

ISSUE #5 | MT21

IKHLAAS

The OUISoc Magazine

CONTRAST

APPROACHING
OXFORD WITH THE
RIGHT MINDSET

PHOTOGRAPHY
CRASH COURSE

ISLAM & SCIENCE:
A CONTRAST OF
WORLDVIEWS



OXFORD UNIVERSITY
ISLAMIC SOCIETY



إِخْلَاصٌ

Ikhlaas

[Noun] Sincerity





Issue 5

Contrast



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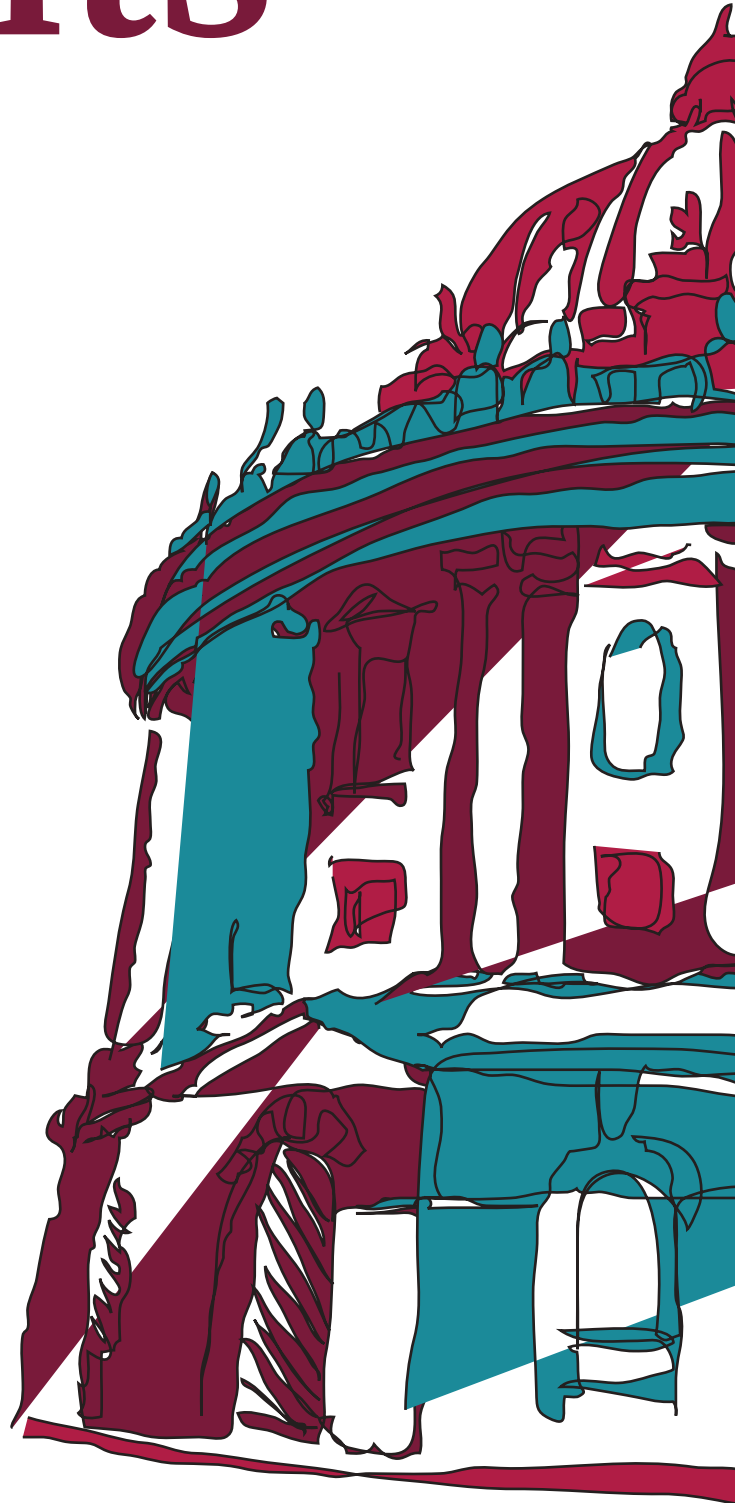
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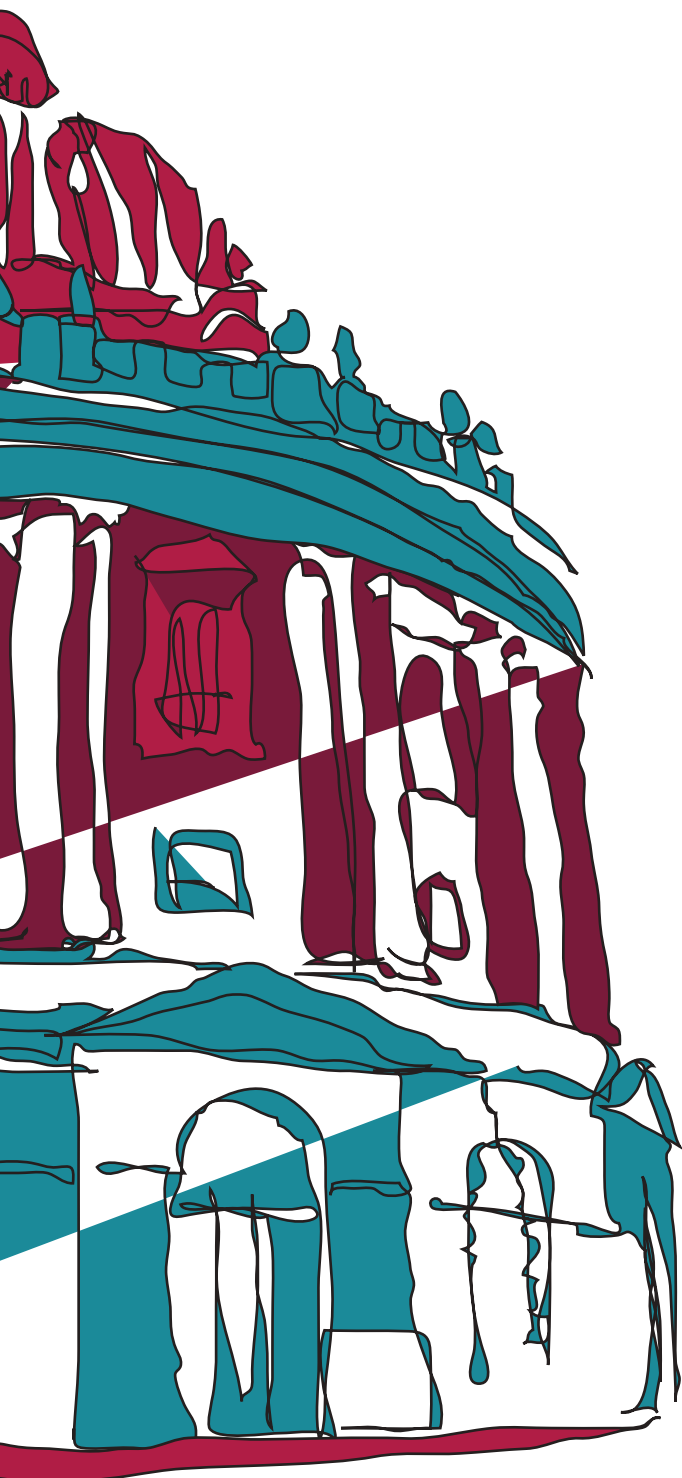
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IN THE NAME OF GOD,
THE MOST GRACIOUS, THE MOST MERCIFUL

FROM THE EDITOR

As-salaamu alaykum everyone! Alhamdulillah, we're made up to finally share this issue with you all. The bar's been set by previous issues, but I think I speak for the whole team in saying we've been blown away by the community's contributions for this issue. Your writing has had us laughing one minute and welling up the next; they've traced Muslim perspectives in both science and poetry; they've been both lighthearted and made compelling cases for their points of view: it's been a joy putting Contrast together.

As well as in our Community works sections and dotted throughout the magazine, our contributors' creativity is showcased in a new project: we asked for responses to our special feature, and received some really moving work which we've printed alongside. Here, contrast isn't just the interactions of opposites, but also about the ways we rework and respond to the ideas around us - and turns out that prize-winning poetry doesn't provide all that bad a starting point!

It's so wonderful to see the ISoc welcome a new cohort in its usual arms-open style - goodness knows it's been a long time coming. But from near or far, something Ezziddin writes in our last article rings true:

"There was something special, something inexpressible in this little pocket of students."

I'm with him on this: even in twenty-two articles, the things that make this community such a gift are impossible to sum up. But insha'allah, like the first four, this issue of Ikhlāas can provide a glimpse into what that gift might be.

A big thank you to the Pres team for their support and to all our wonderful writers and artists - and of course, thank you to my incredible magazine team for all their sincere effort: may Allah bless you all! We hope you enjoy this term's issue - and this term alongside it, insha'allah.

Wa laykum as-salaam,
Tayiba Sulaiman

MAGAZINE TEAM



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Achieving Balance b

“Allah guides to His Light whom He wills.”

(Surah An-Nur)

Bismillah-ir Rahman-ir Raheem.

Knowing yourself is one of the greatest blessings that Allah (SWT) can grant us. He tells us about ourselves and what He has done for us in Surah An-Nisa (28):

“And Allah wants to make things easy; and mankind was created weak.”

Surely it is Allah who knows us best of all, and in this ayah, Allah (SWT) tells us that He wants to make His commands and Qadr achievable for us because He knows our ability - we struggle when torn between contrasting extremes, but thrive when we are able to balance them.

In a Hadith (Bukhari, Muslim) narrated by Anas ibn Malik (May Allah be pleased with him), three men from the Companions came to the house of the

Prophet (SAW) to ask how He conducted Himself at home. Seeing this, they thought that the amount the Prophet (SAW) worshipped His Lord (SWT) was not very much, so each of them made a choice: one said he would engage in night prayers every night, another said he would fast every day and the last companion said he would avoid all distractions by forgoing marriage.

In contrast, the Prophet (SAW) said: "For me, sometimes I sleep and sometimes I pray night prayers; sometimes I eat and sometimes I fast, and I am married. And whosoever does not want to worship in My way, he is not following My religion". In this Hadith, we see that each of the companions wanted to achieve or progress by going to an extreme in their worship, when Allah (SWT) never wanted us to make things difficult for ourselves.



by Knowing Ourselves

Shayk Faid Mohammed Said

All the Prophets ate, interacted in the marketplace and had families; like them, the believer needs to achieve balance. We should do the compulsory forms for worship, and whatever we can of the additional forms, but should not push ourselves past the point of difficulty. The Prophet (SAW) would accept the invitations of His companions - He (SAW) would laugh with them and they would enjoy His company, as He (SAW) was very humble. But if we cut ourselves off from everyone and restrict ourselves, that is making things difficult for ourselves. We have a duty to Allah (SWT), but also to our families, neighbours, children, parents, and hence we must maintain and enjoy this balance.

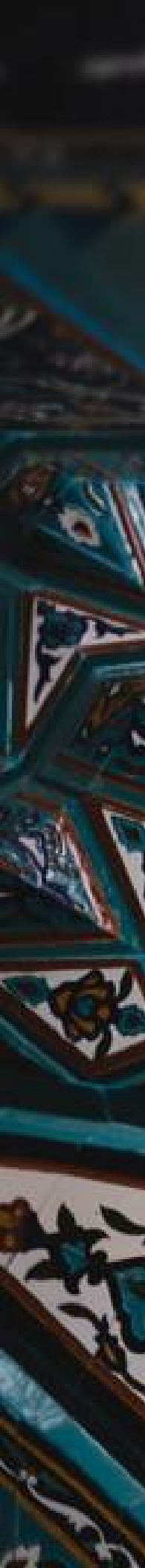
We must always remember that no matter what we do, we cannot encompass everything that is good or beneficial. The Prophet (SAW) said, "Indeed this Religion is very easy and anyone who tries to be extreme in their religion in striving for excellence, will be overpowered; so you should try to be near to perfection and receive the good tidings that you will be rewarded; and gain strength by worshipping in the mornings, the afternoons, and during the last hours of the nights." (Al-Bukhari: 39).

In relation to this Hadith, Ibn Rajab Al Hanbali said "If someone is extreme in their worship and practices, they will end up stopping it all together". This does not mean we should stop

trying to perfect our worship or doing righteous acts, but we are warned against going to extremes in our voluntary worship, as this eventually leads to neglecting that which has been made compulsory. Worship is not something we achieve in a day; it is a *lifelong* effort, as Allah (SWT) said to the Prophet (SAW): "And worship your Lord until the day of certainty (i.e. death)".

Allah (SWT) knows our nature, and our provision is written and guaranteed; when we understand this, we understand that Allah (SWT) wants us to live balanced lives in the interests of our own wellbeing. For this reason, Allah (SWT) made the doors of halal provision very wide, and the doors of haram provision very narrow.

"Say, 'Who has forbidden the adornment of Allah which He has produced for His servants and the good [lawful] things of provision?' Say, 'They are for those who believe during the worldly life [but] exclusively for them on the Day of Resurrection.' Thus do We detail the verses for a people who know. Say, 'My Lord has only forbidden immoralities - what is apparent of them and what is concealed - and sin, and oppression without right, and that you associate with Allah that for which He has not sent down authority, and that you say about Allah that which you do not know.'"
(Surah Al-Araf 32-33)



Allah (SWT) wants comfort for us, as everything has been created for us, but He also does not want us to waste everything we have; hence we should not be too greedy nor overspend. We should always strike a balance, as Allah (SWT) said:

**“And do not make your hand [as] chained to your neck or extend it completely and [thereby] become blamed and insolvent.”
(Surah Al-Isra, 29)**

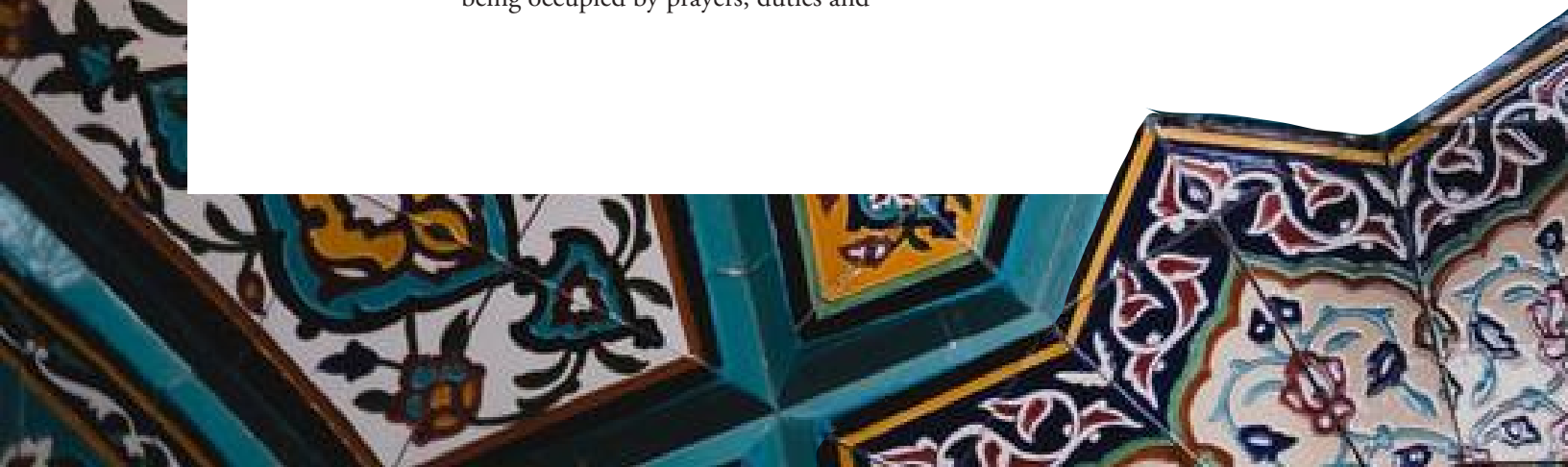
Unless we learn to strike a balance between the requirements of our faith, needs of this world and our public and private responsibilities, we cannot achieve comfort and ease. The greatest achievement of faith is to have this balance in our belief, character, dealings with one another, and our morality; a balance between going into the depths of our religion and spirituality and from spending all of our energy in trying to achieve worldly desires.

This balance cannot be more clearly defined than the example of the Prophet (SAW), who in the midst of being occupied by prayers, duties and

spreading the message of Islam, still found time to race with His wife Aisha, play with His grandchildren Imam Hasan and Imam Husain (Peace be upon them), visit Sayedah Fatima Az Zahra (Peace be upon her), and spread His love to the community. *This* is balance.

