China setting and Anglo-American STS debates. Others may hope for fuller engagement with Latin American decolonial theorists, Indigenous studies or African scholarship. Prasad notes some of this work but does not build a wide-ranging survey. The book

is better read as an intervention in specific debates within STS and the sociology of science, rather than as a comprehensive overview of all work on colonialism and science.

*Science Studies Meets Colonialism* will interest sociologists concerned with science, universities, policy and empire, as well as anyone puzzled by how quickly defending science turns into defending the West. Prasad does not offer a ready-made plan for decolonising science. Instead, he shows how our basic categories – science, the West, the non-West – remain marked by imperial histories. His main message is that STS cannot treat colonialism as something finished and safely in the past; it must face how colonial forms of power still shape knowledge in the present.

Prasad closes the book with a rich dialogue between J. P. S. Uberoi and Bruno Latour on modern science and European colonialism. He shows how Uberoi, speaking as a non-Western ‘insider-outsider’, insists that the European monopoly over scientific method must be challenged, while Latour’s ‘we have never been modern’ comes from a position that is not marked by colonial othering. By reading them together, Prasad underlines his central point: even the most sophisticated theories of science and modernity look very different when viewed from the former colony rather than from the European centre. ■

**SHUBHAM MISHRA**

**Banaras Hindu University, India**

# THE FALL AND RISE OF THE ENGLISH UPPER CLASS: HOUSES, KINSHIP AND CAPITAL SINCE 1945

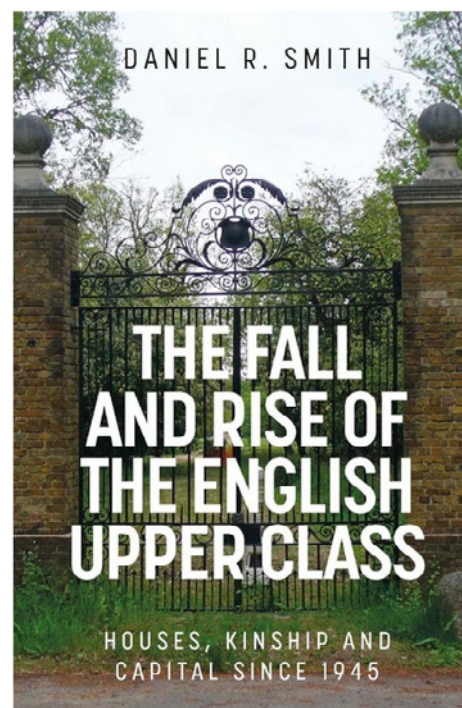
DANIEL R. SMITH

Manchester University Press, 2023

272 pages

Hardback: £61.64; £68: e-book

ISBN: 978-1526157010 hbk



**In this book Daniel R. Smith analyses the British Establishment by revisiting imperial history and explaining the interplay between past and present through the metaphor of the house and its connections with kinship, inheritance, nation, class, mannerism and individuality. Smith's book offers valuable insights into the sociology of elites by synthesising historical and social anthropological perspectives with research conducted among diverse groups, including elite schools and bookshop owners.**

According to Smith (p.6), “An Englishman’s home is his castle, not because it reflects his values of individualism and privacy; rather an Englishman’s home is his castle because it contains a model for an alternative definition of society compared to his continental neighbour’s.” From this point, it becomes clear that the home or house metaphor extends beyond mere physical space, it is deeply embedded in culture and actively shapes social practices and relationships in society. The book comprises three main parts: ‘Fall and rise’, ‘The social poetics of houses’, and ‘Houses as kinship and capital’. Each part consists of several

thematic sections that reconsider Britain’s imperial past to illuminate the relationships among culture, traditions, family institution and physical spaces, or put differently, the ‘island’ as a site of continuous identity formation, all of which influence class dynamics.

