
Other organisations that took notable action are Amaliah who provided an online space for Black Muslim women to creatively express how they were feeling including The Dabiri Group and Hafsa Dabiri who spoke at several events on the problems facing the Muslim community, and Myriam Francois from 'We Need to Talk about Whiteness' amongst others.

COMPASSION FATIGUE

The problem we collectively face now is that of compassion fatigue. Just as the refugee crisis of 2015 which initially mobilised the masses to support the plight of displaced persons eventually lost the public interest, so too will Black Lives Matter amongst non-Black people. #movementnotamoment is a hashtag created on social media outlining the degree of work that needs to collectively be done in order to sustain the change our community needs. This hashtag must become a mantra by non-Black Muslims who are uniquely placed to live the legacy of Prophetic advice⁸ and make it their work to undo the many trajectories of ignorance in the Muslim community and replace it with knowledge.

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SOUKEYNA OSEI-BONSU

Soukeyna is a student based in London and founder of the Black rights based organisation Black Muslim Forum which aims to support Black Muslims globally.

⁷ See Black Muslim Forum (2020)

⁸ See Antepi (2014)

COMPLICIT (POST GEORGE FLOYD REFLECTION)

BY MUNEERA WILLIAMS

Statements and phrases I heard repeatedly in the immediate aftermath of the murder of George Floyd:

*Unconscious bias
Difficult questions
We must do better
America is so terrible*

And then there were the questions:

*Are we in the UK really that bad?
How did we get here?
How can I be an ally?*

The statement I find the most interesting is: how did we get here? The confusion as to how we got here is a conundrum in itself. As a mental health professional, I have become accustomed to the sad reality of suicide. Yet it is important to identify that suicide is not the problem per se, but sits at the very tip of the iceberg, with an underbelly of issues that do not get resolved, until the point of tragedy and loss of life. Unresolved issues may include depression, anxiety, abuse, shame, loss of control and more. Though mental health may be shrouded with stigma and taboos, this veil is slowly lifting and we are able to understand the complexities involved enough to know that suicide is not the beginning of the problem. Yet when it comes to the matter of race, the lens of logic and consequences are blurred and we are left confused, asking questions like how did we get here?

I did not watch the video of the murder of George Floyd. It sounded horrific, the report of it alone is enough for the imagination to run away with and create its own crime scene. Around this time, social media blew up with self-care tips; these were not the typical “have a hot bath and watch Netflix” type suggestions that tend to saturate women lifestyle magazines and online blogs. Like no time I’ve seen before, new grassroots organisations were formed with the aim to facilitate healing and well being within Black communities. Psychologists and therapists sought ways to make their expertise accessible. People of colour particularly Black people were talking about traumatic experiences of racism, both overt and covert, and the rest of humanity was listening with a keen sense of urgency, though there seems to be some backpedaling now. What was different about this incident? What was it that made the life of this man whose name we probably would not know, if someone had not deemed it newsworthy enough to be shared, had the incident not been captured by someone, and someone else somewhere in a newsroom decided that it was indeed relevant.

There has been a failure to connect how we get to the point of a murder of a person who was supposed to be protected by the state, and that same state being the weapon of choice. As this is a personal reflection I can say in my opinion it starts with value, the slight unpicking

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and dismissal of someone’s humanity which leads to the idea of groups of people not being valuable or not having the same intrinsic worth as other groups of people.

For example, looking at Muslim communities within western nations where racial disparities are at a high, conversations about ethnoreligious hierarchies, the representation of Black communities in the structure of Muslim institutions, and the lack of Muslim representation and acknowledgement for Black Muslim histories and intellect have been tense certainly since I embraced Islam 15 years ago. Black people have spoken about casual racism, which has been excused under the guise of ignorance, age, culture, and even jest, that’s if the recipient of the racism is not accused of being, separatist, sensitive, or having a chip on their shoulders.

Sticking with the theme of British Muslim communities and systems, there are countless instances of casual racism, from prominent tv presenters to popular imams and community leaders. A more recent occurrence took place in Birmingham when a young South Asian imam was giving dawa (proselytising) and reprimanding his peers from his cultural background for being involved in criminality and then proceeded to associate their actions with being ‘Black’. There was the time when a Black non-Muslim woman attacked a non-Black Muslim woman in hijab which of course was wrong. Apparently, however, this was the green light for all of the racist tropes on slavery, slurs, and the mocking of facial features to come out. In some respects, it makes no sense to highlight individual cases, because there have been so many. The recipient of racism is left to retell their story, as if we are not aware of these stories, fueling the idea that racism is an individual phenomenon and not a social and structural one. The refusal to acknowledge and challenge these more micro instances of name-calling, profiling and pathologising are the slow steps to the erosion of a person’s humanity. In answer to the question, we got here by ignoring and excusing.

There are theories about our collective consciousness and the supposed communal solidarity as a result of what was being called the ‘great equaliser’ COVID19. But as the global pandemic has developed, it has only exposed, to a greater degree, the structural inequalities that have plagued even the richest of countries; oftentimes with Black people feeling the bite disproportionately.

Change has always been happening. The multiple Black communities (and when I say Black, I am talking about people of African descent) have always resisted these reductive narratives such as the example of Sisters Jamaat, a social organisation active in the 90s and 00s which catered to Muslim youth and ran successful projects in the community. The scope of resistance

is currently widening to also include rest, well-being and recreation as well as the work of challenging norms and celebrating achievements. This is the case for Everyday Muslim Heritage & Archive's Black Muslim History Project, where rather than focus on instances of racism, the project interviewed Black British Muslims and asked questions on all aspects of life.

In this time Black Muslim-only spaces have come under scrutiny. It could be argued that Black Muslim-only spaces are divisive and threaten to further segregate and fracture a community, it can also be argued that these spaces exist and do not need to be formalised. However, there is a case to be held that in these fractured times, for those who access them Black Muslims-only spaces are essential hubs of rest, well-being, strategic planning, thriving, and maybe the more important task of just being among one another without having to explain, contextualise or prove. When we move forward as a community, and meaningful anti-racist practice is wide spread and realised, we may do well to revisit this conversation, looking at the specifics of community and whether there is still a need for Black only spaces particularly thinking about communal and prayer spaces which theologically are seen as spaces which should be accessed by all.

Many non-Black Muslims are doing the active work of anti-racist practice through listening, spotlighting and celebrating, curating events, heritage projects, and creating new curricula. For non-Black Muslims who have not yet embarked upon the journey of decolonising and unlearning racism (which is a dehumanising practise), within the faith itself there exists a spiritual pedagogy aligned with equity and equality should you choose to acknowledge it.



MUNEERA WILLIAMS

@Blackmuslimwomenbike on instagram and some other women who are resisting and shifting perspectives Shazfit, Olly B, Asra Run Club, Zainab Alema, Asma Elbadawi, and @Abiir187 on Instagram.

Muneera Pilgrim is an international Poet, Cultural Producer, Writer, Broadcaster and TEDx speaker.

She co-founded the Muslim Hip-Hop and spoken word duo that was Poetic Pilgrimage, and is a co-founder of a new platform, Black Muslim Women Bike. Muneera conducts workshops, shares art, lectures, and finds alternative ways to tell stories, build community and exchange ideas. She regularly contributes to BBC 2's Pause for Thought, she is a community artist-researcher with IBT, a mental health development manager, an alumni associate artist with The English Touring Theatre where she is working on her first play, and her first collection will be realised in autumn 2021 with Burning Eye Books.

BLACK BRITISH MUSLIMS AND POLICE-COMMUNITY RELATIONS IN 2020

BY ISMAEL LEA SOUTH