Allah (SWT) knows that we, as humans, are not made for either intense, detached spirituality or exclusively worldly lives. People can be hard on themselves and on others, but through both ease and hardship we should escape to Allah (SWT) as He is much more Merciful to us than we are to ourselves. Allah (SWT) said to all of us in Surah Ad-Dharyat (50): “Escape towards Allah!” He opened the door and invited you to run to Him whenever you are faced with difficulty, even if you have disobeyed Him! And when you run or escape from somewhere, you do not carry anything with you. So escape from your fear to His safety!

May Allah (SWT) purify our hearts and intentions, make us worthy of following Rasulullah (SAW) and make us grateful for being part of His community.



Shaykh Faid Mohammed Said


Shaykh Faid Mohammed Said from Eritrea, and is an Islamic scholar, teacher and author. He has spoken widely on international Islamic community cohesion and participated in many global platforms. 2018 – 2021 listed in the world's 500 most influential Muslims by Georgetown University's the Prince Al-Waleed Bin Talaal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding and Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Centre of Jordan.

Shaykh Faid was the Director of the Larayb Institute of Education (LiFE), Resident Scholar at the Harrow Central Mosque and Principal of Al-Madinah College.

He is currently The Imam of The London central Mosque & The Islamic Cultural Centre, Also he is the Secretary General for The Commission of Fatwa and Islamic Affairs.

<http://www.thenur.net/>



A hand holds a soft-serve ice cream cone with alternating swirls of white vanilla and dark chocolate. The background is a blurred city street at sunset, with warm orange and yellow light reflecting off buildings and trees. People are walking in the distance, and a stroller is visible on the left.

Student Blog

In this section, Salmaan, Fatemeh and Coral take a personal look at instances of contrast in their experiences. From timetables to the unexpected, from one culture to another, their responses genuinely moved us.

Photo by Khadijah Hafeji



As we embark on new chapters within our lives, we are faced with challenges that can be wildly unfamiliar to us. Prior to Oxford, I had always been surrounded by people similar to myself. Coming from Southall, West London, an area that is almost entirely populated by ethnic minorities, my community was very much its own bubble. Growing up, I was around people from all over the world. As a consequence, my vocabulary was literally global. I would pick up phrases from my friends' mother tongues and add them to my everyday speech. I would speak a brand of English that the typical Oxford student would struggle to completely understand. This was a huge contrast to life in college. Suddenly, I had to prevent myself from responding to my peers' comments and stories with "Say Wallahi!". The sight of chunks of butter being stirred into baked beans in the shared kitchen was just one of many strange experiences. I was no stranger to contrast, but never had I felt myself to be in such an atypical environment before.

My secondary school experience was far from normal. You see, I did not attend the local comprehensive or a grammar school, or receive a high-end education at a private school. I went to an Islamic secondary school where I spent my formative years. My year group consisted of seventeen of us – that was it. I had Islamic studies five times a week - more than any other lesson - and we called our teachers Brother or Sister; I even had a teacher that we called Brother Ian, despite him not even being

Muslim. The way Brother Ian interacted with us is something I won't forget. Despite not being Muslim, he would fast every other day in Ramadan with us; he showed Islam the utmost respect. He would even oversee lunch detentions for those who were caught talking before Salah. He didn't need to do that. However, when faced with a completely different cultural world, he treated it with the utmost respect. Seeing Brother Ian's adjustment to an environment so far away from his own resonated with me. If Brother Ian could acclimatise to the environment of an Islamic school, then there was no reason for me to feel anxious.

I am still getting used to being in Oxford, and the ISoc has helped massively in providing a hub of familiarity for me. In college, I am still adjusting to being in a space where there are very few Muslims and people of colour in general. While I feel I have been able to overcome it, I continue to navigate these new spaces, I know that I will encounter things that I have never experienced before. Some I may find quite interesting, and others may leave me in states of disbelief. But ultimately, I pray to Allah سبحانه و تعالى to allow me to remain steadfast and go through this new experience with ease.

Salmaan Nur
2nd year History and Politics
Oriel College



Having arrived in Oxford for the first time a month before the start of last Michaelmas, it's safe to say I was super nervous, questioning whether this was the right place for someone like me. I had moved to the UK for sixth form and never thought I'd apply to Oxbridge because I "wasn't smart enough", but my academic advisor encouraged me to give applying a go. Neither of my parents went to university, so I was navigating a new field with the help of my teachers and peers.

My first term at Oxford was an incredible experience. I was looking forward to starting a new chapter in my life but also slightly afraid – I didn't know what to expect from Oxford or Biochemistry. Being away from my family and home, I also had my parents' concern to juggle; they worried about the difficulties I might face abroad. I had to constantly reassure them that I would be alright and call them (or text them at the very least) every day in Michaelmas to feel less homesick! ISoc felt like a home away from home due to the warm and welcoming environment. The heaps of events organized by other sisters meant that I could engage with the lovely community in different settings, which was especially comforting when I started to get homesick towards the middle of term.

After the whirlwind that was Michaelmas, I couldn't wait to go back to Dubai for the vacation, but I never would've guessed that I would be stuck there for both Hilary and Trinity! I was happy and worried at the same time; comfortable because I stayed close to family during the lockdown and concerned about the things I'd be missing back in Oxford. Hilary brought two main challenges: adjusting to the differing time zone

and my mum calling me for lunch in the middle of my tutorials.

With both isolation and exams, Trinity proved to be the most difficult term. As most people were back in Oxford, busy with Ramadan and revision, I found it tricky to connect with my peers over in the UK, and I worried I might be missing out on valuable educational sessions. Having said that, being able to pray tarawih, prepare for iftar with my mum and go to family gatherings was a breath of fresh air, especially with a set of increasingly stressful Prelims creeping up on me at the time. There was no way of knowing whether the online exams would work or not, or whether we'd be hit by technical difficulties. Thankfully, our department was very supportive when it came to accommodating our needs.

It always amazes me how our expectations of the future can be upended by how things eventually pan out. I never imagined being in Oxford, let alone studying at Oxford from my own home! But alhamdulillah, we plan and Allah plans. I look forward to starting my second year in-person insha'allah, exploring Oxford and meeting many more members of the ISoc whom I couldn't meet last year.

**Fatemeh Akbarpoor,
2nd year Biochemistry,
Magdalen College**

My wardrobe isn't big enough anymore, I think as I unpack my bags from Oxford. No, it isn't that it's not big enough, it's not long enough, I realise. I consider folding away the new abayas I have acquired in the back corner of my drawers. That way my atheist parents won't see them, bringing up a whole difficult conversation about my reversion to Islam: "Do you have to dress that way?" and "Why are you hiding yourself?"

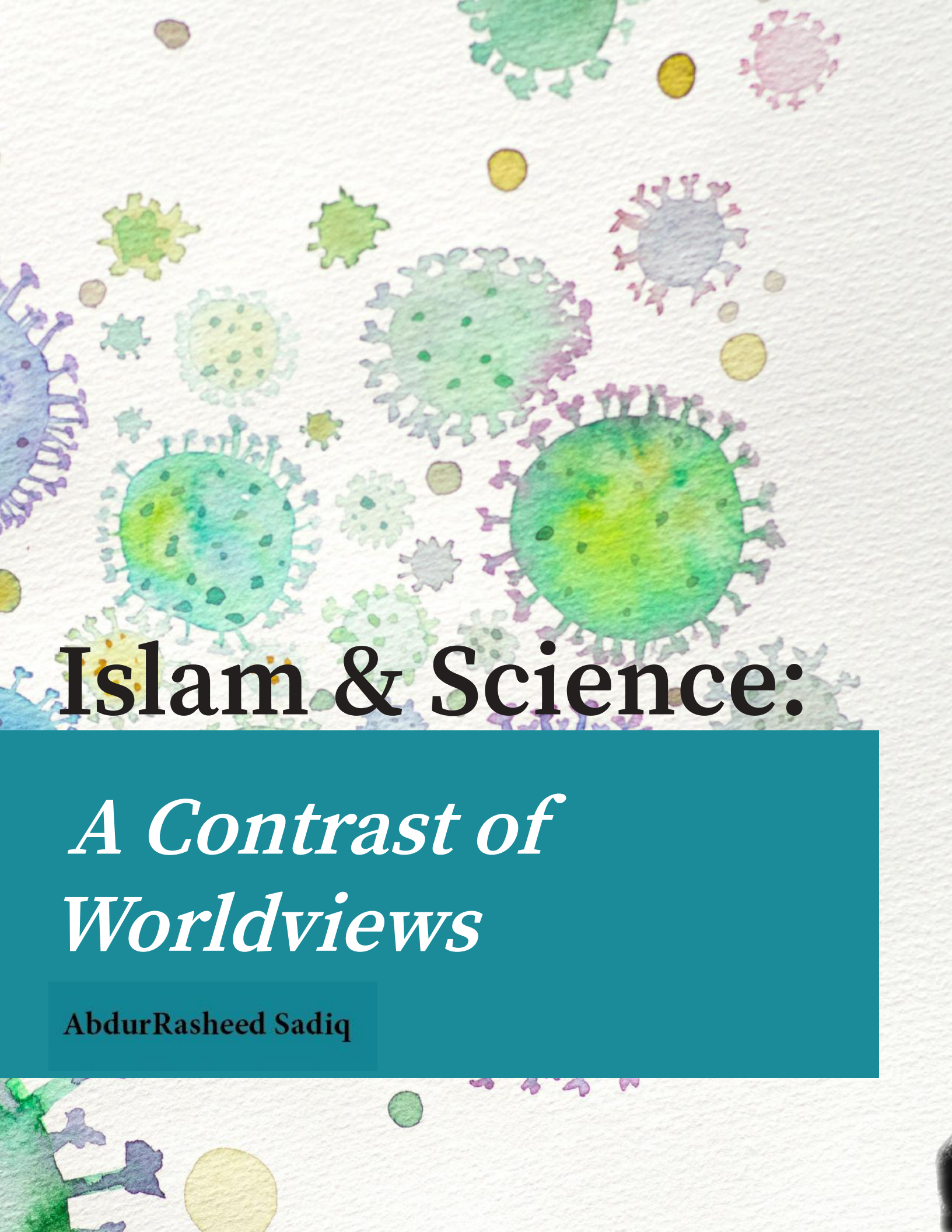
Home represents an imperfect compromise of contradictions: a constant guilt between upholding my Islamic values versus avoiding tough discussions. I know that Islam teaches to obey our parents, as long as it doesn't go against Islam to do so - this can be the challenging part. Alhamdulillah my family have all been relatively accepting; they are good people and I know things could be far worse. But it is a big adjustment, and it is in the small visible details that the pain on both sides comes out. When I first wore hijab, it felt like my parents were grieving; they even spoke of it in those terms, as if they had lost part of me. Ramadan also represented something 'extreme and dangerous' that I was 'forcing myself' to do. Their questions and comments hurt so much and revealed so much fear and rejection of something so close and sacred to me that it hurt to confront them and I'd change the subject. I subconsciously learned to make my faith barely visible at home.

I am thankful that I first wore hijab in a place where there are quite literally no hijabis, it was difficult at first but equally it gave me so much confidence. Very few people in my hometown have ever so much as spoken to a Muslim. I don't know if it is my being a revert that makes people comfortable to ask questions, including some very misinformed ones, but I am glad of their desire to understand and for these opportunities to hopefully give someone a new perspective. I realise I need to apply the same logic to my parents. Their questions are not rejection but an effort to understand, and in avoiding difficult conversations I have contributed to their apprehension about Islam. How can I expect them to understand my faith if I rarely explain it?

The contrast of the openness in my Islamic identity between home and university hurts me, my family and my imaan (faith). I try to take small steps to bridge the gap and reconnect myself with the intentions behind each practice in my life. I know my struggles as a revert are not unique; it is inevitable that we will all have slightly different values from the rest of our family but in cultivating empathy both ways, we can learn to better understand each other and foster stronger relationships. Just as it was the small details which brought out the pain, it is the small touches which help to heal it. My parents buy me a scarf, they wait to eat iftar with me, and I hang my scarves and abayas on my door where everybody can see them. I answer the questions as they come.

Coral Benfield,
3rd year Biochemistry,
Oriel College





Islam & Science:

A Contrast of Worldviews

AbdurRasheed Sadiq

Bismillah-ir Rahman-ir Raheem.

In the Name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

There is no contradiction between science and Islam. Many of us have been told this since childhood, and it is a belief we proudly proclaim.¹ And yet, perhaps especially for students of science, it is a belief that exists on our tongues more so than in our hearts. It is difficult not to sense a tension between two seemingly contradictory ways of seeing the world: on one hand we have a theistic, religious worldview which tells us of God's continuous action in a living world; on the other, we have an atheistic, naturalistic² world view which seems to leave no room for God and which seems fully capable of explaining everything *independently*. Science students in particular will have become adept at straddling these two narratives, looking to interpret experimental data without any recourse to the divine, and then attending the mosque to pray to the One who created those results.

If science endeavours to explain everything without any reference to God or religion, is it not troubling that science "works" so well?

What does that mean for our faith? Do we not find the argument that religion is for the primitive and is no longer needed at least partially convincing? Why

does religion always seem to be on the backfoot? As Muslims, we have become experts in suppressing these questions, and I see no fault in that, as the foundation of our faith stems from our trust in the truthfulness of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and has little to do with the philosophy of science. Feel

free to stop reading then, if you feel like this article is of no interest to you.

However, for

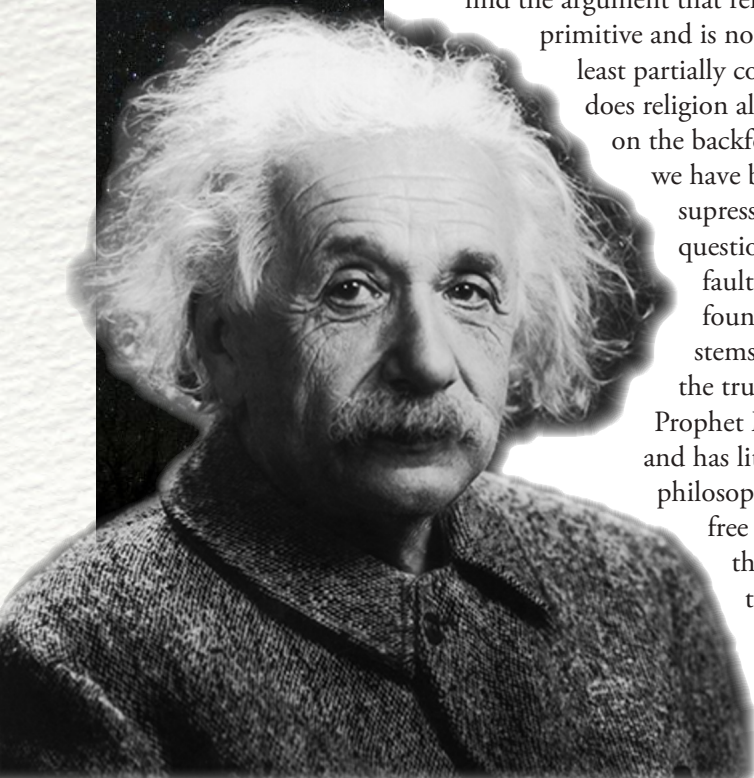
those who can't suppress these questions so easily, such as myself, I sincerely hope that this article will be of some benefit in helping to organise your thoughts.

What is natural science?

Interestingly, no definitive answer to this question actually exists. But there are a number of things the natural sciences all have in common, and among them is an implicit commitment to something called methodological naturalism. If Einstein had simply said "God did that" when considering the photoelectric effect, and drawn a line under it there, we would not have quantum mechanics.³ If Newton had simply shrugged his shoulders after the apple landed on his head, we wouldn't have much science at all! Evidently, there is no other way to do science other than to look for natural causes to observable phenomena. This is what is meant by methodological naturalism. It is an *operational* constraint on scientists - a constraint on the *methodology* of science - but it is emphatically *not* the same as believing that the "natural" is all there is. Both Newton and Einstein believed in God.⁴

To practice science, one adopts the scientific method. One produces a hypothesis, considers what observable physical phenomena should occur were that hypothesis true, and then continuously attempts to prove the hypothesis wrong by testing whether or not the predicted phenomena actually occur. This process continues indefinitely - in most cases, one can never definitely prove a hypothesis - and all of this is done under the *constraint* of methodological naturalism.

