

Music, migration, Covid and racism tackled at Edinburgh

University of Edinburgh: Lisa McCormick was a studio commentator for English-language YouTube coverage of the 18th International Chopin Piano Competition in Warsaw in October. She contributed three articles about the sociology of music to the newsletter, *Chopin Courier*, which was distributed during the competition.

Dr McCormick also chaired the online book launch for *Culture and Art: Selected Writings Vol. 1*, the first in a book series of unpublished writings by Zygmunt Bauman, published by Polity Press. A recording of this, which includes a presentation by librarians on the resources of the Bauman Archive at the University of Leeds, as well as documentary film footage, can be viewed: <https://tinyurl.com/4djeyetc>

In other Edinburgh news, Dr Idil Akinci has been given a fellowship by the Alexander von Humboldt Foundation at the GIGA Institute: <https://tinyurl.com/3ke6syz8>

The foundation promotes international academic cooperation between scientists and scholars from Germany and from abroad.

Dr Akinci published an article on the E-International Relations website which explores how Syrians born and raised in the Arabian Gulf States navigate migration to the West. <https://tinyurl.com/73yy5znz>

Professor Nasar Meer helped launch the People's Review of Prevent, a project that invites evidence from researchers, community



Dr Lisa McCormick

organisations and civil liberties groups on the negative impact of Prevent policies. It was set up after a boycott by groups that mistrust the official government enquiry into the strategy. The Review is chaired by Professor John Holmwood and Dr Layla Aitlhadj.

Professor Meer has also worked with a Scottish government-commissioned review of anti-racist policy, and has made a final report to the government as part of the Expert Reference Group on Covid-19 and Ethnicity.

The Guardian newspaper ran an opinion piece by Professor Nasar Meer on discrimination against ethnic minorities in the jobs market.

He wrote the piece after the publication of research by academics at the universities of California and Chicago in which 83,000 responses to real job adverts were made by fake applicants with the same qualifications and training, some of whom were obviously from an ethnic minority. The study showed beyond doubt that “distinctively Black names reduce the probability of employer contact”, he said. <https://tinyurl.com/2ycju2rp>

Dr Sophia Woodman became a member of the Academic Freedom and Internationalisation working group. The group has developed a draft code of conduct to ensure that academic freedom of staff and students is protected in UK universities. It is encouraging universities to adopt this.

Professor Jan Webb was invited to present oral evidence to the UK Parliament Housing, Communities and Local Government Select Committee on the role of local government in meeting net zero greenhouse gas emission targets. <https://tinyurl.com/yy9bv69c>

The RACE.ED network at the university held a series of events over the autumn on topics including schools, Black History Month, feminist approaches to war and genocide, and the Israeli Occupation of Palestine: www.race.ed.ac.uk

Website on thinking critically is no turkey

University of Edinburgh: A new website on how to think and write critically has been launched.

The Critical Turkey, created by Dr Martin Booker, is a resource for students and features general essay writing advice and blogposts addressing frequently asked questions.

The central idea of the site is to use the practical concerns and questions of students who want to improve their grades as a launchpad for a deeper understanding of and critical engagement with the social world.

Dr Booker said: “One of the most frequently asked questions we get from students is how many sources they should use in their essay. It is tempting to brush this off as a superficial question, or simply give them a quick number. But there is more to it than that.

“So I wrote a blogpost on the different parameters that are in play here, such as the importance of looking at different perspectives and interpretations, and how this helps us gain a better understanding of the



Dr Martin Booker

topic we are looking at. What seems like a superficial question then actually becomes the starting point for a deeper understanding of how to think and write critically.”

The website also looks at how to be critical

and original, and under what circumstances students are permitted to use non-academic sources.

All resources are available under a creative commons licence, CC BY-NC, so they can be downloaded, adapted and remixed as required. New content is added regularly.

Dr Booker hopes it will become a comprehensive guide to critical writing in the social sciences, suitable for an inclusive and decolonised sociology of the 21st century.

The title is a play on the metaphor of the inductivist turkey employed by Bertrand Russell and Karl Popper to warn against the pitfalls of inductivist reasoning.

Used to being fed every morning, the ‘inductivist turkey’ concludes that it will always be fed every morning. This holds true, until Christmas. The critical turkey, however, uses its critical reasoning skills, understands the motives of the humans feeding it, and escapes to live a life of freedom.

The website is at: blogs.ed.ac.uk/criticalturkey For more information contact M.Booker@ed.ac.uk

Afghan researcher fears for colleagues

City University: A sociologist who was evacuated from Afghanistan as the Taliban took power has spoken about her concerns for the country's future.

