

**AZIZ**FOUNDATION

BUILDING COMMUNITIES TOGETHER

# ISLAMOPHOBIA RESEARCH

A COMPILATION OF RESEARCH CONDUCTED BY AZIZ  
FOUNDATION SCHOLARS 2019 - 2020



# INTRODUCTION

Established in 2015, the Aziz Foundation is a family charitable foundation that aims to widen participation and opportunities for British Muslims, especially within education.

In the past two years, the Aziz Foundation has funded over 350 British Muslims to create change within society and actively work towards tackling the growing issue of Islamophobia in Britain.

This report is a compilation of research conducted by our scholars over the course of the past two years on the topic of Islamophobia and its manifestation in a range of disciplines and areas of society.

We'd like to thank our scholars for their efforts and hope that this can be used as a source through which change can be created in society.

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# AISHA ADEN

**LPC LLM in Professional Legal  
Practice  
(2020-21)**  
University of Law

My research was for the **Islamophobia inquiry** called by the **Home Affairs Select Committee**. I offered evidence in respect to the current extent of Islamophobia in British society and the impact of an official adoption of the definition of Islamophobia. Focusing specifically on **Islamophobia in education** and the impact of this in relation to employment prospects, my research concluded that by taking a broader approach and going beyond the statistics, there is clear evidence to suggest **there are elements of Islamophobia present in contemporary British society**. Through my findings, I also urged the committee to take into account the fact that the **terms 'Islam' and 'Muslims'** have been used interchangeably.

# ZAHRAA AHMED

**MPhil Political & Economic  
Sociology  
(2019-20)**  
University of Cambridge

My research aims to explore the **role of religious identity** in the **experience of being made disposable** in British society. Conducting fifteen in-depth interviews with British Muslim men and women from a range of socio-economic, ethnic and racial backgrounds and by referring to the work of Achille Mbembe, Henry Giroux and Edward Said, my research argues that **religious identity plays an integral role in the experience of being made disposable**. By highlighting how British Muslims **undergo a process of racialisation as the 'Other'**, which effectively exposes them to continuous forms of violence and apathy, this dissertation builds upon the work of Mbembe and Giroux by highlighting how **alongside reproducing racial and colonial legacies**, neoliberalism also reproduces **historical narratives regarding religious identity to civilise this process of determining who lives and dies**.

# SIBIA AKHTAR

**MA History**  
**(2019-20)**  
University of Manchester

Within British history, there is limited understanding regarding the **contribution and racism experienced by British Muslims**. British Muslims have **been racialised in Britain and their identities now are considered as 'un-British'**. My research works to **undermine the contemporary focus** placed on understanding British Muslims and Islamophobia as a **recent phenomenon**. These histories require recentring to focus on these stories. This thesis examines the everyday racism experienced by British Muslims from the 1970s to present day by **challenging the idea that there has been historical change with racism**. I will use archival material to supplement the limited secondary scholarship on this topic to assess historical change. However, my research is grounded in using oral history testimonies conducted by myself and primarily sourced from the Everyday Muslim archive, to understand how **racism affects British Muslims through their lived experiences** in wider societal institutions, interpersonal relationships, intersectional identities and everyday anti-racist activism

# AFIA AHMED CHAUDHRY

**DPhil Education**  
**(2020-21)**  
University of Oxford

My research is borne of my own experiences witnessing the **impact of socio-economic inequalities and media discourses on the educational and professional outcomes of BAME and Muslim communities**. As a history teacher in an urban classroom, I intend to research how **Muslim students engage with history**, school history's role in helping manage synergies and dissonances arising from different historical interpretations, and how to mitigate for disengagement and alienation. Recent findings have elucidated a **low uptake of history amongst BAME and Muslim pupils**, and note the importance of school history in fostering social cohesion and developing identity. I aim to explore **how Muslim students identify and where they locate themselves within the classroom and wider British society**, with the hope that findings will repudiate commonly entrenched misconceptions and **allow Muslim students to find belonging in multicultural Britain**.