Arising from the scientific method is an important topic in the philosophy of science: realism. As an example, consider a scientist who records an intriguing result in his or her particle detector⁵ which cannot be explained



with the accepted science of the day. They might hypothesise the existence of a new particle, and when considering how that particle would be behaving inside their detector, realise that it would exactly produce the observed result. They may run several other experiments to test other predictions, and confirm all of them. Their new theory seems to be successful, as it predicts the outcome of their experiments perfectly. But does that mean the particle really exists?

A scientific realist would argue that it does, but a scientific anti-realist would argue for agnosticism at most: after all, can we definitively state that no other hypothesis could have made all the same predictions?⁶ More explicitly, consistency with data is not proof of existence; “it works, therefore it is” would not be accepted by the anti-realists as a sound argument.

In addition, if there are “unnatural” or “supernatural” forces⁷ at play in the world, our self-imposed restraint, which allows us only to consider the “natural”, could be leading us to interpret such forces as a new particle, when in fact no such particle exists. So on a deeper level, methodological naturalism may not be reflective of reality.

These considerations are not merely of academic interest. They have significant consequences for understanding the relationship between science and our faith.

Does science really “work” so well?

This depends solely on what one considers to be the objective of science. If it is to understand how to produce, predict, control and exploit certain phenomena (such as electricity), science has been a resounding success; modern

technology testifies to this. But if it is to understand the essence of reality and discover what the world is really made of, scientific anti-realism renders its success uncertain, although this uncertainty is not understood by society at large.⁸

Stemming from this misunderstanding is a commonplace argument we often find threatening: science, constrained by methodological naturalism, is capable of explaining everything, and therefore naturalism is justified as an ideology. (“What more need do we have of God to explain the world?”, as is so commonly asked.) But since we cannot know the truth of these scientific explanations, we need not feel threatened by their comprehensiveness. It is a circular argument to look for a natural description of the world and then, after formulating it, to claim it as proof that only the natural exists. The fact that we can formulate such a description serves not as proof of anything, but only as a testament to the regularity of God’s creation.⁹

Understanding science as a Muslim

One day during labs, I was charging two parallel metallic plates with like charges and then observing how they repelled each other. At that moment, I realised that it was really Allah سبحانه و تعالى moving these plates apart, and everything clicked. I can’t see the electric field, and nobody ever has or ever will. It may or may not exist. It’s a convenient tool - a good mathematical model - for predicting the plates’ movement exactly, but that’s all. It is possible that it exists, and God exercised His command through it; it is just as possible that angels pulled the plates apart, and God exercised His command through them. The former is no more plausible than the latter. Everything we see in nature is an act of God, and the argument that religion is primitive and science has found the truth is fallacious.



“Do they not see the birds above them spreading and closing their wings? It is only the Lord of Mercy who holds them up: He watches over everything.”
[67:19]

“If you ask the disbelievers who created the heavens and earth and who harnessed the sun and moon, they are sure to say, ‘God.’ Then why do they turn away from Him?”
[29:61]

We should have mental fortitude enough as Muslims to resist this cultural pressure to reject our “primitive” beliefs, and to recognise the epistemological deficiencies in the naturalistic worldview being sold to us as a replacement. Scientists (especially physicists) like to mockingly refer to God in their books and talks with such comments as “If we do discover a theory of everything [...] we would truly know the mind of God,”¹⁰ and it creates the impression that religion is losing ground to an ever-advancing scientific view of the Universe. But science cannot so definitively determine the truth. These comments, if anything, evoke the following verses:

“If you ask them who created the heavens and earth, they are sure to say, ‘God.’ Say, ‘Praise belongs to God,’ but most of them do not understand.”
[31:25]

And Allah سبحانه و تعالى knows best.

1. Perhaps with the exception of evolution, for there does seem to be an explicit contradiction there between scripture and the science. For those looking for an in-depth analysis of Islam and evolution, I highly recommend “Islam and Evolution: Al-Ghazālī and the Modern Evolutionary Paradigm” by Shoaib Ahmed Malik. The e-book is (legally) available for free online and on Solo.
2. Naturalism is defined by the Oxford English Dictionary as “the philosophical belief that everything arises from natural properties and causes, and supernatural or spiritual explanations are excluded or discounted.”
3. This is just a historical example. The general point is that if a scientist saw something and didn’t look for a natural reason, they would not be a very good scientist.
4. Newton was a Christian who rejected the divinity of Jesus, and who had a number of unpublished religious writings, including a lengthy Biblical commentary. Einstein had very unorthodox beliefs, rejecting pantheism but endorsing an impersonal God who was revealed through the order in creation.
5. The search for subatomic particles is a big part of modern physics. Very advanced and expensive particle detectors, several kilometres in length, exist to play around with particles in the hope of discovering new ones.
6. This refers to scientific underdetermination, a common argument against scientific realism.
7. “Forces” is meant here as a general term and not as a scientific one.
8. The general public tends to see science as a steady progression towards truth. However, Thomas Kuhn, in his famous book “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions”, argues that science is not a cumulative enterprise, and that our knowledge should be seen as shape-shifting rather than as growing ever larger, and that our knowledge will continue to shape-shift indefinitely, without ever arriving at a final truth.
9. Furthermore, it can be argued that there are things science cannot explain - for example, why nature is so ordered as to allow science in the first place - but this is beyond the scope of this article.
10. From “A Brief History of Time” by Stephen Hawking. Some students of science may even be accustomed to their lecturers, tutors and co-workers speaking in this way. It is not uncommon.



Welfare &





Lifestyle

This term's welfare section has a little bit of everything: Muaz guides us through giving your photos that extra edge, and we're treated to a seasonal tour through Oxford by everyone's favourite tree specialist Iman Awan. Alongside those lighthearted pieces, we have Ibrahim's sincere advice to anyone starting (or wanting to re-start) their Oxford year on a clean slate, Charlie's reflections on how care for others and for ourselves in the process, and tips on how to prepare for the unknowns beyond university from some of our alumni - with stunning artwork from Sophie Thomas, Coral Benfield and Mahira Muhsanat.

Photo by Khadijah Hafeji



Approaching Oxford

I would describe starting at Oxford as a whirlwind experience. The jump from A-level to university might be the biggest you ever make, and the unfamiliarity of a new environment hits quite hard. But fear not, many of us have been in this position and we're here to help you get through it all. In my sixth and final year at Oxford, I'd like to share six pieces of advice that helped me approach my time at Oxford with the right mindset.

1 Set your goals

Do you want to leverage Oxford's prestige to get a high paying job? Or are you truly interested in the subject and wish to pursue it further as an academic? Is it a bit of both?

Ask yourself these questions throughout your time here – things can change, and that's fine. If you are unsure, break down your degree into the core transferable skills it can provide, for example problem solving, critical thinking, working

under pressure; these are skills that will benefit you as a working adult, and can be developed even through studying a degree that has nothing to do with your future occupation(s).

Knowing this will motivate you and help you track your progress with a personalised metric that matches your own priorities and not the priorities of others (which may be valid, but might not be appropriate for you).

2 Don't be intimidated

It's important to accept that you'll be surrounded with other people who were all top of their classes. Standards are higher and some will be more academically able than you. This is no reason to be intimidated or dampen your ambition! Remember, no one is born good at their subject, and there is always a process by which they reached

the stage they're at now. Seek advice from people more experienced than yourself and make your game-plan to improve at your subject. Becoming hyper-fixated on grades and outcomes can cripple this process. Outcomes are in the hands of Allah SWT and all you have is your intention and سَعْيٌ (effort; endeavour).

3 Collaborate

Finding people in the ISoc who do the same subject is a game-changer. Pool resources, bounce ideas off each other, and seek advice from older students. Being around people in the same boat as you makes tough times more bearable. I've found that it also helps to highlight your blind spots and

piece together nuggets of information from tutors at different colleges with different areas of expertise. You don't have to be best mates but forming a working relationship will prove invaluable (so long as you aren't distracting each other!).

with the Right Mindset

Ibrahim El-Gaby

4 Use your time wisely

Parkinson's law states: "work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion"; I have found this to be painfully true. Allocating the entire day to work often makes you work inefficiently whilst missing out on non-academic activities. The more hours you work consecutively, the more you lose efficiency, so find your sweet spot.

Extracurricular events happen at fixed times, whilst work can be done at any time (provided it's not too late!) Build your schedule around things you can't move but be realistic as to what you can achieve with the time left over. This will train you to be more time-efficient, and give you a light at the end of the tunnel to get you through the week.

5 Judge your tutors

Tutors in Oxford are usually academics – they're very smart, but not always necessarily good teachers. Sometimes you'll have a great tutor, but one who has an agenda that doesn't match yours. Examples include teaching content that isn't relevant or useful, wanting work done in an unnecessarily particular way, setting absurdly heavy workloads, and so on.

Try and suss out your tutors early on (again, seek advice from older students) and be proactive in making up for any of their shortcomings. Make the most of the good tutors and don't shy away from asking them for extra feedback; they can often hold gems of information that they forget to give unless prompted.

6 Learn how to learn

There is no shortage of YouTube productivity gurus telling you how to study these days. Ironically, you'll find yourself procrastinating by watching them! The reality is that different study techniques work for different courses, different topics within those courses and for people and their varying attention spans.

Be adaptable and evaluate whether your study technique is effective or

if it just makes you feel like you're working but not learning (I like to call this pseudo-work – for example fancy notetaking with zero information retention). First year, and specifically the first term (plus the vacation after) is a good low-risk opportunity to experiment, find out what works for you and try to stick to it. If it's not working for whatever reason, troubleshoot and update.

Implementing all the above at once can be difficult; 6 years in and I'm still trying! It is the nature of mankind that we are forgetful and imperfect. There will be highs and lows, so seek Allah's help – he makes easy what appears difficult – use both the highs and lows as opportunities to draw closer to him, thus making them both rewarding experiences insha'Allah.

وفقكم الله

May Allah grant you his *tawfiq* (success).



Watercolour by Tayiba Sulaiman

Crash Course: Photography

Muaz Nawaz

Whether you just like to capture the moment or want to be the next Instagram baddie, this article is for you! I'm not a professional photographer by any means, but photography is something I thoroughly enjoy, so I'll be sharing some pointers and sprinkling in a couple of examples along the way. Even though I primarily use my DSLR - since its lens, known as the 'nifty fifty', is both affordable and great for portraits, street photography and even tightly-framed landscapes - smartphone cameras can give DSLR cameras a run for their money if you use their wide-angle lens correctly. You want to choose the right camera for each situation, but don't worry, the tips in this article should be applicable to casual smartphone photography.



See things from another perspective

Now, a detail that may seem arbitrary but which makes a big difference is whether you take your picture in landscape or portrait - there's a few questions you can ask to help make that decision. First of all, what are you using the image for and where are you viewing it? If the image is going to be viewed on your smartphone, a portrait orientation will optimise the space on your screen better; the opposite is true if it'll be viewed on a computer or laptop.

Second of all, what do you want your picture to include? If more of what you want to capture is in the horizontal

plane, you'll want to shoot in landscape. If you want to zero in on something in your field of view, you'll want to shoot in portrait. Despite the terms referring to landscape and portrait photography, the orientation of your image shouldn't be bound by these terms. Just because you're taking a picture of a landscape, that doesn't mean that you have to shoot in a landscape orientation. Taking pictures of the same subject but with different orientations produces different results, which is illustrated in the bell tower example - as by shooting in landscape the length of the subject is captured.





Don't get exposed

In DSLR photography, ISO, Shutter speed and Aperture are your “holy trinity”, and they all contribute to the exposure of your image. I won't get into how each affects the exposure of your image as that's an article in itself (and a very boring one at that) but I want to emphasise the importance of exposure - it can make or break a photo. The aim of the game is to be neither over or under-exposed; you'll lose your details in

your shadows and highlights, which will be difficult to recover when you're editing. For the phone photographers out there, your camera will auto-adjust the exposure depending on the lighting conditions, but it's also something you can adjust yourself to make sure you get the perfect picture. In both examples, the before pictures are overexposed - leading to a loss in detail that is difficult to recover whilst editing.

Don't lose focus

It goes without saying that your image should be in focus, unless you want it to look like it's being seen through the eyes of someone who forgot their glasses. But instead of relying on autofocus, you can use

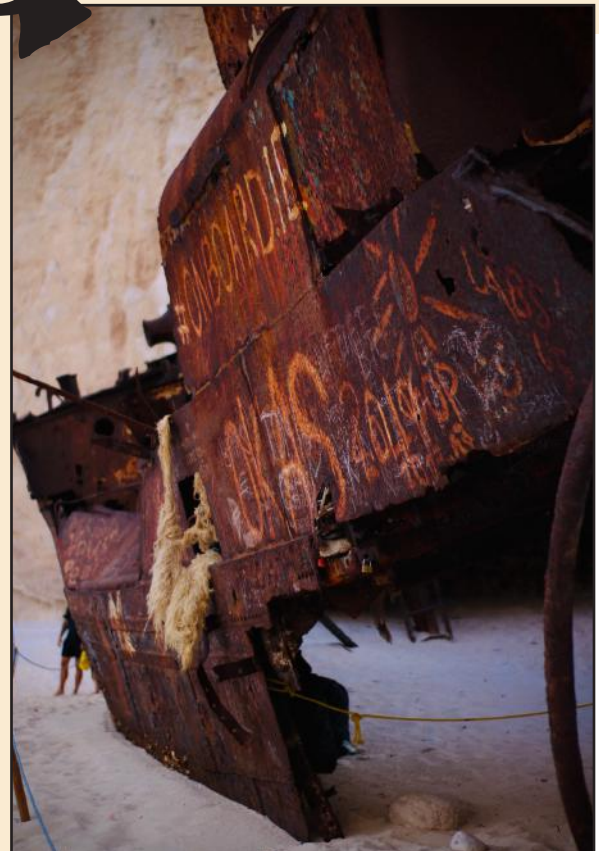
manual focus to accentuate specific details in your image. In the before image of the shipwreck example, the focus is shifted towards the log on the right rather than the ship itself, leading to a loss of detail in the main subject of the image.

The Kardashian Special - time to edit!

Congratulations! You've taken banging pictures but there are a couple questionable ones in there – don't worry though, they can be revived. Now, I can't tell you how to edit, as every photographer edits their pictures differently to suit their own style and the nature of their image. If every picture was edited the same, Instagram would be a very boring place. However, I advise you to always start off with the highlights and shadows - these two simple adjustments can alter the mood of the image completely and revive pictures you might otherwise write off. We all know

the feeling of taking a million pictures but not liking any in the end, but this simple trick has saved me multiple times. Everything else is up to you. I prefer natural edits but some people love to go to town and make their pictures look like a shot from a Michael Bay movie - if that's your cup of tea then go for it!

In the shipwreck example, simple adjustments to the highlights, shadows and warmth really transform the mood of the image to give it a dramatic effect.



Caring Carefully:

looking after yourself and others



As Muslims, we are blessed to have a duty to our brothers and sisters: we help each other through our lowest points, and share in each others' blessings. University life is full of many opportunities and unforgettable experiences, as well as its fair share of challenges and difficult times. Especially with the intense academic pressure that comes with an Oxford degree, it can seem hard to find time for yourself, let alone to care for a friend or family member in a way that they might need or deserve. So how can we as a community care for each other, while also not letting go of our own care needs in the process?