What is intriguing in his analysis is that the author poses the question ‘Who’s Who?’ to examine British aristocracy, while simultaneously unravelling the complexity of aristocratic ideologies and nobility, by situating these phenomena in spatio-temporal contexts. Smith extends his analysis beyond aristocracy and the upper class to elucidate how intricate inter-class relationships shape identities and culture, and influence social class dynamics. In examining the English upper class, Smith foregrounds the transformation of inheritance resulting from the fragmentation of modernity, which generated what he terms ‘displaced inheritance’.

The author suggests that the ‘Arcadia’ of an aristocrat’s house is an English fantasy in which small landed estates struggle to preserve pre-modern ways of life against the fragmenting forces

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of modernity. Smith demonstrates how a house embodies the nexus of kinship and inheritance, which manifests in father-son relationships that operate simultaneously at the micro-level family relations and the macro-level cultural and class reproduction. He further highlights the heirship crises of the 17th and 18th centuries by conceptualising the house not merely as property to be inherited but as an institution fundamentally concerned with securing male succession due to the limited legitimate heirs.

## “THE ACCUMULATION OF CAPITAL THROUGH POWER RELATIONS HAS ENGENDERED ECONOMIC DISPARITIES IN THE MODERN ERA”

Central to his analysis is the relationship between capitalism and wealth inequality, whereby the

accumulation of capital through power relations has engendered economic disparities in the modern era. Smith states: “Our meeting point is that England’s passage to capitalism began with a landed aristocracy, an upper class whose central idioms of traditionalism led them to capitalism earlier and without a great, societal transformation” (p.21). This tendency is addressed through the analysis of class structure as a critical analytical framework.

This approach also offers insights into the economic consequences of Brexit and their impact across social classes. The book offers significant theoretical and empirical contributions for scholars investigating the historical determinants of class relations, particularly concerning elite social reproduction, the negotiation between traditional hierarchies and modernising forces, and the structural mechanisms underlying wealth stratification. ■

**ULVIYYA KHALILOVA**

**University of Birmingham**

# Appreciation



# PROFESSOR CLAUS OFFE, 1940-2025

**P**rofessor Claus Offe, the political sociologist whose work looked at the modern welfare state, labour markets and the relationship between institutions and individuals in democracies, has died aged 85.

Professor Offe worked at the universities of Frankfurt, Bielefeld, Bremen and Humboldt University of Berlin, as well as the Hertie School of Governance, a private university in Berlin that he co-founded.

**“HE WAS A POLITICAL  
SOCIOLOGIST, BUT IN THE  
MOST EXPANSIVE SENSE”**

In a tribute to him, Dr Charles Turner, of the University of Warwick, writes that “he was a political sociologist, but in the most expansive sense, equally at home in institutional analysis, political philosophy, and when he needed it, rational choice theory ... he would map

out the challenges and dilemmas facing politicians, policy makers and citizens alike across a range of areas and issues.”

His books included: *Contradictions of the Welfare State* (1984), a response to Marxist critiques of welfare, and conservative views that the welfare state created expectations among citizens that it could not meet; and *Disorganized Capitalism* (1985), which responded to Reaganism and Thatcherism and to the way Western societies were becoming fractured along new lines.

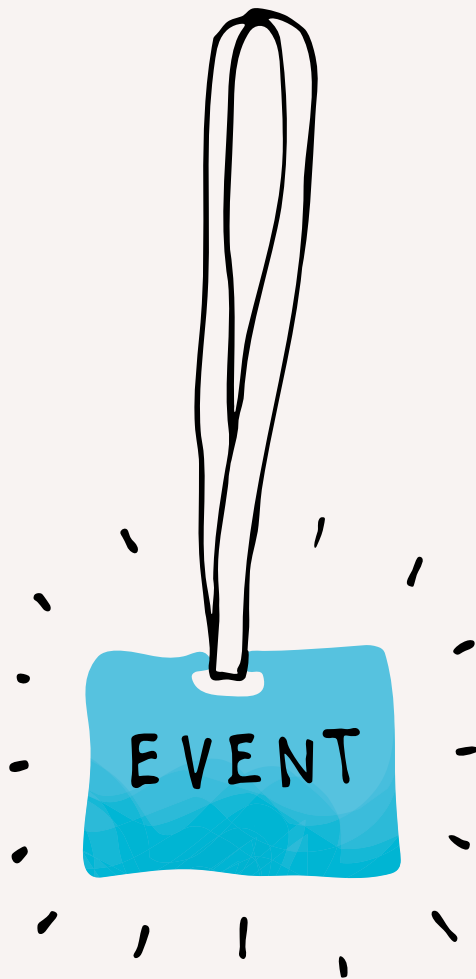
Other works included: *Europe Entrapped*, (2014), *Inequality and the Labour Market* (2010) and *Reflections on America: Tocqueville, Weber and Adorno in the United States* (2005).