# NADIA YAHYA HAFEDH

**MSc Postcolonial Culture & Global  
Policy**  
(2019-20)  
Goldsmiths, University of London

I argue that the UK, as an imperial state, uses misrecognition in a domestic context to maintain state power. In this context, the **state does not attempt to recognise Muslims nor migrants**, but rather **use misrecognition to construct these groups as hostile and 'other' to justify expansive state intervention into these communities and create a common enemy for native groups**. The myth of an inclusive multiculturalism has been violently disrupted in recent years through the **rise of the far-right in British civil society**. My research explores the state's use of misrecognition through two state policies; Prevent, a counter-terrorism policy, and the hostile environment, an anti-migrant policy, **both of which construct national perceptions of Muslims and migrants that recruit the general population as agents of the state to 'other' and effectively criminalise these groups**.

# MAHMOUD IBRAHIM

**PhD Sociology**  
(2019-20)  
University of Warwick

My PhD research focuses on **analysing the construction of Islamophobic discourse in the media from a decolonial theoretical perspective**. As a journalist who has worked in different TV and media platforms such as the BBC and other corporate communication and civil society groups in the last 15 years, I will also look into the **implications of unethical media and the Islamophobic narrative on Muslim communities in the UK**.

# KHADIJA KOTHIA

**MSc History of International  
Relations**  
(2019-20)  
London School of Economics &  
Political Science, University of  
London

Emerging in the midst of global geopolitical tensions, the **1988-9 Rushdie Affair marked a dramatic shift in understandings of Muslim identity in Britain**. Following publication were months of local protests, a death-sentence issued by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini, and a British-Muslim campaign for legal protection. Yet, despite the centrality of British Muslims within the affair, **academic scholarship has, since, failed to integrate British Muslim perspectives, leaving behind a scholarship reliant on sensationalist and unrepresentative media coverage depicting a 'violent' Islam**. In response, this dissertation serves to fill this gap by **delineating British Muslim perspectives during the 1988-1989 Rushdie Affair**, to analyse, whether, by centring **Muslim voices, mainstream understandings of the event can be reconstructed**. By examining a series of British-Muslim primary documents, this dissertation provides a revisionist narrative to conventional understandings of the affair, to **reveal the damaging impact of erasing Muslim voices to historical narratives of the Rushdie Affair**, and the importance of involving local perspectives within historical analysis.

# KARIM MITHA

PhD Sociology  
(2019-20)  
University of Glasgow

The experience of Muslims in Scotland has often been marginalised within larger discourse and studies of Muslim in Britain. Extant research and academics have taken the view of a "**Caledonian exceptionalism**" - that **Muslims in Scotland are distinct and different vis-a-vis their English counterparts due to the perception that there is "nae problem here"**. While this view is perpetuated in the academic literature, it is **increasingly critiqued by Muslims themselves** including recently by Muslim MSPs and the CPPG group on Islamophobia, noting that **everyday experiences of Islamophobia are part and parcel of the Muslim experience in Scotland and Scotland is not immune to Islamophobia**. Given that Muslims comprise a small proportion of the Scottish population, their **health needs are often unmet and unaddressed with substantial inequalities in mental health care**. Building on the work of Davidson and colleagues (2018), I contest this view of "nae problem here", working extensively with Muslims in Scotland to **unpack and understand their experiences of everyday racism, Islamophobia, identity construction, and mental health**

# HAFSAH NOOR

MSc Middle East Politics  
(2019-20)  
SOAS, University of London

The Muslim image has been heavily invented over the ages, with recent events including the Arab Spring perpetuating the old, clichéd and barbaric image of Islam. **Western policy and media discourse have arguably micromanaged what it means to be a "Moderate Muslim" in the modern day, such particular Muslims to be the suitable and acceptable kind**. The UK continues to provide evidence of this emerging phenomena that has increasingly intertwined and influenced daily policymaking decisions and key media publications. **Western imaginaries have thus continued to orientalise Islam and Muslims through similar, enhanced measures, particularly after the events of the Arab Spring**.

# SAIF OSMANI

**MSc Architecture & Historic Urban  
Environments**

**(2019-20)**

The Bartlett, University College  
London

**Framing Banglatown** critically examines the nexus between UK planning policies, the creative industries and the Bangladeshi Muslims in the Spitalfields area of East London, **one of the highest concentrations of Muslims in the UK.** Through 16 qualitative interviews, I found that religious culture, culinary (and socialising) along with customs/behaviour remains the main forms of cultural expression for this diaspora. **Increased building developments have meant incoming commodified cultural forms take priority over long-standing migrant culture.** I describe this phenomenon as **'gentrification through hipsterfication'**. My research findings helped form the **Bengali East End Memory Map** to **capture the complexities of cultural expression for this diaspora** with this being shared with the community and local policy makers.

