

Institution: Teesside University
Unit of Assessment: 29, English Language and Literature
Title of case study: Muslims Writing Britain
<p>1. Summary of the impact</p> <p>Since the events of 11th September 2001, Muslims have been placed at the centre of national and global debates about modernity, citizenship and multiculturalism; this research has served to promote and inform public debate about the representation of British Muslims in contemporary culture. The impact of this research takes two closely related forms. Firstly, this research has promoted awareness and understanding of the historic contribution of South Asians to British life and culture since 1870. Secondly, this research has served to bring new audiences and readers to the work of contemporary writers of Muslim heritage.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>This case study is informed by an established and developing body of academic research in the field of postcolonial studies by Dr Rehana Ahmed. Ahmed was appointed Senior Lecturer in English at Teesside University in January 2011. She was awarded an Arts and Humanities Research Council Fellowship (Early Career Scheme) for the project “Muslims Writing Britain and Beyond: Faith, Class and Multicultural Politics” (£48,062.40, 1 September 2011 – 31 May 2012). The research underpinning this case study has two closely related concerns: firstly, the history of the South Asian diaspora in Britain and, secondly, literary representations of Muslim culture and identities by British writers of Muslim heritage.</p> <p>Ahmed is author and co-editor of publications which provide access to new archival materials and which offer alternative perspectives on the history of British life and culture. “Equality of Citizenship” explores South Asian struggles for equal rights between 1870 and 1950 and examines official and public attitudes to their settlement in Britain. This chapter is a key contribution to <i>South Asians and the Shaping of Britain, 1870-1950: A Sourcebook</i> (ed. Ranasinha with Ahmed, Mukherjee and Stadtler, 2012), a collection which provides scholarly annotation and contextualising analysis of newly published archival sources which illustrate the role played by South Asians in shaping Britain’s political and cultural life. This research has been presented in a range of contexts, including <i>Bharat Britain: South Asians Making Britain, 1870-1950</i> (British Library Conference Centre, 2010), a conference incorporating events for non-academic audiences with an interest in South Asian history and heritage. “Networks of Resistance: Krishna Menon and Working-Class South Asians in Britain” explores the role of V. K. Krishna Menon as a central node in diverse networks of dissident South Asians in Britain; this chapter is a key contribution to a collection, <i>South Asian Resistances in Britain, 1858–1947</i> (ed. Ahmed and Mukherjee, 2011), which provides new insights into South Asian contributions to radical discourses and political activism prior to the period of post war migration and settlement. Ahmed's research on the histories of South Asian working class activism and the development of pre-war campaigns for equal rights is informed by analysis of archival sources including India Office Records (British Library), War Office and Home Office records (National Archives) and the Tower Hamlets Local History Library and Archive. “South Asians Writing Resistance in Wartime London: <i>Indian Writing</i> (1940–42)” examines the contribution of South Asian writer-activists to metropolitan literary culture, with a focus on the role of the periodical <i>Indian Writing</i> in bringing South Asian literature, culture and politics to an international audience.</p> <p>Ahmed’s research on representations of South Asian, British Asian and British Muslim identity and culture extends from the early twentieth century to post 9/11 culture, and examines a range of literary and cultural texts, including fiction, film and memoir. Ahmed’s research focus is on debates and controversies concerning the place of Muslims in contemporary multicultural Britain; this research is historically informed by consideration of the impact of events including the 1991 Gulf war, the 2001 ‘race riots’ in northern towns and the 2005 bombings on London transport. This</p>

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research contributes to a wider investigation of representations of Muslim identity in contemporary culture. “Reason to Believe? Two “British Muslim” Memoirs” examines autobiographical narratives by Sarfraz Manzoor and Yasmin Hai and was published in *Culture Diaspora and Modernity in Muslim Writing* (ed. Ahmed, Morey and Yaqin, 2012), a collection which focuses on contemporary literary fiction by writers of Muslim background and literary representations of Muslims by non-Muslim writers. The impact presented in this case study is concurrent with research which will be published in a forthcoming monograph, *Writing British Muslims: Religion, Class and Multiculturalism* (Manchester University Press, 2014). This research explores representations of Muslim culture and identities in multicultural Britain in the work of contemporary British writers of South Asian Muslim heritage. It examines how the local social contexts of British cities and regions have conditioned the identities, affiliations and practices of Muslims; it traces the shift from the monocultural vision of Britain that underwrote policies and rhetoric on immigration and race in the 1980s to the neo-liberal multiculturalism of the 1990s and 2000s and post-9/11 discourses on the ‘failure’ of multiculturalism, and asks how contemporary Muslim writers have responded to and also informed this shift. This research has been presented in a range of contexts, including *Muslims, Multiculturalism and Trust: New Directions* (School of Oriental and African Studies, 2013), organised by the *Muslims, Trust and Cultural Dialogue* research project; this conference was attended by public audiences, including policy makers and media professionals, and presentations are accessible as podcasts on the event website [5:1]. Ahmed was a member of the e-advisory group “Places For All? A Multi-Media Investigation of Citizenship, Work and Belonging in a Fast-Changing Provincial City,” an Arts and Humanities Research Council Connected Communities funded project in association with the Royal Society of Arts (2011-2013).