Professor Offe was one of the founding members of the Green Party in Germany, and the Basic Income Earth Network.

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For Dr Turner’s tribute:  
<https://tinyurl.com/muwc66an>

# Events



# EVENT LISTINGS

As at the end March 2026 – for a complete and up to date list, see: <https://www.britisoc.co.uk/events/key-bsa-events-listerRacial>

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## Capitalism in Post(Imperial) Europe: A Roundtable

A BSA Theory Study Group Event  
26 March  
Online

## New Perspectives on Postgraduate Research and Future Career Pathways

A BSA-Funded Postgraduate Regional Event  
28 March  
Coventry University

## BSA Annual Conference 2026

*75 Years of Sociology*  
8-10 April  
University of Manchester

## Religion, Medicine, Health & Illness – Overlaps and Intersections

A joint event from the BSA Sociology of Religion and Medical Sociology Study Groups  
17 April  
Hybrid (online via Teams and in person at University of Nottingham)

## Become Conference Confident Workshop

A BSA-Funded Early Career Forum Regional Event  
21 April  
University of Leeds

## BSA Human Reproduction Study Group Annual Conference

18 May 2026  
De Montfort University

## Doing Emotions: Emotional Practice and Reflexivity in Everyday Life

A BSA-Funded Postgraduate Regional Event  
19 May  
University of Edinburgh

## Storytelling turbulence: Methodological challenges of presenting contemporary complexities

A BSA-Funded Postgraduate Regional Event  
20 May  
University of Manchester

## The Tangled Roots of Creative Research and Social Justice. Exploring the Social, Critical and Theoretical Roots of Creative Research Practice, and Disjuncture within Everyday Practice

A BSA-Funded Postgraduate Regional Event  
3 June 2026  
University of Bristol

## Reimagining Academic Futures: Building Collective Pathways Beyond Precarity

A BSA-Funded Early Career Regional Event  
4 June 2026  
Newcastle University

## Understanding and Enacting Social Change in Education: Working with Bourdieu

A BSA Bourdieu Study Group Event  
11 June  
Istituto Comprensivo Benci-Borsi, Livorno, Italy

## BSA Sociology of Religion Study Group Annual Conference 2026

*Healing and Harms*  
29 June – 1 July  
University of Nottingham

## Care, Labour and Capitalism

A BSA-Funded Postgraduate Forum Regional Event  
7 July  
London, UK (venue TBC)

## BSA Auto/Biography Summer Conference: Seasons

15-17 July 2026  
University of Reading

## BSA Medical Sociology Study Group Conference 2026

8-10 September  
Northumbria University

## BSA Work, Employment and Society Conference 2026

*Work and Employment in the great Reshuffle: Navigating the Polycrisis*  
9-11 September  
University of Bath School of Management

## Early Career Workshop on the Sociology of Work and Wellbeing

A BSA-Funded Early Career Regional Event  
18 September  
University of Oxford

## The 3rd Sociology of the Arts PGR Symposium: The aesthetic and culture in the arts

A BSA-Funded Postgraduate Regional Event  
7 October  
University of Edinburgh



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