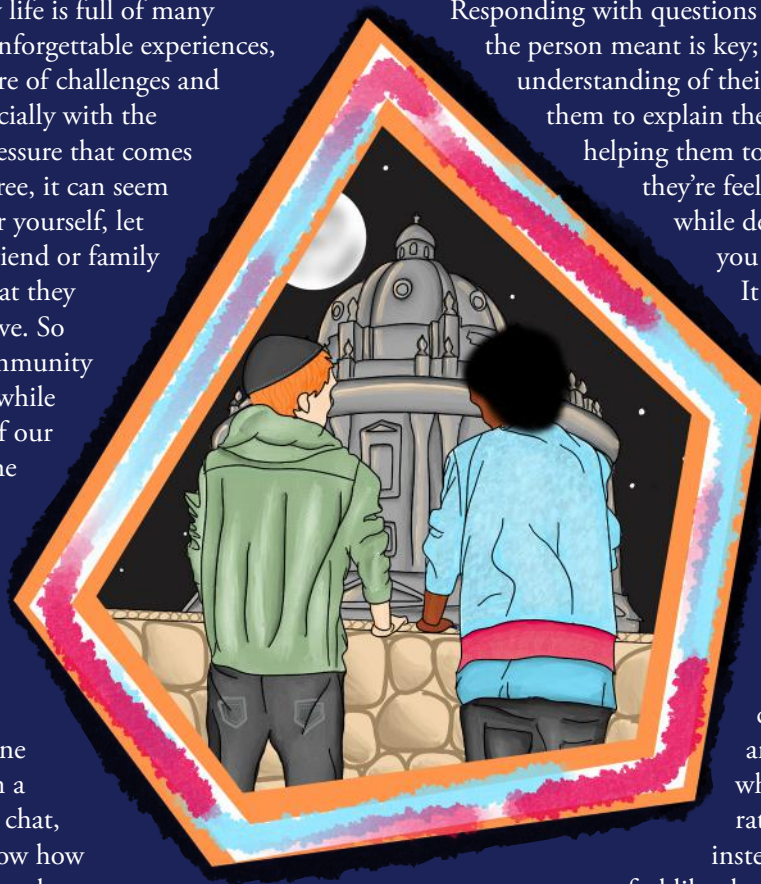
Checking in on our friends is something we should be doing regularly, yet after noticing that someone may need more than a simple salaam and a chat, it can be hard to know how to proceed. Language plays an enormous role in mental health communication and counselling, helping to build and strengthen relationships. Asking open questions – questions that don't have yes or no as the answer – and avoiding 'common' questions for which we all have a default answer is a great place to start. For example, instead of asking "how are you?" try "how have you been feeling recently?". This involves an emotive word

and a time frame within the question, making it specific enough to provoke a more personal response.

Responding with questions that clarify what the person meant is key; it improves your understanding of their position, and guides them to explain their situation better, often helping them to make sense of why they're feeling the way they are while demonstrating the concern you have for their wellbeing.

It is this sentiment of care that we are trying to get across to our brothers and sisters. "Why" and "you" questions can often seem accusatory, so avoiding them takes the personal aspect out of your questions. In comparison, probing questions (beginning what, how and when), can often seem more answerable – especially when you adopt a passive rather than active tone. So instead of asking "Why do you feel like that?", try "has anything happened recently to make you feel this way?"

And care comes in many other ways other than simple communication. Just taking someone out for dinner or coffee, planning a movie night, or simple walkaround Uni Parks can be just as meaningful in providing that care and showing concern for your loved one. You're spending quality time with them, being there when

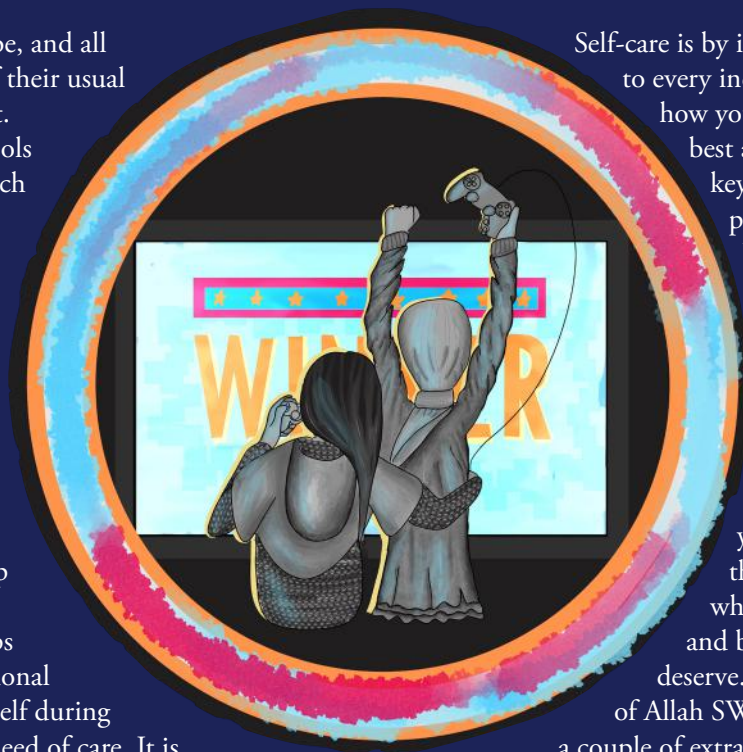


they might need you to be, and all while taking them out of their usual routine and environment. However, the two best tools we have in supporting each other are sabr (patience) and dua (prayer). Not just making sincere dua for your friends, but when you are feeling low just knowing how many people are making dua for you too, and Allah سبحانه و تعالی is the Controller of hearts. Simply the act of worship of making dua for your brother or sister also helps relieve some of the emotional burden you put on yourself during supporting someone in need of care. It is easy to feel that you are alone while caring for someone, yet Allah سبحانه و تعالی is As-Salaam and Ar-Razzaaq: the Perfection, Giver of peace and the Provider. All matters are with Him and He is always with you: “and we are closer to him [man] than his jugular vein”.

With this practice of *tawakkul* (trust in God) and sabr comes the acceptance that things will not always be easy. Not on the person you're caring for, or on you. Finding out how to support your friends best and what works best for you is a game of trial and error, and it's easy to find yourself emotionally exhausted in these situations. Striking that balance of prioritising yourself too not only protects your own mental space and wellbeing, but also allows you to continue your support in the most effective way.

Charlie Perry
Peer Support co-ordinator
for University College

Illustrations by
Sophie Thomas



Self-care is by its very nature unique to every individual; discovering how you personally relax best and what you enjoy is key. Whether it may be playing PS4, reading a book, spending a while making a cup of tea, watching a movie in bed, or going to the gym, having this space without any distractions allows you to unwind so that you're able to make the most of the time which both your degree and brothers and sisters deserve. Keeping conscious of Allah SWT and setting aside a couple of extra minutes each day for mindful dhikr helps to ground you and focus on the people and things that are important to you – as ultimately:

“verily in the
remembrance of Allah
do hearts find rest”
[13:28].





STROLLING *through the* SEASONS

Iman Awan

When asked what they love about Britain, most people mention Bake-Off, the NHS or maybe even the London slang. Yet they overlook one beautiful, surprisingly thought-provoking, and always underappreciated thing: the seasons. Nature just switching things up every three months to keep things interesting. So as the days get shorter and the winds turn brisk, here are my top locations for appreciating the changing of the seasons in Oxford.

The last days of summer

Term technically starts in Autumn, but these days who knows what kind of weird and wacky weather we'll be having, so here are some ideas for those odd warm and sunny days.

THE CHERWELL, THAMES AND OXFORD CANAL

Situated at the confluence of the Cherwell and Thames, Oxford has plenty of options for riverside strolls. University Parks and Christ Church meadows both have paths along the Cherwell, but if you have a bit more time, walk or cycle along the Oxford canal or the Thames path. I'd recommend exploring the Thames path near Botley – you might see a heron or kingfisher – or heading up to Iffley lock for the pretty views.

Autumnal fun

Golden trees, cosy jumpers and wholesome seasonal food. What's not to love about Autumn?

FARMERS' MARKETS

Whether or not you actually want to buy anything, heading to a farmers' market is a cute way to spend a morning; plus, it gets you out of the

SOUTH PARKS

From the end of St Clement's Street, South Parks seems like an expansive yet unassuming green, but walk to the top and you can enjoy beautiful, panoramic views of the city. If you're feeling energetic, cycle up the hill via Morrell Avenue just so you can fly back down.

Oxford bubble and into the community. There are a few options, but the East Oxford Market is just off Cowley Road and Willowbrook farm should have a stall there, so worth a try!

STARS OF THE SHOW: THE AUTUMN TREES

I love trees no matter the season, but Autumn is when everyone else starts to appreciate them too. Because sure, the blossoms of spring and summer are fun, but they don't die in style like the leaves of deciduous trees. Take in the yellow-oranges of the plane trees along Parks road as you walk to the prayer room. Look out for the bright reds of the acers; there's one on the end of Jowett Walk. Or find an old beech tree to sit under and admire.

Winter fogs and flooding

Rainy winter days might be marketed as drab, but don't buy into it; there's something about wrapping up in waterproofs that just smells of adventure.

PORT MEADOWS

You'll be shocked to see Port meadows in flood season if you've only visited in summer. Enter via the Walton Well Road entrance and you'll find that what used to be a field is now a lake. Go on a foggy day and it'll look even more dramatic. Make sure to wear shoes you don't mind getting muddy and be careful of marshy grass.

Early darkness and city lights

Towards the end of Michaelmas, sunsets get very early. You might not want to get too adventurous after dark so here's a few last ideas for the city centre.

COLLEGE GARDENS

Try visiting college gardens post-nightfall; they don't tend to be well-lit, so it can be fun to scare your friends with the creepy vibes. Also, the dark makes them perfect for star-gazing. When you've been deprived of starry nights by pollution back home, the night sky in Oxford is very, very impressive.

WINTER FESTIVITIES

Right before the end of term, Broad Street will be engulfed with the Christmas market, tree and lights. Before setting off back home, you might as well have a quick wander around just to see what's going on and maybe taste some churros.

CARFAX TOWER

Carfax tower. No buildings in central Oxford are allowed to be built taller than its 74 feet, so you get some neat rooftop views.

MARSTON CYCLE PATH

Flooding on the Marston cycle path is so well known that there's even a Twitter page dedicated to it. It can be something of a novel sight to see a path descend underwater – though that novelty will soon wear off if you're running late to a tutorial!

CAFES AND LIBRARIES

Cafes line almost every street in central Oxford. I've been recommended the Café Nero in Blackwell's for the RadCam view, as well as Jericho Coffee Traders, but I'd probably opt for a warm bubble tea from Fantastea. If you've got some work to do and don't want to splash on an overpriced hot drink, just grab a seat in the Bodleian. The reading rooms have a homely warm light and there's a common room where you can chat.



Preparing for Post-Uni Life

In General: Nuha Ansar

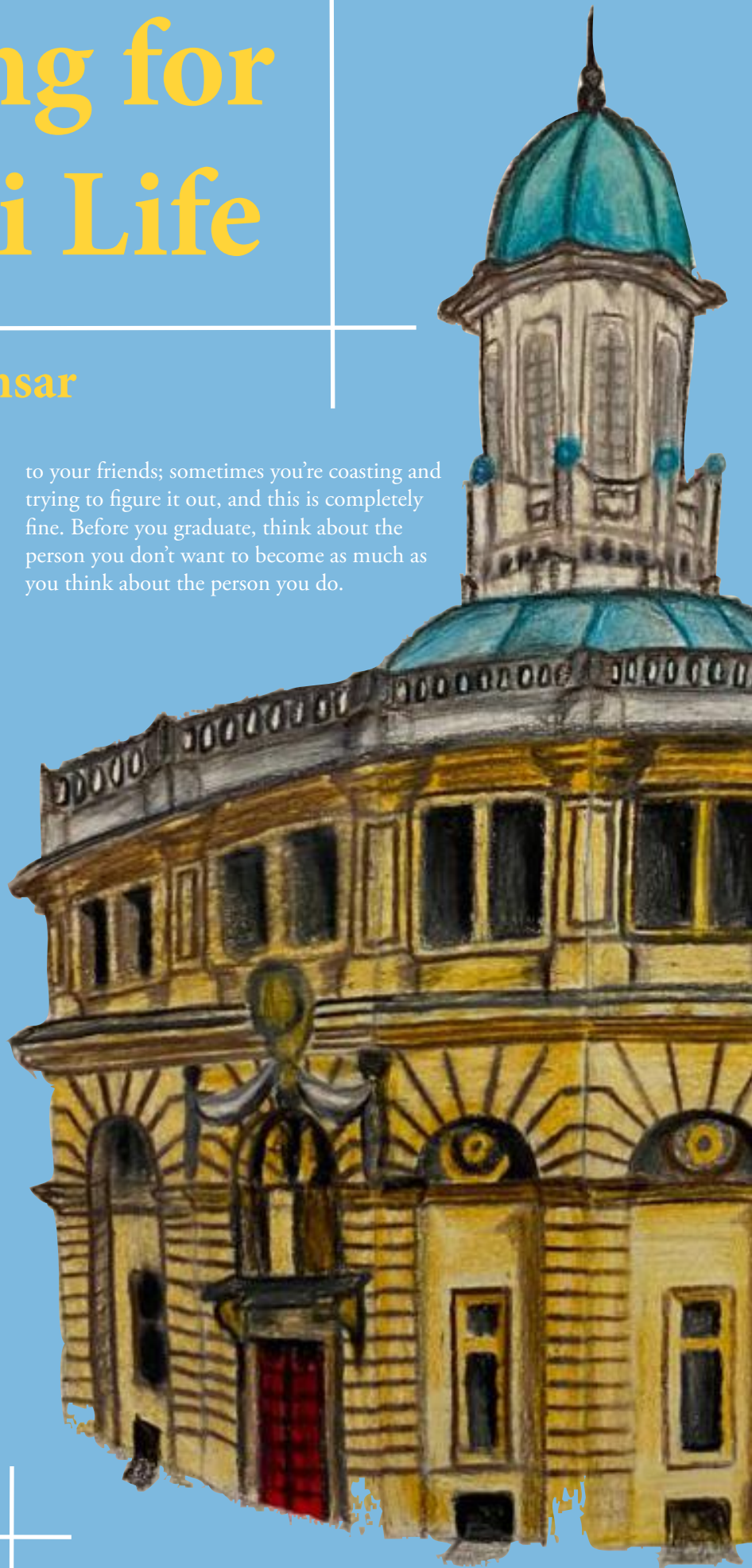
Doctor working in Stevenage

To make the transition into post-uni life easier:

- Foster habits now that you want to maintain for a lifetime. For me, that was journaling and keeping a diary of my everyday. Final year was so formative for me, and looking at entries now feels like such a full circle moment.
- If you're thinking of getting married soon, open up the conversation with your family. I've noticed a lot of people only talk about marriage to their parents or loved ones once they're sure they are ready. These people know you and will have thought about what's best for you long before you have! They may have some invaluable things to say, and probably want to be part of the process just as much as the result.
- Keep your inner circle small but powerful. It's really difficult to keep in touch with absolutely everyone after uni, and sometimes being so overwhelmed by this can cause you to distance yourself from everybody. Find the people who bring you the most joy and keep them close.

Remember: growth after university is not always an easy process. Everyone moves onto new paths, and just when you think comparison in Oxford is as bad as it gets, you realise the working world thrives off comparison. The biggest lesson I've learned since leaving university is that your '100%' won't look like other peoples '100%', your definition of 'progress' can be wildly different

to your friends; sometimes you're coasting and trying to figure it out, and this is completely fine. Before you graduate, think about the person you don't want to become as much as you think about the person you do.



Finance: Haseem Shah

Equity Research Analyst at
Mondrian Investment Partners

Assalaamu 'Alaykum, I'm hoping to provide some tips to help you optimise the management of your finances once you leave university.

The best thing you can do for your finances is to live at home if possible, as it enables you to save the majority of your income. If you can't live at home, then don't be tied down to living super close to your place of work. Particularly for those looking to rent in London, try to be open-minded about living a bit further out. You'll often find many areas on the outskirts of the city (like Redbridge or Essex, where I live) offering cheaper rent, much higher quality accommodation, nicer surrounding areas, and only an extra 10-20 minutes on your commute. Try to get on the property ladder as soon as possible, as rent is 100% expense, whereas mortgage payments are part expense, part paying

yourself by accumulating equity in a property (I'm talking about Islamic mortgages of course).

More broadly, spreadsheets are king, and can really help you triangulate where you are spending money (sometimes unnecessarily). I keep a spreadsheet with my forecast monthly expenses, split by essentials and luxuries, so I know where there's room to save costs, and a log of my monthly incomings and outgoings. You can start doing this now to build up the habit and hopefully leave your finances looking more healthy when you finish university. Lastly, if you are managing to save some money each month, don't just let cash accumulate in your account; invest it wisely to grow that hard-earned wealth. You can learn more about investing on platforms like Islamic Finance Guru.

Hopefully these tips can help you optimise the management of your finances once you leave university.

Job Applications: Faaria Khan

Business Development
Specialist
at Jane Street

Having gone through multiple rounds of internship and job applications, I completely understand how exhausting and soul-draining the application process can be. Here are some tips to hopefully ease the process and lead to success, insha'Allah!

1. Any experience is good experience

Perhaps more relevant for internships, but I strongly encourage you to be open-minded and apply to a wide variety of opportunities. You might not want to eventually pursue that career path but you won't know until you try, and will undoubtedly learn some new skills along the way.

2. Plan ahead

In your last year, you will have very little spare time and applications can be time-consuming. To avoid feeling overwhelmed and possibly missing deadlines, keep track of your applications and firms of interest on a spreadsheet. You can even set up alerts to remind you.

