
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

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The murder of George Floyd triggered protests in Minneapolis and around the world. The murder was part of an enduring pattern; yet another killing of an African American by law enforcement. Though it was an all too familiar situation in which Black people find themselves treated as suspects by default, the aftermath led to social upheaval, catalysing activism, including among British Muslim and Black British Muslim communities.

The killings in the United States struck a familiar chord in the UK where we have had similar incidents with Mark Duggan and Rashan Charles. More recently, Desmond Ziggy Mombeyarara, 34, was seen in mobile phone footage being tasered in front of his infant son at a petrol forecourt in Manchester.

As a father, this brought shivers down my spine. Growing up as someone of African Caribbean parentage in NorthWest London, enmity against the police was a natural feeling. We witnessed friends and family members in the 1990s go through numerous incidents of police harassment.

The way forward necessarily will involve both community and police efforts. Black British Muslims are playing an important role in leading efforts to transform the relationship which includes advocacy, challenging racism, and capacity building.

CATALYSING CHANGE

George Floyd's death highlights long-standing questions on either side of the Atlantic about accountability, justice, and equality. A recent parliamentary research study (Angiolini 2018) supported by INQUEST, a UK charity with expertise in criminal justice, states that individuals from Black and minority ethnic groups are at a higher risk of arrest, and are more likely to die of violent force by police.

How can Black communities feel safe when they are targets of violence by the very institutions that are supposed to protect people? Though I do not have all the answers, I believe in effective community action and working with the members of the police who genuinely want to protect and serve their communities.

First, I believe in activism and advocacy. Lee Jasper is an example to follow; he has been at the forefront of challenging police brutality for over 30 years, encouraging political engagement and peaceful activism in urban communities. Our communities need to support people like Lee Jasper to train the next generation of social activists to be savvy in challenging police brutality in urban communities.

Second, we need to build the capacity of community-based organisations to address youth violence. Specifically, we need grassroots anti-violence youth practitioners to consistently facilitate stop and search awareness training in our communities. We also need youth workers to build capacity in our communities to defuse situations and be socially prepared for police encounters. Such places could include schools, youth clubs, churches, colleges, universities, mosques and community hubs for our youth.

HOW BLACK MUSLIMS IN BRITAIN ARE LEADING

Black British Muslims are leading the way in advocacy, activism and capacity building in communities. An important element is work around anti-Blackness that needs to be carried out in our communities. These efforts build on the momentum spurred by Black Lives Matter as well as recent research findings by the Black Muslim Forum (2020) about racism in parts of Muslim communities in the UK.

Black British Muslims are leading efforts in three ways; first, by skill building in different communities, and secondly, by creating relationships between communities. Finally, Black British Muslims are building platforms to bring people together.

Working at the grassroots level in communities is one of the strengths of the Salam Project, a community-based organisation that works with youth. An organisation that was established in 2005 and currently operates under guidance of our management committee featuring the input of Hajj Khalid Mair, Rashid Rose, Hanifah Kaaba and Ibrahim Janneh, have been running workshops in different communities across the UK. Workshop topics have included: Racism and Unconscious Bias Awareness, Stop and Search Awareness with emotional intelligence and conflict resolution skills, as well as workshops on racism and anti-Blackness in the British Muslim community.

Other responses include the formation of platforms that bring people together. One example is the Black British Islamic Bureau, or the BBIB. I have decided to be the co-founder and senior advisor to a group of academics, professionals, community activists and practitioners who have come together to form this coalition of Black Muslim organisations like: The Heal Project, The Salam Project, Islamic Action, Emotional Insight, The Salamat Foundation and many others.



As an organisation, BBIB have reached out to create and strengthen relationships between Muslim communities including Mosques and Imams National Advisory Board (MINAB), Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), Islamic Society of Britain (ISB) and Muslim Charities Forum (MCF). All four organisations’ senior management have been receptive and are open to working with BBIB who will deliver anti-Blackness workshops in partnership. BBIB’s co-chair, Muhammad Sulaiman, says he is “feeling optimistic for the first time in 30 years” that real change can happen. Co-chair Anisa Kissoon, has stated that we “aim to challenge anti-Blackness in the UK and in the Muslim world”.

What has BBIB achieved so far? It has emerged as a voice that has recommended credible Black Muslim community activists to be functionally integrated in the management of organisations such as MCB, MINAB and ISB. BBIB will also be facilitating anti-Blackness workshops in Muslim schools and to Muslim charity committees around the country. BBIB’s northern representative, Ahmed James is “excited and optimistic in working together to build bridges in communities.”

CONCLUSION

While technology has helped to hold law enforcement accountable through recording videos, the resolutions to our challenges lay in tried and true methods of relationship and capacity building. As capacity building is well on its way, our communities need to follow the lead of advocates and activists. At the same time, we expect the role of mediators to be as important as ever before. Organisations like the Black Police Association need to take a more active role as community mediators. Although we are used to viewing police officers as part of a problematic system, such officers, about whom I discuss in another piece can make a difference. The example of the late Jamal Moghe, who led initiatives to build relationships between the Muslim community and law enforcement, demonstrate that there are positive ways to work together.



ISMAEL LEA SOUTH
Co-founder
Salam Project

Ismael Lea South is an experienced Youth and Community Consultant who is the co-founder of The Salam Project. (www.thesalamproject.org.uk) An anti youth crime specialist who facilitates numerous projects/workshops on knife crime, county lines, under-achievement, permanent exclusion, gang crime and extremism/radicalisation. Under The Salam Project banner, in partnership with The Race Trust he manages a mentor project in various inner city schools in Greater Manchester and Greater London. He is also currently managing a structured online digital mentoring project with his team of mentors (professionals, academics, entrepreneurs, craftsmen etc.) who supports marginalised, disenfranchised and at-risk Black (African/Afro Caribbean/Somali/Dual Heritage) youths. This project engages young people in Greater Manchester and Greater London online. (Zoom, Skype, Google Hangouts, FaceTime and WhatsApp video)

A guest lecturer at The University of Chester who enjoys cooking Caribbean food and concocting various Caribbean juices in his spare time. As an independent freelance researcher, he is working with Wisdom Against Racism and Decolonising the School Curriculum in putting forward Black (African /Afro Caribbean) British history content to be taught in schools. Finally in partnership with Employees Matter and REMA he delivers racism awareness or unconscious bias projects for third party organisations. (Corporate businesses, national charities, statutory organisations, sports foundations etc.)