# WASEELAH SMEDLEY

**MA Global History**

**(2019-21)**

University of Birmingham

The field of ethnomusicology, as opposed to musicology, was specifically developed for the study of music by the non-Western 'other'. **The study of Muslim music through this orientalist lens, including the degradation of Muslim music as primitive, also often takes a secular methodological approach and separates perceived 'Islamic' forms from 'secular' forms of Muslim music.** This has created a narrow understanding of 'Islamic' music (and wider, Islamic art), **and misunderstands the placement of the arts in Muslim societies.** These same frameworks are used by Muslims too, **applying Western musicological frameworks to non-western forms, and internalising a secular, orientalist lens in our own discourses around music, resulting in analytical categories that make little historiographical sense.** Therefore, my study explores the music and culture of the singing slave girls - 'the Qiyān' - in 10th-12th centuries through a desecularising lens, **understanding how 'secular' music is deeply involved with the Islamic ethos and texts.**

# SAMIR SEDDOUGUI

PhD Social Policy  
(2019-20)  
University of Bristol

My PhD is focussed on the **financing of Islamophobic think tanks in the UK, and the relationship these organisations have with funders and think tanks abroad**. Through my research I aim to unpack these relationships, drawing attention to the **network of organisations, funders and individuals who have contributed to a rise in Islamophobia and a hostile environment for Muslims in Britain**. By highlighting the **current issues of Islamophobia within political discourse and society more generally**, I hope to raise awareness to these issues and hopefully as a result make **policy recommendations that will reduce the marginalisation of Muslims in Britain**.

# ALMAS TALIB

MSc Social & Cultural Psychology  
(2019-20)  
London School of Economics &  
Political Science, University of  
London

This study aimed to understand how **new racist discourse, based on cultural essentialism**, was explained by those belonging to **social groups that are marginalised by or benefit from systemic racism in the UK**. 20 interviews and 4 focus groups were conducted with 42 participants in total; the discussions of 21 British South Asian Muslims (BSAM) were compared to those of 21 British white non-Muslims (BWN). Portrayals of BSAM denoting negative stereotypes were used as stimuli to investigate the uses of attributions and essentialism by BSAM and BWN in explaining the portrayals. The results showed that when making internal attributions to the group to explain the portrayals, **BSAM mostly essentialised South Asian culture whilst BWN essentialised Muslimness; both explanations perpetuated negative stereotypes**. This provides insight into how **attributions and essentialism are used for resistance, internalised racism and the perpetuation of new racist discourse around Muslims in Britain**.



# BILAL UR-REHMAN

**LLM Human Rights Law  
(2020-21)**  
University of Reading

My research aims to **decolonise and tackle Islamophobia within the Law School curriculum by identifying how Muslim works can be better incorporated into the curriculum and how this can help Muslim students feel represented.** By focusing on multiple law disciplines such as Human Rights Law, Employment Law and Public Law, I want to utilise my research project to **allow Muslim students to have a voice and speak on issues they may not necessarily feel comfortable discussing.**

# THAHMINA BEGUM THANIYA

**MSc International Relations  
(2019-20)**  
London School of Economics &  
Political Science, University of  
London

My research focuses on the **differing strength and nature of Islam as a mobilising force in global politics.** My postgraduate dissertation analysed how pre-existing ties between **South Asia and the MENA region strengthened the idea of "jihad" as a mobilising tool for the anti-Soviet resistance in Afghanistan during the 1980s.** Rather than focus solely on extensive geopolitical accounts of "global jihad", my research is concerned with **examining the contexts within which foreign fighters and activists operate.** Highlighting the limits of mainstream International Relations theories, I assess the anti-Soviet resistance movement from a transnational perspective and **conceptualise the ummah as an alternative organising framework, shedding analytical light on non-state actors' ability to mobilise on an international scale through Islamic language, symbols and norms.**