3. Make them remember you

A great piece of advice I received from an older ISoc member was to hone in on three of your characteristics that you want the recruiter to know about you. For example, you could select: independent, team-spirited and adaptable. Then weave each trait into your interview responses along with a past experience to back your claims.

4. Stay resilient

Rejections are an inevitable part of any job search. However, with the right mindset, each application process will be a learning experience and an opportunity to improve for successive ones. Never forget: you only need one offer, so be patient, stay focused and have faith in Allah's سبحانه و تعالی plan for you.

Illustration by
Mahira Muhsanat



Special Feature:

In Conversation with Abeer Ameer

“It all started for myself. But my English studies stopped a long time ago! When I finished my GCSEs, that was it. I didn’t do any formal English – from then on it was science-based. Literature wasn’t on my radar until I got ill in 2012. Alhamdulillah, it turned out to be a huge blessing, but I had to retire. And I was in that kind of mood where I had to do something! Because of the sudden loss of my career, I started reflecting about life – and I found I liked poetry more because of my surgical background; you do something in a short period of time and then it’s sorted. I guess it’s the precision of it.”



‘Mutanabbi’ - Painting by Abeer

Abeer Ameer, Tayiba and I meet on Zoom, ready and excited to discuss her debut poetry collection, *Inhale/Exile*: a book which has moved us and many others. Born in Wales (and once even living in Oxford!) Abeer worked as a dentist before turning to poetry; her first book is made up of stories of her characters’ journeys through and from their homes, as well as contemporary styles reflecting on Iraq, family and political unrest. Before even reading it, I knew I would love it; the

title, with its play-on-words reflecting the fragmentation that comes with diaspora was enough to give that away. On a personal level, I was excited to meet a Muslim creative who also lives in Wales and to hear about the cultural clashes we might have in common. The conversation spanned many topics, from religion and science to the relationship between art and politics, giving credibility to the immense creativity behind *Inhale/Exile*.

Sohaib: *What was the inspiration for the title – it seems to hint at an almost claustrophobic part of diaspora, as if something's incomplete or displaced?*

Abeer: Interesting that you say claustrophobic – no one's made that observation before. The first version of my poem "The Reed Flute and I" had the title "Inhale/Exile", which is after Rumi's poem, "The Reed Flute's Lament." The form of the reed flute represents the body, and the voice of the flute is a reflection of the breath

which runs through it – just like how in the Qur'an's description of the creation of the human being, the breath into Adam is of Divine origin. The flute's sound is so sorrowful, as if it were sad to leave the reedbed, just like how the human soul is not from this world and yearns to return too. The voice of the reed flute expresses that yearning, and I just felt the metaphor really suited the themes of home, exile and longing running throughout the book.

Excerpt from "A Word"

I

scrabble in grey matter
search
shine a torch
for a link between
the tip of the tongue
and the body of the larynx
vocal cords stretched
to umbilical chords
rack the brain
on the rack
of understanding

to find a word to convey
and erase
from existence.

Sohaib: I also really liked the poem "A Word". It felt like it was written by you for you - like there's something I'm not supposed to understand?

Abeer: You're spot on in saying "A Word" is the most personal poem - it is. It follows a poem partly blacked out called Detail. Under those black-outs is the first poem I wrote – it was a response to a suicide bombing, where a boy in my family was caught in a wall and lost his life.

It was just – I don't know – even when I think about it now, I'm speechless. I still have difficulty coming to terms with that event. "A Word" was my trying to say – what is that word? What is it that I'm trying to express but can't?

Some people don't like that poem because they don't know what it's about, but that is my most personal poem.

Sohaib: *With the autobiographical elements, how do you think imagination works – would you like your reader to go and search for the people and places, or prefer to let them imagine it?*

Abeer: To a certain extent, I minimised the identifying details to help with imagination; I think that affects how we perceive a person. It's always a disappointment when you see a film, and you had a certain image in your head about a character, and then when you thought it'd be an old man with a crooked back, they put Brad Pitt in! I didn't want to identify them, and plus, sometimes when

you give away a name, it seems it's just that person's experience. These things are individual, but also a collective experience for a lot of Iraqis and people in exile. You know, I just thought each person risked so much, and that shouldn't be lost to history. It's very personal but it's also for the world to know. These things are happening; there are people who struggle with everything, and yet there's still hope, there's still joy. You know, Allah bless them and guide us to be like them.

Sohaib: *Do you see yourself ever writing these characters into other forms, like a novel? What's next?*

Abeer: Before poetry or anything else, I loved memoir. What I would like to do, maybe in the future, would be to write an autobiography, in the form of poetry. Though I appear in the book, you don't know that it's me. But I would like to do something with my own experiences. All those people would come up again – my parents, my grandparents, my husband's family. It's not going to end at the first book, insha'allah. I'd like to do something along the same tone, with a different generation in mind – the generation of my siblings and I, and my cousins in Iraq and America who've never met each other. I'd love to explore that more. Because you know: there are people that are born, and they open their eyes and it's just war. From one day to another, there's something really tragic happening, and I often think about how our lives are different even though we're from the tribe.

Sohaib: *And despite all of its tragedy, there's a stubborn humour persisting in the collection.*

Abeer: Yeah, I think this partly relates to the issue of where I fit into the book, or how much is personal. Because when I go to Iraq, when I think about my aunties and uncles – we have such a fun time – you'd never guess they're in the middle of a civil war. Obviously, it's not universal – we're privileged in that we've managed to avoid most really awful difficult things. But when we're there, we don't want to come back here! And I wanted to put that across. You know, I miss them so deeply now – since the pandemic started, I haven't been back. And part of it is the humour, part of it is just that this is the life that Allah gave us; we have to make the best of it. And not just make the best of it, but to be very grateful, actually. And that's a Quranic message as well, isn't it? Inna mal usri yusra, with difficulty comes ease. It's all together, you can't separate it. It's Allah's promise. Those things I wanted to make sure came across. Even if you're not Muslim, even if you're not Iraqi, even if your life experience is different, you surely will have hardship – and with it there is hope as well, subhanallah.

Excerpt from “Iraqi Bride in Transit”

Iraqi Christians who boarded the same plane
from Baghdad waiting for their New York flight
recognise *she's the bride*, take her to the gate.
Last flight before Christmas.

He is pupil. He do drugs. She rolls her Rs.

Groom's lost hope. It's late.
He gets up, ready to leave Heathrow,
gathers coins to make the international call.
What will he tell her father?

Announcement. Groom is summoned to Immigration.

Your wife says you do drugs.

He realises at the moment he should have taught
the correct English term for *pharmacy student*.

After an hour's conversation, we wrap up the interview and say our salaams before leaving the meeting, both touched by Abeer's honesty and openness, and inspired by the scope and sincerity of her work. The beauty of each poem's gems of visual attention, autobiographical insight and the character's interlinking lives makes *Inhale/Exile* a joy to read, and it was a real privilege to discuss it with its writer. As Abeer herself mentions, we are all too quick to categorise an Iraqi Muslim's poetry through its heritage or its connections to war. Abeer is a testament to the limitations of these labels – her writing spans humour, grief, renewal and perseverance, and I wholeheartedly recommend *Inhale/Exile*, as a piece of writing which is both artistically imaginative and fundamentally human.

Credits for excerpts of the poems from "Inhale/Exhale" above go to Abeer Ameer and Seren Publishers.

We asked some of our contributors for responses to Abeer's poem "The Reed Flute and I"

"The Reed Flute and I"
after Mawlana Jalaluddin Rumi

As the reed flute sings you weep your sorrow;
your heart still beats in the place you left. The weight
of your yesterdays that were once tomorrows
halves you, just like the day the reed was cut
pulled from its bed, carved to carry the breath
of the carver to ears held far. Its inhale
is your exhale; as if straight from your own chest.
Its wails redden your eyes. Its larynx speaks your exile.

The same parting that split the reed from its bed
brings you together and you can't know until
you've always known; when they said farewell, you bled
so long, knowing you would not fare well, and still
only long for the place your heart comes from.
Reading in tongues; all music yearns for home.

BY Rohan Abdul Haleem Kaya

Listen! For in a river a reed flute reverberates
Making mountains cry, as it reminds them
Of their loneliness, the weight of perennality
Cleaving them in two, rendering a solitude
That makes weep the reed flute cut from its home
Telling a tale of farewells and separations
To the forests whose lungs redden our blood
While glaciers lament their exile

Nay, such a parting has no parts
Each inhale but an exhale of one same lung
Each cleaving an illusion for those weak of heart
Even the rumbling reed flute cut from its home
Has a friend, who neither begets nor is begotten
So how can there be a cleft, an exile, or a parting?
Thus reed flute cry not, while you sing your song
For your friend awaits with a song of His own

"The Reed of the Flautist" BY Siddiq Islam

Soft are the breezes that leave the reeds shuffling,
Tranquil the waters that flush down their flanks.
For all of their lives they'll be in the wafts ruffling.
For all of their lives they'll be stuck in the banks,
But snipped from the bush by an artist-cum-hortist,
Long gone is their brother, the reed of the flautist,
Who, blessed with the music of angels above,
Sings graces of merriment, triumph and love.
He travels the land in the mouth of his player.
He woos pleasant ladies and charms pretty kings
And blesses the world with the tunes that he sings.
These beautiful journeys could make him no gayer,
Nor cloud more severely the folds of his mind
Belonging to riverbanks left far behind.



**Illustration by
Iqra Hussain**



Current Affairs

The subtheme of this Current Affairs section is Rights: and with compelling arguments about how we decide our rights for ourselves, who we allow to dress as they choose, explorations into how women's rights look today, the duties to ourselves that our generation has forgotten and history's rights, the articles here explore the topic from top to bottom. As ever, the opinions expressed in this section are only representative of the author.

Have We Forgotten our Own Rights?

Our millennial generation is perhaps more aware and concerned about human rights than any other in history. Judging by the number of social activists, online influencers, and our everyday vocabulary, we are more politically correct than ever, openly and actively calling out violations of human rights, racism, inequality, and so on.. Ironically, this millennial generation overlooks a fundamental right: the right to our own welfare and mental health. It may come as a surprise that mental health is actually part of the foundational human rights of health, i.e. “a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family,” according to the Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

But can self-care truly exist in our generation’s current obsession with productivity, side-hustles, a non-stop lifestyle? Our generation is constantly told “you can achieve anything you set your mind to” and as a result, we have extremely high and probably unrealistic expectations of ourselves. We are told to work long hours, work at maximum efficiency, adopt new systems to do more in less time so we make more time to do even more! This mindset of always working at 100% of our capacity is the antithesis to a society that prioritizes self-care.

Why should we work ourselves to burnout only to then take time out to care for ourselves, instead of being in a constant state of knowing our limits, being kinder to ourselves and more realistic about our capacity for intense work? Why should we wait for mental health issues to arise instead of taking the preventative approach and prioritizing self-care at all times? In Islam too, the Prophet warned a companion when he was overexerting even when it came to worship: “Verily, your own self has rights over you, so fast and break your fast, pray and sleep.”

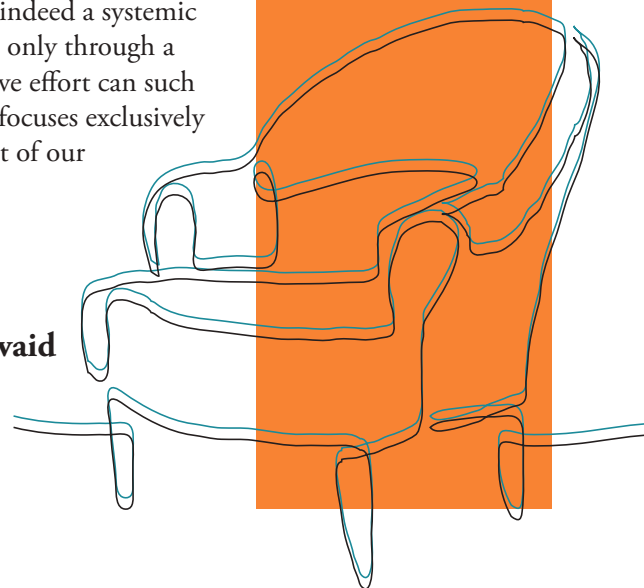
And even if we were to prioritize our well-being, does our generation really know what self-care is? Or has our social-media influenced generation confused it with the billion-dollar consumer industry, expensive

get-aways, aesthetic candles, kale smoothies, and yoga mats? Do these activities really improve our long-term emotional and mental health or are these simply distractions that make us feel temporarily good instead of focusing on deeper self-improvement and fulfilment? Surely self-care cannot just be for the rich and privileged who can afford to indulge in these activities. Self-care has to be for everyone. Ironically, even our “self-care” activities have been plagued with such a performance-mindset of pushing ourselves to the limit at the gym and setting fitness “goals” that we start dreading these activities, defeating the whole purpose.

The fact that it is called “self” care itself is an oxymoron. Is self-care really an individual’s own responsibility? What about our employers’ responsibility in shaping a good work-life balance; what about our capitalist society really allowing people to take time out when needed without any ramifications on income and career progression? What about having healthcare systems that prioritize mental health and makes support readily available; what about therapists not charging exorbitant fees? What about educating us from a young age about true self-care: teaching us to develop healthy coping mechanisms to everyday stresses; to build and rely on support networks, family, and good friends; to ask for help when we need it. After all, truly caring for yourself is probably hardest when you have already fallen ill or are overwhelmed and burnt-out.

This neglect of self-care is indeed a systemic and cultural problem, and only through a mindset shift and a cohesive effort can such a system be fought which focuses exclusively on output at the detriment of our own wellbeing.

Hira Javaid



Baseless Rights Beget Multiple Wrongs

Moral claims that appear intuitively obvious are often extremely difficult, even impossible, to rationalise. Likewise, rationalisation can only go so far in pulling apart bad moralities: it shouldn't take 6000 words to argue that non-consensually removing body parts from a dead person and giving them to someone else is wrong.¹ Yet the absence of an objectively grounded and comprehensive ethical framework enables a volatility in moral thought that allows bizarre and seemingly counterintuitive arguments to arise. Over time, these hyperrationalised, and ultimately foundationless, contentions can colour public perception on ethical issues and tend to require onerous and time-consuming deconstruction.

Among all the components of a comprehensive morality, rights carry the most force: rights are peremptory, overriding and constraining efforts towards the maximisation of utility² and thus, unlike supererogation,³ entail a curtailment of liberty. Therefore, it is important to get rights right: given their moral status, rights must be respected, and this means we need to be careful about what we include in this category. Furthermore, it is a mistake to inflate away the value of rights by labelling certain moral considerations hyperaspirationally. It seems very strange to me, for instance, that human beings are born with an in-built right to "necessary social services" or a "free education".⁴

Declaring everything to be a top priority is another way of saying nothing has priority.⁵

So, where should our understanding of rights come from? Human beings are born with strong intuitions on right and wrong (the *fitrah*) that inform the way we ought to behave towards each other. However, these instincts are easily clouded as one is exposed to corrupting forces. As a solution to this, unpolluted intuitions are confirmed by the revealed Guidance. For instance, it is clear that human dignity is paramount and uncompromisable.⁶ Property rights exist and respecting ownership is important.⁷ There are many other examples.

Revealed scripture must be rationally interpreted within its limited scope. When we step outside these limits to emend and redact rights ourselves, we risk deviating from the Guidance and generating grievous consequences. Across the globe, legislation of human design now almost exclusively determines societal approaches to rights. The Organ Donation Act is one recent and local example of this ubiquitous phenomenon. The Act has introduced an opt-out system for deceased organ procurement in the UK, meaning that anyone who dies without having opted out of the donor register may have their organs harvested for transplantation. However, although it does disregard rights,⁸ it would not be correct to claim that this synthetic commandment is *grounded* irrationally. In fact, the moral claims it implicitly makes are all based in reason. The same may be said for *Rassenhygiene*, forced sterilisation in Uyghur concentration camps, and *Jāhiliyyah* female infanticide. Respectively, these atrocities may be rationalised through eugenics, geopolitical domination and personal financial situation; however, as I am arguing in this article, the

quality of being rationalisable cannot itself justify these things. What all these things have in common is that they afford primacy to what is rational to the fallible intellect, whilst disregarding the rights of the human being as they have been made intuitively (and scripturally) clear to us. When we decide our rights for ourselves, we make use of the same epistemological toolkit that justifies many of the transgressions of the Nazis, the Chinese Communist Party and the pre-Islamic Arabs.