3. References to the research

Chapters in edited collections

1. Ahmed, Rehana. “Networks of Resistance: Krishna Menon and Working-Class South Asians in Britain.” *South Asian Resistances in Britain, 1858–1947*. Ed. Rehana Ahmed and Sumita Mukherjee. London: Continuum, 2011. [Available on request].
2. Ahmed, Rehana. “Reason to Believe? Two “British Muslim” Memoirs.” *Culture, Diaspora and Modernity in Muslim Writing*. Ed. Rehana Ahmed, Peter Morey and Amina Yaqin. New York and London: Routledge, April 2012. [Submitted to REF2].
3. Ahmed, Rehana. “Equality of Citizenship.” *South Asians and the Shaping of Britain, 1870-1950: A Sourcebook*. Ed. Ruvani Ranasinha with Rehana Ahmed, Sumita Mukherjee and Florian Stadler. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012. [Available on request]

Articles in peer-reviewed journals

4. “South Asians Writing Resistance in Wartime London: *Indian Writing (1940–42)*.” *Wasafiri*. Special Issue: India in Britain: Cross-Cultural Encounters, 1870–1950. Ed. Florian Stadler, 27:2 (2012) 17-24. [Available on request]

5. Details of the impact

Ahmed is co-editor of a public online database and co-curator of a touring panel exhibition which are designed to promote awareness and understanding of the historic contribution of South Asians to British life and culture since 1870. The database *Making Britain: Discover How South Asian Shaped the Nation, 1870–1950* is one of a number of outcomes from an AHRC funded project (Principal Investigator, Professor Susheila Nasta, Open University) which investigated South Asian contributions to Britain’s literary, cultural and political life during an under-explored period of migration. Since her appointment to Teesside University in 2011, Ahmed has contributed eight new articles to the database (Anjuman-i-Islam; Chirag Din Chohan; Ghulam Sarwar Khan Chohan; Inauguration of East London Mosque; Khwaja Kamaluddin; Paradise Café Restaurant; William H. Quilliam; Taslim Ali) [5:2]. Ahmed is co-curator of an accompanying touring panel exhibition, “South Asians Making Britain, 1858–1950”, which has been hosted at a range of locations across the UK, including the British Library; Ahmed arranged for the exhibition to visit North East England

and presented a curator's talk for a public audience during its residency at Middlesbrough Central Library (October 2011).

Ahmed has collaborated with regional and national cultural organisations and public bodies to convene a range of events for public audiences and schools; these events have brought new audiences and readers to the work of contemporary writers of Muslim heritage, with a specific focus on developing audiences and reader communities in North East England. In June 2012 Ahmed convened and chaired a poetry reading and panel discussion event, "Three British Poets of Muslim Heritage: Moniza Alvi, John Siddique, Shamshad Khan;" this event was part of the annual Middlesbrough Literary Festival programme, organized by Middlesbrough Central Library and funded by Middlesbrough Council. In October 2012 Ahmed convened and chaired a public reading and panel discussion event, "Writing from a Muslim Perspective: Selma Dabbagh, Amer Hussein, Mirza Waheed" at the Durham Book Festival, an annual event produced by New Writing North (the writing development agency for North East England) for Durham County Council and supported by Durham University and Arts Council England. In October 2012 Ahmed convened educational visits to two north east school primary schools (Stanley Burnside Primary School and South Hetton Primary School) by Wendy Meddour, author of the Cinnamon Grove children's book series, which explore the lives of two British Muslim families. These activities were organized in association with the Durham Book Festival and New Writing North.

Ahmed is Online Reviews Editor for *Wasafiri Extra*, an open access website which provides access to original content, including reviews of new writing and 'Summer Reads' and 'Christmas List' recommendations. This site is affiliated to *Wasafiri: The Magazine of Contemporary Writing*, a publication dedicated to the promotion of contemporary international writing [5:3]. Ahmed is co-author of two articles published by the open access Huffington Post online: "Muslims Protest Against H. G. Wells Book in 1930s Britain" (with Stadtler, 19 September 2012) [5:4] and "Literary Controversies Since the Rushdie Affair" (with Chambers, 20 September 2012) [5:5]. These articles were written to coincide with the publication of Salman Rushdie's memoir *Joseph Anton* and served to foster and inform public debate about religious minority protests against creative works [5:6].