Dr Liza Schuster spent most of the past decade conducting fieldwork based at the Afghanistan Centre at Kabul University.

Dr Schuster recounted how she had been staying with a friend in Kabul when the situation in the city "was getting increasingly tense". After moving to a secure camp, she was taken to Kabul airport in an armoured vehicle to get an emergency flight out.

"I'm a European with a European passport and I'm a woman of a certain age, and I knew that I really wasn't at risk," she said. "People who are most at risk are my Afghan colleagues and friends."

She could "really feel people's fear and panic all around" her in her final days in Afghanistan. She said that everyone was wary of strangers, and banks and ATMs were running out of cash as people tried to stockpile what they could.

"Personally, I have at least two dozen people I desperately want to get out and who I know are eligible to be evacuated because of either their work with the British government or European governments.

"I also have lots of other people who are calling me and sending messages and emails, and I know that they won't get on a list. I know that they're in danger, and I don't know what's going to happen.

"All of those people are now extremely worried and very frightened. The Taliban are already going to people's homes – they know who these people are. At the moment they are questioning them and taking documents,



Dr Liza Schuster

and they're also looking for official vehicles.

"I have no way of getting them out. I would pay every penny I had to get them out now. I am very afraid for them.

"I'm so angry with the UK government but also with the European Union, which should be loudly telling European countries, 'we have a responsibility to the people who have worked with us'."

Dr Schuster, who can speak Persian, one of the country's main languages, has carried out work funded by the ESRC, including an examination of the way that migration is represented in Afghan oral culture and an exploration of the influence of the EU on the development of Afghan migration policy.

She came to City University in 2005 from the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society at Oxford. Before that she was a Fellow at the LSE. *Sources: Research Professional News, My London News, City University*

Project to reveal Black experience

University of Cambridge: The Sociology Department launched an online national survey recently asking Black people about their experiences.

The survey was open to any Black person in the UK, and asked them about aspects of their lives, such as discrimination at work and in healthcare, and their views on policing, the news media, the arts and politics.

The survey was part of the Black British Voices project, which will give a portrait of Black Britishness in the 21st century, and is a partnership between the Sociology Department, the Black-led consultancy I-Cubed and Britain's only national Black newspaper *The Voice*.

The research is led by Dr Kenny Monrose, who said: "We want to hear from normal people on streets up and down the country

to uncover the reality of being Black in 21st century Britain. Do you see yourself as Black British? If so, are you proud to be Black British? Can Black people ever feel or be seen as English?"

The project also includes focus groups and interviews with Black activists, politicians and others.

"We want to unpack deep-seated feelings and sentiments about the Black British experience and show that we are not a uniform or homogeneous group," said Dr Monrose.

"We can use this information to transform the perception of Black people in this country, and help share an authentic and reliable version of Black British life that is obtained by consulting with and gaining consent from Black communities."

Round-up of news in the world of sociology

University of Lincoln: A book by Anna Tarrant exploring the dynamics of men's caring responsibilities in low-income families has been published by Policy Press.

Fathering and Poverty: Uncovering Men's Participation in Low-Income Family Life considers men's participation in family life across the lifecourse and how this is affected by the constraints upon them such as the impact of austerity.

The book contains eight chapters tackling themes including the historical and policy context of fatherhood, caring arrangements and urban neighbourhoods.

The book has been welcomed by Professor Bren Neale, of the University of Leeds, as "a sensitive and moving portrayal of men on the margins, the ebbs and flows of their family contributions and the challenges they face in securing a caring role."

Loughborough University: The university is establishing a new mini-Centre of Doctoral Training to support research into equality, diversity and inclusion.

The centre is led by Dr Line Nyhagen and will involve sociology staff and a multi-disciplinary team from across the university.

The centre will support six PhD students to examine opportunities and barriers for culturally diverse students, academics and professional staff.

Dr Nyhagen said: "The mini doctoral training centre will ensure that our work in this area is research-informed, innovative and collaborative."

The first PhD students are expected to start work in January.

Lionel Jansen has completed the second volume of his analysis of the English examination system from a social anthropological perspective.

The first volume, *Classified and Classifier-Tilting at Windmills*, was based on his unsuccessful petition against the award of a lower-second classification for his degree in social anthropology at the **University of Sussex**.

His second volume, *Being and Madness*, has now been published by Aspect Design and is an account of his confinement and treatment in the mental health system under the 1983 Mental Health Act.

He challenges the negative stereotyping of mental illness and questions the veracity of the hospital dossier, asking if his treatment would have been different if he were white rather than mixed ethnicity.

For more details see: <https://tinyurl.com/5ykhywuf>