Although moving away from the Divine Guidance is a common theme, it would be incorrect to deny that some ventures have ended more badly than others. The point I am trying to make is that grounding our comprehension of rights in the intellect, without due consideration to the Revelation, is at best a precarious pursuit. Rights can only be adequately safeguarded when we submit to the suprarational,

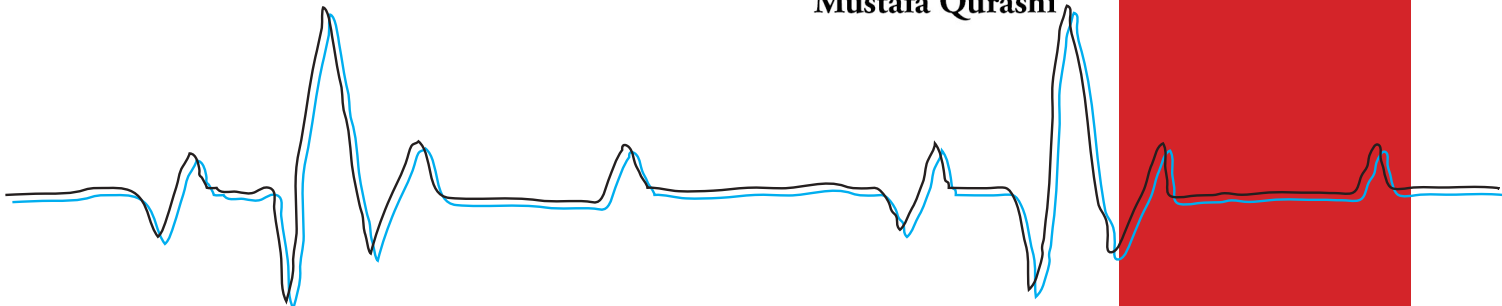
rather than focussing our *tawakkul*⁹ on the deficient human mind.

So, where will this all end? I will reserve my right to be pessimistic. Within medical ethics in particular, there is a sense of acceleration towards an as yet indiscernible terminus. I think the secular ethicists also feel this; however, to many of them the sensation is one of progression towards a holy grail, rather than towards inevitable ruin. As one question is resolved, countless others spawn and we continue to dig ourselves deeper.¹⁰ Before it is too late, let us return and hold fast to that in which we have certainty.

By the declining day, Lo! man is a state of loss, Save those who believe and do good works, and exhort one another to truth and exhort one another to endurance.

103:1-3

Mustafa Qurashi



1. Qurashi GM. Opt-out paradigms for deceased organ donation are ethically incoherent. J Med Ethics doi:10.1136/medethics-2021-107630. An important disclaimer: this paper specifically discusses the coherence of opt-out systems within the secular ethics framework, primarily by responding to dominant approaches to justifying such systems. I do not discuss the permissibility of deceased organ donation in Islam. There is a wide range of opinions on this, including many that permit donation. The fatāwā I have seen that do, however, stipulate that prior consent from the deceased remains a prerequisite.
2. Consider the well-known thought experiment in which a man is seized and killed in order to save five other people with his organs. In such a situation, negative rights against violations (obliging inaction) would be violated and this prevents the utility-maximising option of saving those five people.
3. We cannot force people to be good Samaritans, nor punish those who are not.
4. UN General assembly, Universal Declaration of Human Rights.
5. The wording of T. M. Wilkinson. For a more complete discussion, see Chapter 2, Wilkinson TM. Ethics and the Acquisition of Organs. Oxford University Press 2011.
6. “Indeed, We have dignified the children of Adam, carried them on land and sea, granted them good and lawful provisions, and privileged them far above many of Our creatures.” 17:70, Dr. Mustafa Khattab, The Clear Quran.
7. One of the most striking examples in support of this is the hadith on martyrdom and defending property (Sahih Muslim 140); one is permitted to use reasonable, including lethal, force to defend one’s property.
8. For a detailed discussion on the Organ Donation Act, including how opt-out systems violate rights to bodily integrity, see my paper (referenced above).
9. Roughly translated as a complete trust or reliance
10. Adults are now considered to have such sovereignty over their bodies as to have the right to surgically modify themselves beyond recognition or reversal. Here, the ethics are broadly considered resolved and the discussion has advanced, refocusing on situations that may allow children to undergo these procedures for reasons of, for instance, gender dysphoria. Relatedly, I think it is also only a matter of time before one gains the ‘right’ to end one’s own life.

When is it Acceptable to Cover Up?

In 2010, France prohibited the niqab and burka in public spaces such as streets, parks and public transportation - countries such as Belgium, Austria and the Netherlands followed suit. One argument against the niqab is the possible security aspect and how a person's identity is hidden. Astoundingly, during the pandemic, it was legally mandated to cover your face without a worry for security. Therefore, the argument is empty and lacks any true gravitas.

Ten years later, on 15th July 2020, the European Court of Human Rights ruled (somewhat ironically) that companies within the European Union can legally ban their female Muslim employees from wearing a headscarf under certain conditions.¹ To many Muslims, this won't come as a shock - Islamophobia and specifically anti-hijab sentiment is on the rise within Europe. Such rulings set a precedent that Muslim women are second class citizens. Their right to live peacefully in Europe comes with the catch that their identity and visibility must not be reflective of their religion.

Consider the values of the West: freedom, liberty, freethought, and equality. Such values have disappeared into the distance and are nowhere to be seen when it comes to the defending the rights of Muslim women and their rights of dress. Where is our freedom of religion and expression? Where is our right to wear the hijab, the niqab and the burka? As a way to Please God and maintain a good relationship with him, dressing modestly forms a central part of many Muslims' lives. The power of defining freedom of expression and what it means to be a feminist remains firmly in the hands of non-Muslims.

The hypocrisy of European institutions grows further with the recent reaction to sports women deciding to wear more modest clothing during sports games. With the intention to tackle the sexualisation of women in sports, the German Olympic gymnastic team wore full length unitards that cover most of their body, in comparison to

their previous bikini-cut leotards - a decision which was met with widespread admiration.² Praising of non-Muslims who have decided to cover up continues with the Norwegian handball team whose protest of a sexist uniform rule by wearing longer shorts made headlines across the globe.³ So now, is it suddenly acceptable to cover up? The last ten years have been spent adjudicating the covering of Muslim women to the point of their alienation from society. But now, as non-Muslims decide to take a rightful stance against sexist uniform rules within sports, everyone seems to be in their corner. As a Muslim woman, I feel defeated. Western feminists continue to praise themselves for acts of perceived protest yet demonise others for the same acts of perpetuating images of oppression - an expression of freedom in the West but an act of oppression by the East.

The condemnation of Muslim dress alongside the celebration of European anti-sexualisation seems to tell us that it is only acceptable for non-Muslims to cover up. European countries may dictate what Muslim women can wear, but Muslim countries which do the same are viewed as barbaric and backwards. The criticism always seems to funnel down to positing the covering itself as the barbaric act, rather than the removal of choice: an act we see in the West all the time.

In an era of discussions around diversity and inclusion, Muslim women need to be part of the conversation. Our views need to be heard if we are ever going to be treated as equal to our non-Muslim counterparts and regain our right to express our religion through modest dress.

Kadiza Khanom

1. <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/7/27/the-cjeus-ruling-on-hijab-exposed-europes-hypocrisy>
2. <https://metro.co.uk/2021/07/24/germany-team-ditch-leotards-in-protest-against-sexualisation-of-gymnastics-14983467/>
3. <https://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2021/07/its-not-just-volleyball-enforces-sexist-dress-code-women-s-clothing-still-policed>

Exploring Women's Rights in Islam

Not only does religion provide a foundation for culture and civilisation, it is also a defining characteristic for moral conduct. With the recent global resurgence of religious consciousness, questions have been raised regarding religion and gender equality. As Muslims, we should take it upon ourselves to truly understand what the Qur'an and Ahadith teach us about the educational, financial and legal rights of women in Islam.

The duty to acquire knowledge applies to every Muslim irrespective of gender, meaning education for women is not only allowed but encouraged in Islam.¹ In the pre-Islamic period *Jahiliyyah* (the age of ignorance), women were denied the right to run businesses, own property, and receive inheritance or a basic education - the Prophet ﷺ preached boldly against these abhorrent practices. Furthermore, we can look to the example of Aisha, the youngest wife of the Prophet ﷺ credited with narrating more than 2000 Hadiths and is a testament to how women can excel in education, leadership and scholarship.²

In financial and legal matters, the rights of women and men vary, and are allocated according to the duties and responsibilities of the sexes. For example, a woman does not shoulder any financial obligations with respect to her husband, children or maintenance of the household. Such conditions are mentioned in the Qur'an: "Men are responsible for women, because Allah has made one of them to excel the other, and because they spend (to support them) from their means" [4:34]. It is crucial to note that 'excel' does not refer to strength, prowess or worth but rather relates to responsibility and duty as Allah سبحانه و تعالی has made men and women two equally important halves of a whole. Regarding inheritance, Islam typically allots women half the share available to men if they inherit from the same father. Whilst this may seem unfair at face value, there is certainly *hiqmah* (wisdom) behind it. Whilst males are financially responsible for the upkeep of their wife and children, women are not. For all practical purposes, this favours the woman, as inheritance need not be used on household expenses but still offers financial security.⁴

However, gender inequality is unfortunately often a salient characteristic of Muslim societies. Such disparities arise from cultural practices which not only denigrate the rights and status of women but stand in opposition to the teachings of Allah سبحانه و تعالی and His Messenger ﷺ. Some pertinent examples would be Saudi Arabia's defunct driving ban, and the country's history of limited education for women. There are two driving factors behind such inequalities: the regressive legal system, and the profound patriarchy within the country. Whilst Saudi Arabia is guilty of such factors, it is not alone in providing insufficient infrastructure for women to exercise their Islamic rights. That said, we can look to the response to these gender inequalities to understand how they can be fought. For example, the Women2Drive campaign and subsequent protests proved effective in placing international pressure on the Saudi Arabian government to lift the driving ban. The Women Human Rights Defenders' Movement movement also advocated for an end to the male guardianship system. From these examples, it becomes clear that in order to cease such cultural malpractices in Muslim societies, acts of bravery and fearlessness are required, and we should certainly admire such female activists risking their freedom.

From this examination of the Qur'an, Ahadith and the lives of the Prophet's wives, it is evident that Islam expanded and continually promotes women's inheritance, financial and educational rights. In doing so, we have realised the extent of the bravery and fearlessness which is required for such inequality to be overcome. Taking this into our daily lives, we should reflect on whether we are being as brave in speaking out against patriarchal norms persisting in many of our cultures, and if not, we should do our best to do so and honour true Islamic teachings.

Muhsin Ahmed

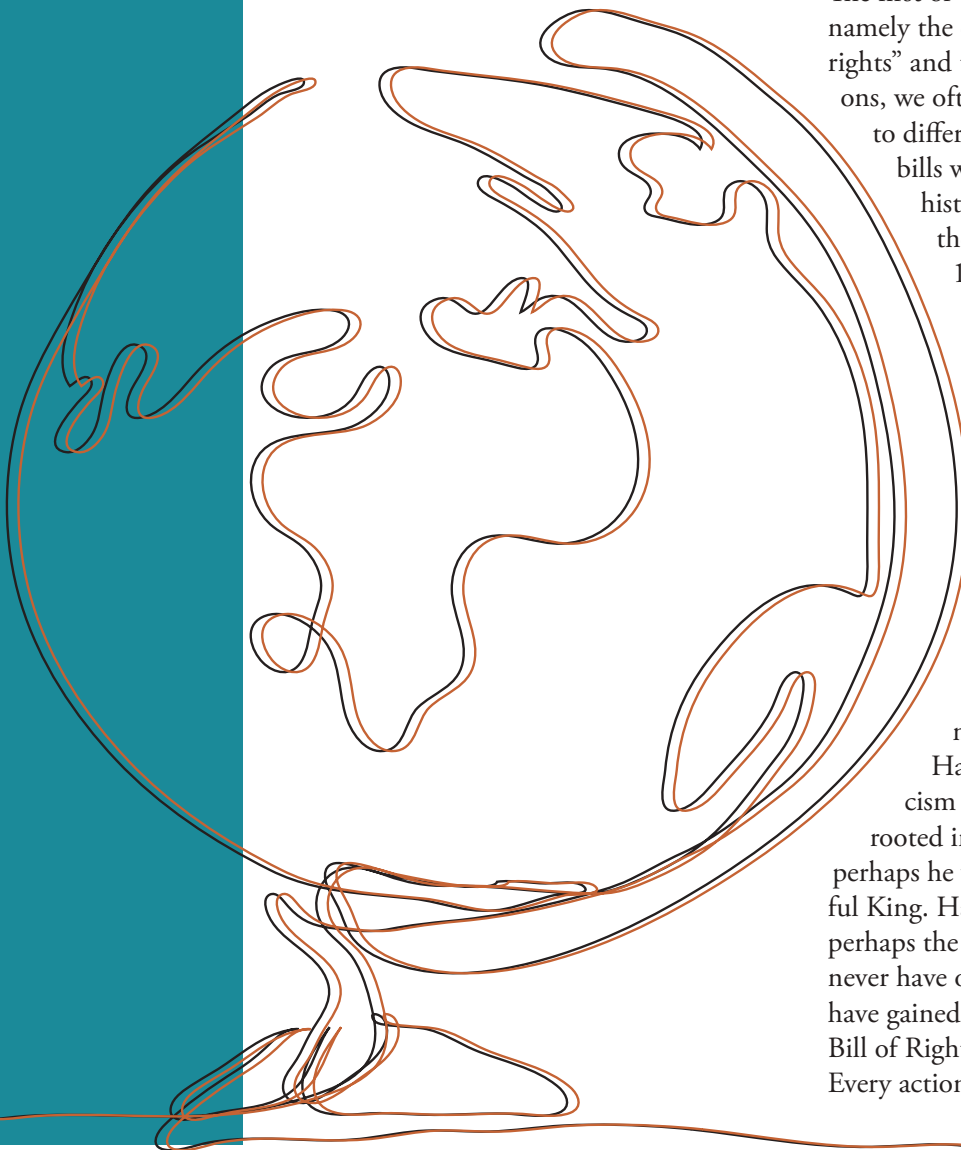
1. Sunan Ibn Majah 224, Grade: Sahih, Hadith.
2. Onaid F. 'The Importance of Girl's Education in Islam'. (2014).
3. Zaman U. 'Muslim Women, Financial Rights and Financial Fitness: How Healthy Are Your Finances?' (2020).
4. Dar Al-Ifta Al-Missriyyah. (2021). 'Do Women take Unequal Shares of Inheritance in Islam?'.

The Rights of History

Law, religious discipline and ideology are all rooted in various global narratives spanning millennia; only by engaging in the study of the past can a future be created. This gives history the power to exercise a certain authority over us. It means we rarely take a decision without consulting the traditions of gone years, consciously or not. In short, it is a discipline of knowledge.

This knowledge is often disregarded as meaningless. The “mindless repetition of facts” or the “memorisation of dates” are common phrases used to misconceptualise history. However, it serves a function without which society would cease to operate.

This article will explore the control exerted by history over us in two important ways. The first of these is the concept of rights, namely the difference between “historical rights” and the “rights of history”. As Britons, we often credit our permitted freedoms to different bills passed throughout time, bills which developed from significant historical events. Take for example the Bill of Rights, established in 1689. This was one of the initial rights acts passed in the United Kingdom, but it could not and would not have occurred without the longstanding political turmoil and events preceding it. Had the English Civil war not occurred, the monarchy would never have been replaced with Cromwell’s Protectorate republic. Had the restoration of the monarchy not occurred, James II would never have ascended the throne. Had widespread fear of Catholicism not been prevalent after being rooted in England for over a century, perhaps he would have been a more successful King. Had he not run away from battle, perhaps the Glorious Revolution would never have occurred, Parliament would not have gained greater legislative power and the Bill of Rights would never have been made. Every action executed on a professional level



stems from happenings deeply ingrained in history. It impacts everything we do. It is as simple as saying that rights would not exist without history.