The following research beneficiary testimonies provide evidence of the impact of this research:

- Selected comments from audience evaluation questionnaire (*South Asians Making Britain, 1858-1950*, exhibition and talk, 2011): "Very useful information"; "Interesting snapshots of research"; "The website is going to be a good research source"; "Very interesting and informative. New information for me about participation in war and political activities"; "Enjoyed it very much. I look forward to exploring the Open University website." An audience member described the talk as an "excellent and thought provoking event" in an online blog entry [5:6].
- Development and Operations Manager, Middlesbrough Library Service (*South Asians Making Britain, 1858-1950*, exhibition and talk, 2011 / "Three British Poets of Muslim Heritage", Middlesbrough Literary Festival, 2012): "Middlesbrough Library Service initially worked with Rehana Ahmed to celebrate Black History Month in 2011. Prior to this, the service had only been able to promote the month with limited activities, such as displays and book lists, however Rehana's touring panel exhibition and talk, generated a lot of interest within the local community, and we know that people visited the library, specifically to see the display, and listen to the talk - some of whom had not previously visited the library. The Library Service received such positive feedback about the event, that [the] Adult Services Manager and Literary Festival Organiser, was keen for Rehana to revisit the library during the 2012 Literary Festival, at which Rehana contributed a talk entitled "Three British Poets of Muslim Heritage: Moniza Alvi, John Siddique, Shamshad Khan". This was again a successful event, again enabling the library service to reach a wider audience. We would very much like to work together with Rehana in the future."
- Moniza Alvi (Author and panel member, "Three British Poets of Muslim Heritage", Middlesbrough Literary Festival, 2012): "The event was a brilliant and unusual opportunity for me to read with two other poets of Muslim heritage and to reflect, with the audience, on our different worlds and cultural backgrounds. . . . As well as enjoyable, I feel such events with

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readers who really do speak to each other in this way are important for cultural understanding. It would be marvellous to have more of them.”

- Programme Manager, Festivals and Events, New Writing North (“Writing from a Muslim Perspective”, Durham Book Festival, 2012): “Drawing upon Rehana's expertise to programme this event at the [Durham Book] festival, helped us to bring a range of new authors to the festival and hopefully allowed us to introduce their work to new readers as well as existing fans of their work. The event, which was for an audience of 30 people, sold-out very quickly, demonstrating the high-level of interest it generated in our festival visitors; anecdotal feedback from audience members was also positive. The popularity of this event means that New Writing North will certainly consider programming events with a similar theme in future.”
- Wendy Meddour (Author, educational visits, Durham Book Festival, 2012): “My trip to Durham - and the school visits organised by Rehana Ahmed - gave me a wonderful opportunity to meet (and enthuse) children from very deprived areas. Many of them had never met an author, and it was touching to experience their excitement. It was also great fun to help them realise their own creative potential. As it was a predominantly white area, the school visits were also an opportunity to introduce the children to the other cultures (largely Muslim) presented in my books (*A Hen in the Wardrobe* and *The Black Cat Detectives*). They responded extremely well and we had a lot of fun discussing characters, playing with plot and hopefully dismantling prejudice!”
- Selma Dabbagh (Author and panel member, “Writing from a Muslim Perspective”, Durham Book Festival, 2012): “I am a British Palestinian writer of fiction and spoke at the event about my first novel, *Out of It*. . . I shared a panel with the British Kashmiri writer, Mirza Waheed and the British Pakistani writer Aamer Hussein, neither of whom I knew before the event. Our styles of writing were very different from each other, but there were thematic similarities that Rehana drew out and our works complemented each other well. It was an unusual experience for me as a writer (and as an individual) to be presented under the heading of a 'Muslim' writer, coming from a very secular background, but Rehana encouraged me to participate in the panel despite my reservations. I believe that it was correct to do so, for it is as important to show the diversity of approaches that can fall under the heading, as the rejection of a particular religious heritage is as important in showing the variety found in the 'Muslim world' as well as those who define themselves by the title in a more devout way. Much of a writer's job is to dismantle stereotypes and panels such as the one I participated in in Durham went some way to bringing the diversity of voices found in the Muslim world to new yet curious audiences. The questions were thoughtful and the event was respectful and enjoyable. . . it was great to work with Rehana who was extremely thorough in her reading and understanding of our work and conscientious in her presentation of us.”

6. Sources to corroborate the impact

1. <http://www.muslimstrustdialogue.org/index.php/past-events/119-muslims-multiculturalism-and-trust-new-directions>.
2. <http://www8.open.ac.uk/researchprojects/makingbritain/>.
3. <http://www.wasafiri.org/pages/content/index.asp?PageID=265>.
4. http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/rehana-ahmed/muslims-protest-against-h_b_1895942.html
5. http://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/dr-claire-chambers/rushdie-muslims-books-controversy_b_1895954.html
6. <http://marshtowers.blogspot.co.uk/2011/10/making-britain.html>

[Archived web pages available on request.]