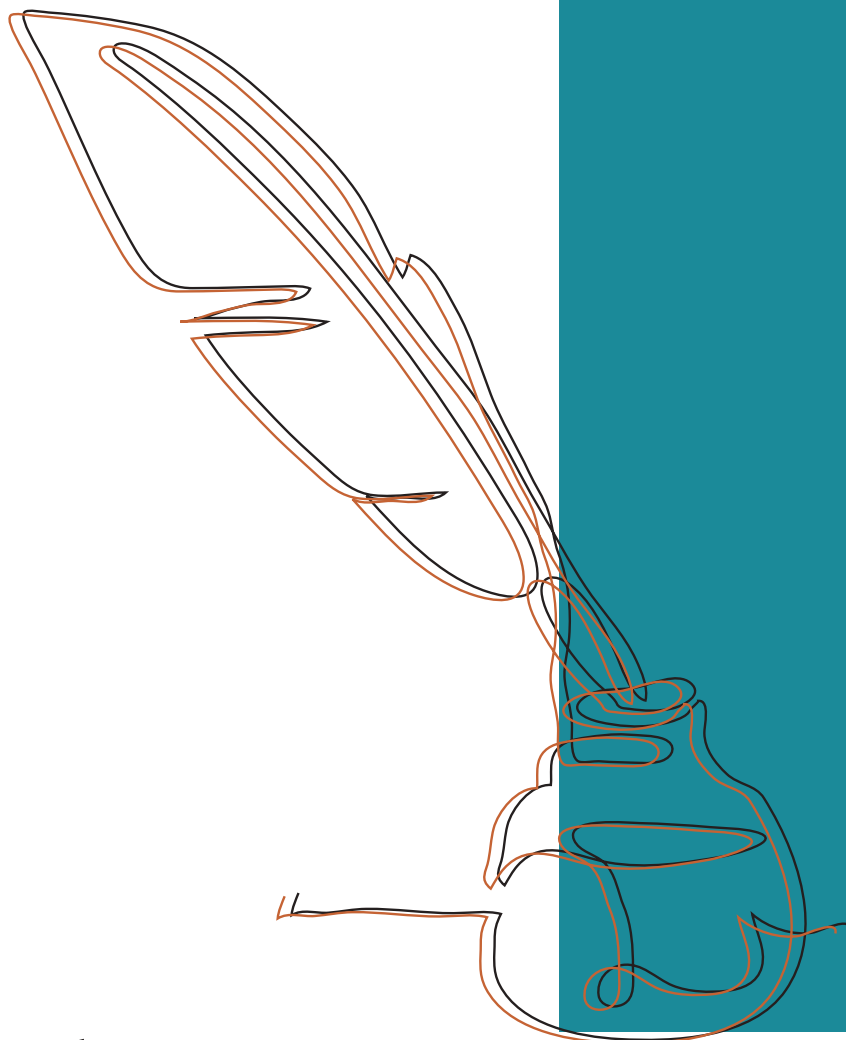
However, instead of thinking that history has bestowed rights upon us, we should start regarding this as the rights of history over us. It is not a gift from history - moreover, it is the authority history has over us. The former is escapable, the latter unescapable. We are intrinsically bound by the shackles of our nations' past and this means that it is almost impossible for society to undergo a reformation from its roots. History will always have a say in the manner it is run. Even if policies gradually change over time, their origins can always be traced and the story of how they grew into their present form, always told.

This leads to the second point; that the right of history over us is complex in the present age. This is largely due to the disparity in histories, where some are placed upon a higher pedestal than others. We can observe how Eurocentric narratives dominate over others, leading to crucial accounts being overlooked. In school, we are often taught about the glory and heroism of the soldiers who fought during the Great War. Growing up, we would hear tales of brave soldiers who fought for England or France. Very rarely were these told from a perspective that acknowledged the contributions of the Non-Western World. The Ottoman, Indian and Arab contributions to the war effort have become lost, succumbing to the European colonisation of historical narrative. And such details are not so minor- the British Indian Army consisted of almost two million soldiers, involved in campaigns on the Eastern Front and across Asia. But

India's contributions went beyond just this; it assisted in rebuilding the British economy after the war. Colonies such as Morocco were equally significant in sparking similar redevelopment for France, yet stereotype dictates that exclusively European super-powers controlled the war's direction.

The implications different histories have for the present day is immense. Nations who have colonised history are able to colonise the present day under the rationale of being victors. This means history holds different powers over different nations. For the victorious, it holds glory. For the less successful, it holds tales of defeat and recovery. Altogether, history is the Earth's memory. Just as a human's memory affects their every action, so does history affect every action taken across the globe.

Zuhaira Islam



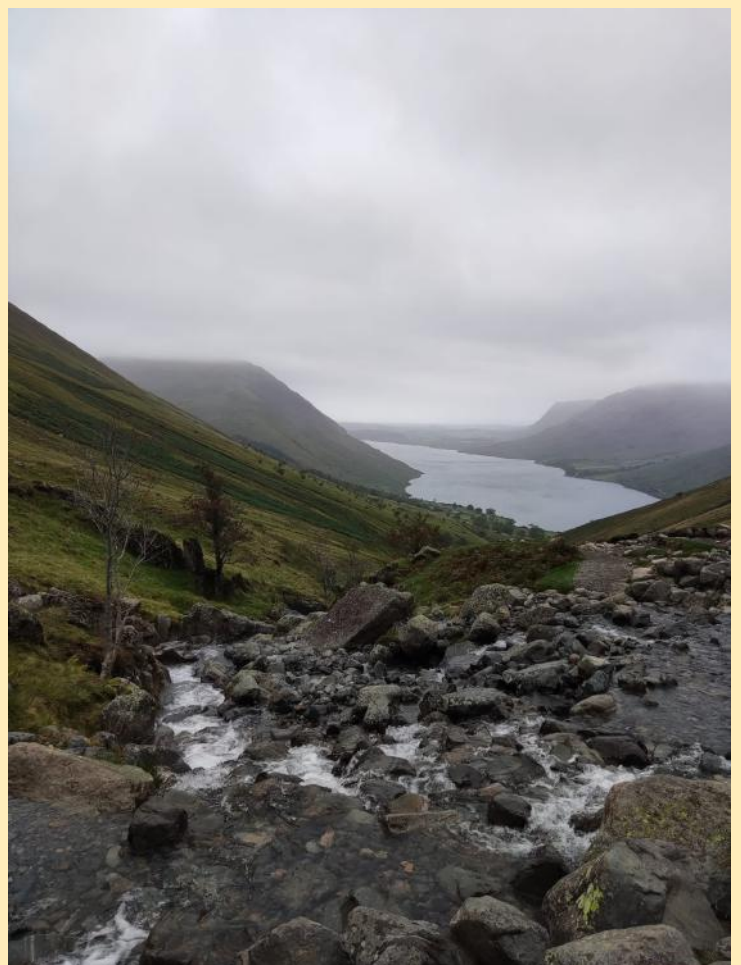


Community Works

'Keeping Focus'- Rafiah Niha,
Magdalen College



'Wastwater'- Abdul Lateef,
St John's College



White Text

by Siddiq Islam

" ," I type with white text on white paper.

" ," I read with my eyes' empty holes.

The space takes up space so it is or it isn't?

The empty crevasses that emptiness fills.

" ," I think in the gaps between thinking.

" " escapes from my dry, hollow throat.

It's funny how ~~low~~ loudly the silences echo.

It's funny how much no idea can connote.

" ," I pray when there's nothing to pray for.

" ," God answers to such bold requests.

What would there be if I took away " "?

The cracks in the cracks where the nothingness rests.

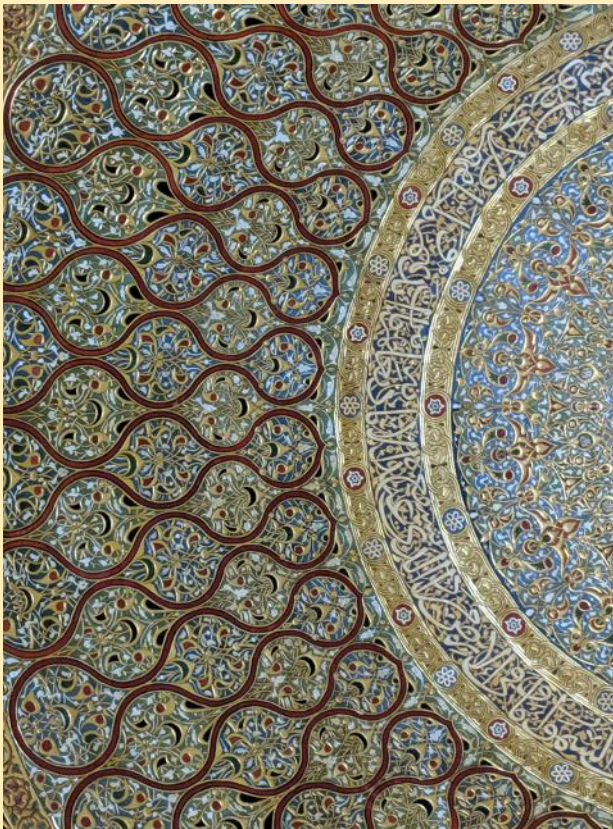
'Variegated Duckling' Coral Benfield,
Oriel College



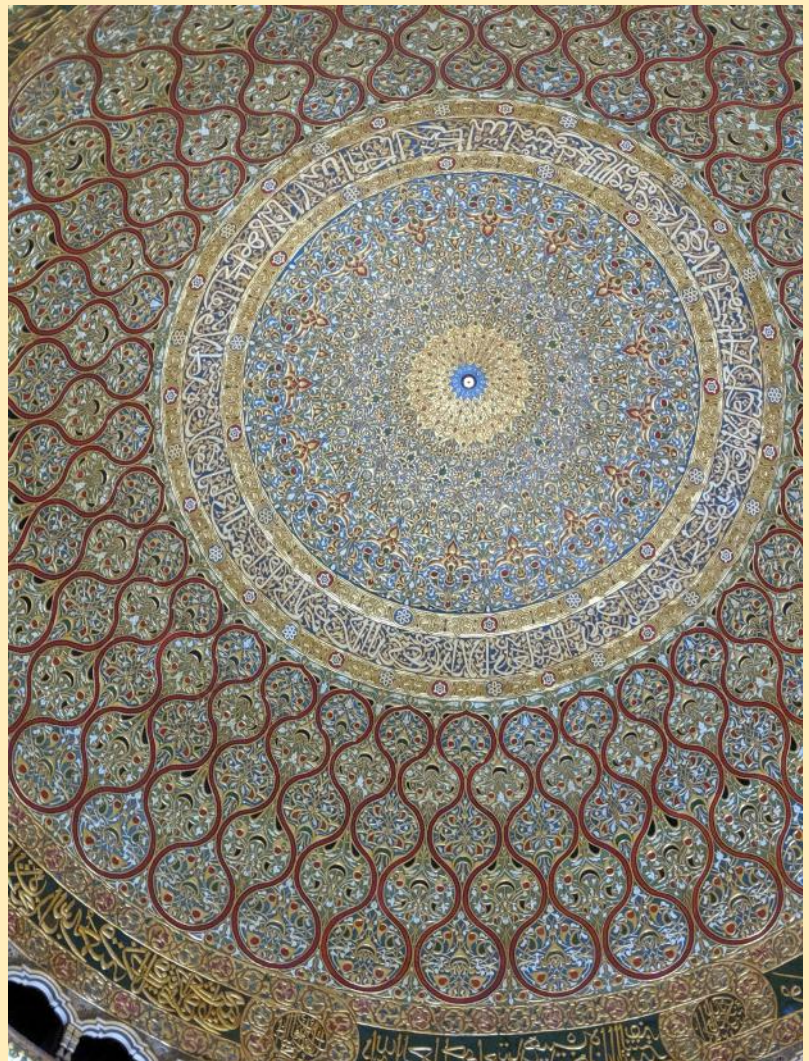
Hibah Hassan,
Harris Manchester College



'Replacement PR' in Berlin
Tayiba Sulaiman,
St Hilda's College



'Dome of the Rock' -
Aisha Rasul, St Hugh's College





'The Fog
Before the Dawn'
Ayan Shahid,
Hertford College



'From Darkness Appears Light'
Fatemah Akbarpoor,
Magdalen College





Research Showcase

Featuring Rashma Rahman's long-awaited thesis on the buried stories of South Asian women in the 70s miners' strikes, Ibrahim Ghaznavi's incredible research into treating mental illness using virtual reality, and Imran Naved's insights into the complexity of hypersonic engineering, this research section covers a variety of fascinating disciplines. It closes with a special focus on the Muslim Research Network, an organisation which has grown to represent the Muslim voices within academia today.

The New Workplace Militants: *British South Asian Women in the 1970s*

Rashma Rahman,
BA History

THESIS

My undergraduate thesis is an act of historical recovery. It charts the unfolding militancy of Asian women workers in Britain in the years before the Grunwick Film-Processing factory strike in 1978. As a British Bangladeshi woman, I was deeply moved by Amrit Wilson's book, *Finding A Voice* (1978); her writing on the struggles of Asian women sheds light on how Asian women's identities empowered their unshakeable resilience in the face of adversity. Her chapter on Asian women's paid labour outside the home is the inspiration for my thesis topic. The Grunwick strike occupies a place in the historical memory of British trade unionism, and yet the role of British Asian women in that strike is still unfamiliar.

My thesis contextualises the Grunwick strike by focussing mainly on the less remembered, earlier strikes by Asian women at Mansfield Hosiery Mill in 1972 and Imperial Typewriters factory in 1974. By reconstructing contemporary understandings of those two strikes, my thesis confronts the industrial militancy of immigrant workers across the 1970s, revealing a chapter of modern British history still under-explored.

Because trade unions were consistently failing to fulfil their purpose of representing the grievances of *all* workers, irrespective of race or gender, rank-and-file action¹ grew in Britain during the early to mid-1970s. My thesis challenges the perception of trade union militancy as a white, male affair. Instead, it shows how

conflicts and disagreements over both sexism and racism occurred *within* trade unions. It reveals how Asian women workers consistently took up class militancy for reasons of race and gender. But memories of 1970s class politics often overlook their contributions as a part of the working class and are instead characterised as white and male; this was not the reality.

My thesis is primarily source-based, focusing on the representation of the strikes in three places: Black and Asian activists' publications, the far-left press, and the mainstream press. Although the mainstream media paid little attention to the strikes, both contemporary black radicals and the wider radical left saw successes for the Asian women as holding significant potential for victories across the entire working class. Managements of both the trade unions and the factories tried to use divisions in identity within this multiracial working class to obstruct the power of that unity. The thesis also excavates a lost moment of 1970s radicalism in which feminist and anti-racist politics were seen by some militants as intrinsic to class politics, not separate from them.

The militancy of Asian women workers inspired broader layers of left-wing radicals, eventually winning the admiration of, and setting a crucial precedent for white trade unionists at the Grunwick strike. Part of the inspiration that arose from the three strikes spoke to power beyond merely economic demands. Within the sources, the Asian women's use of confrontational language against their bosses and the wider media discourse of workers' power in the 1970s reflects the systematic disempowerment of racialised patriarchy. The language used turned their strikes into stages for claiming power through resistance to bosses and trade union bureaucrats.

The story I trace in my thesis is not just about class politics, but about the class politics of race and gender, where racialised and gendered identities functioned to generate a class militancy mirrored across wider sections of the British working class in the late 1970s. Like the Asian women in my thesis, my understanding of my identity remains starkly different to the way it is imagined by white British society today. Culture formed a means of empowerment for these Asian women as they focused on histories of resistance by drawing on local traditions, not speaking out against them, as racist depictions of innately patriarchal Asian mores might imagine. My thesis was an opportunity to study and communicate one such history of empowerment that matters to me.

Footnotes:

1. rank-and-file action: strikes led by ordinary workers against the wishes of the trade union leaders.



An Immersive Virtual Reality Platform for Self-attachment Psychotherapy

Ibrahim Ghaznavi,
DPhil in Psychology

RESEARCH PROJECT

Currently, there is a global mental health crisis of an unprecedented scale, and conventional, non-digital methods are unable to respond to it effectively. A report by the NHS states that: “Mental health problems represent the largest single cause of disability in the UK. The cost to the economy is estimated at £105 billion a year – roughly the cost of the entire NHS”.¹ Conventional treatments for depression involve medication and collaborative face-to-face psychotherapy. Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) is one of the most widely practised forms; it involves changing patterns of thought to alter behaviour, and is traditionally collaborative, highly structured and needs to be administered by a trained clinician. This makes it less cost-effective and limits its accessibility thus making it less scalable. Just to give you an idea, even in the US there are only 14.7 licensed psychologists per 100,000 people.² The majority of the patients have to wait weeks if not months to access health care; this supply problem is further exacerbated in other parts of the world.

For these reasons, an intervention which is scalable must be self-administrable - self-attachment psychotherapy has the potential to offer this. Under the Self-attachment therapeutic framework, the causes of mental disorders can be traced back to the individual's insecure attachment with their primary caregiver during childhood. Self-attachment offers a self-administrable protocol in which the user imaginatively creates an internal affectional bond with their childhood-self based on mental imagery, and then simulates optimal parent-child interactions to re-parent the childhood self to emotional maturity, thus earning themselves secure attachment.

To make this scalable, it must be based on a technology that is easily accessible; with over 5 billion mobile subscribers worldwide, mobile technology is therefore ideally placed to offer a breakthrough in the field of digital psychotherapeutic research. The latest phones have evolved from merely being phones to be full-fledged computing devices with virtual reality (VR) capabilities. It will be hardly surprising to see a scalable digital psychotherapeutic intervention to be based on mobile technology. My research involves building and testing an self-administrable, thus, scalable, immersive virtual reality platform to enhance the efficacy of the Self-attachment psychotherapy and to help treat

mental health patients; since there is no need for a trained professional, it therefore has the potential to help a far greater number of patients.

The platform consists of both a high-end platform (based-off Facebook's Oculus), and a low-end mobile VR platform (based off Google's Cardboard). A preliminary version of the VR platform has been piloted on volunteers across Europe and Canada and shows promising results. The platform tested whether users find their 3D photorealistic avatars in virtual reality to be more relatable than their 2D photos. In both the high-end version and the low-end version, more than 85% of the participants reported that their avatar in VR was more relatable than their ordinary childhood photo. Participants also reported that the high-end version of the VR platform was more realistic and immersive than the low-end mobile version. A full-scale randomised controlled trial is currently underway to test the efficacy of the platform in a clinical setting.



Footnotes:

1. Mental Health Taskforce, “The five year forward view for mental health.” 2016, Accessed: Jun. 23, 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://www.england.nhs.uk/wp-content/uploads/2016/02/Mental-Health-Taskforce-FYFV-final.pdf>.
2. P. Lin, L and Stamm, K and Christidis, “2015 County-Level Analysis of U.S. Licensed Psychologists and Health Indicators,” APA Cent. Work. Stud., 2015, Accessed: Jun. 24, 2020. [Online]. Available: <https://www.apa.org/workforce/publications/15-county-analysis/index>.

Transpiration Cooling for Hypersonic Vehicles

RESEARCH PROJECT

Imran Naved,
DPhil in Engineering

For the past decade, there has been a great resurgence of research into the field of hypersonics.¹ Much faster than the better-known supersonic vehicles, like the decommissioned Concorde and the SR-71 Blackbird, which may travel at speeds of up to Mach 3 or 3500 km/h, hypersonic vehicles can reach speeds in excess of Mach 5, approaching 10000 km/h. Many hypersonic vehicles have been different variants of rockets, flying man or other payloads into outer space. These include the Saturn V, the Space Shuttle and the Russian Soyuz rockets.

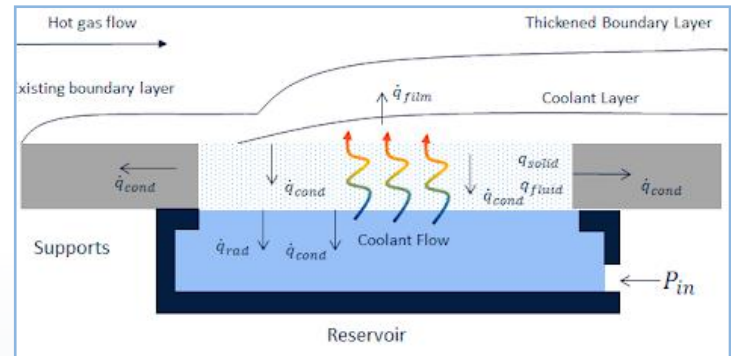
Since the 1980s, significant research has been expended to develop hypersonic transport for both civil and military applications. For two decades, the US in particular has invested billions of dollars to develop a Single Stage to Orbit (SSTO) spacecraft and passenger airliner. Named the National Aerospace Plane (NASP) program, its development was eventually prevented by the fact that technology had not yet matured to the point of realising such an ambitious concept, and so it was eventually cancelled in the mid-1990s.³

But just over a year ago, SpaceX delivered four astronauts to the International Space Station on the Dragon 2 rocket (with the Crew Dragon module); this was the first US developed spacecraft to be able to do so since the retirement of the Space Shuttle. Troublingly, around the same time, Russia unveiled its new weapon system, Avangard. This heralded the start of what has been dubbed a “hypersonic arms race”; its missiles are able to reach a target in the US mainland in under 15 minutes.

But why is it so hard to develop Hypersonic vehicles that can fly?

Developing a hypersonic vehicle is an incredibly complicated, multidisciplinary problem. Among many systems, it requires an efficient heat shield able to withstand the high temperatures at ascent or re-entry to the atmosphere. SpaceX are already demonstrating with their existing Falcon and future Starship vehicles that reusability is a key factor for keeping costs down.

My Research Field



Schematic Illustration of Transpiration Cooling

A promising technology which has come to the fore in recent years is transpiration cooling. Analogous to how we sweat through pores in our skin, transpiration cooling is the introduction of a cool layer of fluid through a porous material between the vehicle surface and the hot external flow, reducing the heat transfer to (and therefore the temperature of) the material. The advantage of transpiration cooling is that it is an active cooling technology that can enable fully re-usable hypersonic vehicles. This is the dream currently being pursued by SpaceX and other smaller companies such as Reaction Engines in the UK.

As well as the great civil potential of transpiration cooling – for example, the ability to deploy fully reusable spacecraft may enable the usage of hypersonic vehicles in a similar form to our current civil aircraft industry – the technology also has great tactical benefits. It can be used to maintain the aerodynamic characteristics of, for example, a sharp leading edge. Better aerodynamics can lead to more effective and efficient capabilities for both offense and defense.

It is at this juncture that what may seem like innocuous, basic scientific research starts to veer away to questions of morality and ethics. Ultimately, for me, the pursuit of developing the next generation of spacecraft to explore the solar system, and further afield is a noble goal. By digging deeper and truly experiencing the overwhelming wonder of God’s creation, surely we will also come to a deeper realisation of God along with it?

Footnotes:

1. Hypersonic Missiles Are Unstoppable. And They’re Starting a New Global Arms Race. New York Times <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/06/19/magazine/hypersonic-missiles.html>
2. First Flight of Space Shuttle Atlantis – Oct. 3, 1985 | NASA (background image)
3. Facing the Heat Barrier, A History of Hypersonics, T.A Heppenheimer

Muslims in Academia

Imran Naved,
DPhil in Engineering;
Noor Qurashi,
BA History

When one thinks of Academia, both in the Humanities and Sciences, the individuals that often come to mind are figures such as Newton, Darwin, or Descartes; it is easy to forget that not that long ago, the Muslims led the world in scientific and academic progress. In the mid-8th century, the Abbasids led a vital translation work at the so-called “Bayt al-Hikmah” (or House of Wisdom) through which Greek, Persian and Indian sources were translated into Arabic. It is less well known that this (eventually) formed the foundations for the western European Renaissance and heralded the modern age of science and progress.

The intellectual achievements of the Muslims did not occur in a vacuum but rather were driven and motivated by Islam and the injunctions of the Qur'an. When the Qur'an conveys to us to reflect on the world around us – on the creation of the Earth, the Sun, and the Moon – the early Muslims understood that to mean research: gaining closeness to God through an interrogation of the mysteries of nature. When you read works by early Muslim scientists, you may notice that the first page of the book begins with the name of God, praising Him. God was central in their pursuit of knowledge. Today, whilst there are many Muslims working within and excelling in academia, there is often a disconnect. A disconnect between the secular mechanism of conducting experiments and writing papers, and ultimately, the divine majesty of the object of study – the world around us.

The Muslim Researchers Network

In 2018, after working with FOSIS on the inaugural National Muslim Student

Research Conference (NMSRC), a group of Oxford students established the Muslim Researchers' Network (MRN), envisaged as a platform that aims to promote progress and excellence in academic research conducted by Muslims across all disciplines. Indeed, it is part of the uniqueness of the MRN that it aims to encapsulate both the Sciences and Humanities (and thus encourage cross-subject collaboration), as well as its being a body specifically for Muslims conducting secular research. There is a place here both for the physicist researching novel ideas in particle physics or the economist researching new techniques in macroeconomics.

The objectives of the MRN are threefold: to showcase research conducted by Muslims and to contextualise this in light of their faith; to encourage collaboration across different fields through building a vibrant network of Muslim academics; and to encourage the next generation of Muslim students to excel in academia.

Over the past year, the MRN has run a mentorship scheme to connect early stage and aspiring researchers with more experienced academics. Furthermore, over the coming months, the MRN podcast will offer insight into the world of “Muslim research”, hosting experienced researchers across a range of disciplines.

The Conference

The annual Oxford Muslim Research Conference (OMRC) is the flagship component of the MRN. Bringing together over 150 students, researchers and academics across the UK, it is a chance for attendees to showcase their research, take part in panel discussions and network.



The Conference consists of four primary components:

- The **research workshops** are aimed mainly at PhD students and above and consist of a mixture of talks in both Science and the Humanities. Each speaker links their research to their Islamic faith, discussing some of the moral, social or spiritual implications in that field of study.
- Extended breaks and sessions where undergraduates and masters students have the chance to showcase their research to conference attendees.
- The **panel discussions and workshops** aim to both support existing academics with a variety of conversations around pertinent topics in academia; and to remove any misconceptions or fears about academic research for those considering it as a career.
- Finally, the **Keynote lecture**. This is based on the theme of the conference and aims to address the primary aim of MRN - linking academic research to the Islamic ethos.

Testimonials From Previous Conferences

“The OMRC was a brilliant opportunity to explore academia as a career path. The variety of talks given by specialists showed the breadth of opportunities within academic work, but, crucially, discussed the impact this could have on wider society. I personally enjoyed the Q&A sessions as they broke the glass ceiling. Topics of discussion ranged from career building to – interestingly enough – routines and exercise habits, so any questions you have will, very likely, be answered!”

Samiha,
3rd year History undergraduate

“From an undergraduate perspective, OMRC represents a unique opportunity to learn about the realities of academia from Muslims who have lived it, to hear about a range of research from fields beyond the narrow scope of an undergraduate degree, to hear from world-class keynote speakers, and to feel pride in the quality output of our community.”

AbdurRasheed,
4th year Physics undergraduate

OMRC 2021

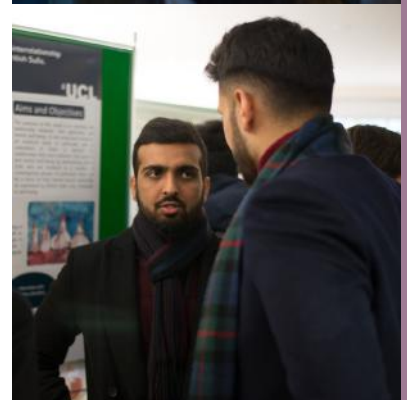
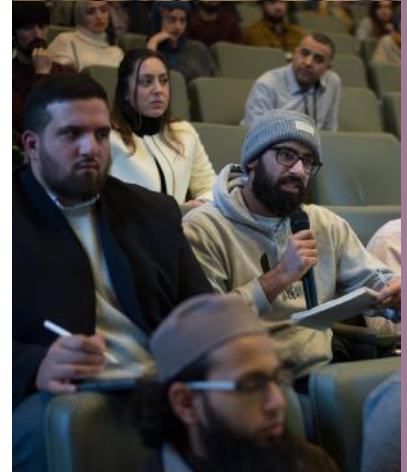
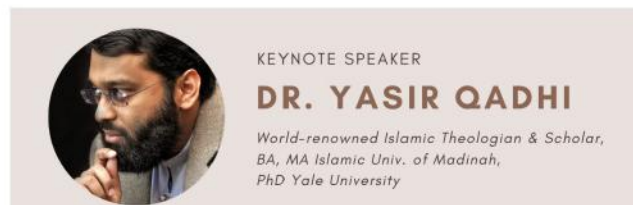
This year's conference focuses on 'Navigating Academic Disagreement as Muslims', and features a keynote talk by Dr Yasir Qadhi, Dean of The Islamic Seminary of America, and will take place on 23rd October.



FOCUS **NAVIGATING ACADEMIC DISAGREEMENT AS MUSLIMS**

VENUE
UNIVERSITY
OF OXFORD

DATE
23.10.2021



Alumni

In this Alumni section, Nabila (who many of us know from her work with Oxford Mutual Aid and as a previous Vice-president) reflects on the responsibilities of teachers - her way of approaching them is so insightful. After her, Ezziddin - Vice-president in 2017-18 and President in 2018-19 - writes a piece which sheds light on this community's central place within the Oxford experiences of so many of us.

From Student to Teacher

When I finished my degree at Oxford, I knew I wanted to work in education, but I wasn't sure which path to take. Having just survived the intensity of the past two years, the idea of running straight into what would be intense teacher training did not have a strong appeal, so I went down the charity route. But before long, I realised that my favourite hours of work were those in schools, delivering workshops and meeting students so I figured out where my heart lay early on. From then on, I took a PGCE and went into mainstream secondary education.

Looking back now, the transition was one of responsibility. Every hour, I was responsible for another thirty faces: responsible for not only the content I was teaching, for their experience of education, and for moments that could and may shape how they learn and interact with the world for the remainder of their lives. I say this as someone who has pertinent memories of my own time in education - gestures, statements and swift comments from teachers that have stayed with me to this day. From my name being wrong, being too quiet, too loud, not really being noticed at all, to being told I'd never get into Oxford or no work ever really being good enough. Some moments more obviously significant than others, and many which slipped my teachers' minds as easily as they imprinted in mine. Then the reverse: moments my teachers may remember but which were inconsequential parts of my day, none of which I could recall with any detail, but which I cannot say have not subconsciously formed significant parts of who I am, and defined how I interact with the world. The plasticity of young people's minds, particularly as teenagers, navigating an ever-changing world and finding their place in it, cannot be overstated. Thus, I know every interaction I have with my students has the potential to have an impact on their lives. I'm under no illusion: many will have no meaning at all, but I will never know the difference. I cannot know

whether moment A is any more important than B, regardless of how it may feel to me.

The lessons of the past two years have been those of stepping up to the plate. Of understanding the consequences of my actions and thinking before I speak. Of knowing the impact of words and actions from those in positions of responsibility and embracing those possibilities. Within this is also knowing that I have new opportunities every day, so as many mistakes that I will make (and there will be many), I must also hold onto the hope that with self-reflection, good intent and sincere effort, I can work to ensure that in my classroom, they do not take hold in my students' experience of education.

In many ways, my experience of ISoc helped me to step outside the 'student bubble', where life often felt nothing more than the books we read, the essays we scrambled to finish or the exams we had coming. Oxford was unique in this aspect - between studying, socialising, organising, sleeping, there's not time for much else, certainly not for second chances. A bad impression once made, was there for good (and I made a lot of them!). It never felt like enthusiasm and intent counted for much, so entering the world of teaching has been refreshing for both my mental and spiritual health. For seeing a world broader than my existence in it, for seeing impact beyond anything I could type at two in the morning, and for seeing the impact that purpose and action can have on the world around me.

Nabila Qureshi



Oxford's True Torch

Ezziddin Yonis

An architectural feature of the old Arab cities is a sharp contrast between the private and the public, between the interior and the exterior. If you were to seek out one of the grander traditional houses in cities like Damascus, you'd find yourself weaving in between dusty, narrow streets. The walls around you would be plain and sun-baked. There'd be simple, small doors at regular intervals, neither they nor the blank windows revealing anything about what may lie inside. That is the exterior of these traditional homes, and it is as plain as can be.

Only after entering one of these doors is the glory revealed. The first step inside takes you into a spacious and beautifully landscaped courtyard: a sculpted ecosystem. In the centre would be a pool of water, maybe a rushing fountain. Intricate mosaic and calligraphy would add dazzling detail in any direction you care to look. And all this bursting with life; vines and trees providing shade and fruit, a courtyard designed to host every generation of the extended family, and ready to provide hospitality so generous it goes far beyond the limits of expectation and reason.

I often think about this contrast; the humble exterior masking the glorious interior. It's the virtues of hijab applied to architecture, and also a reflection of an Islamic truth: that the inner life is what matters and where real beauty lies.

At the University of Oxford, the contrast I love about these traditional houses ran the other way around. Don't get me wrong, I really wanted to study at Oxford, and I'm grateful that I got in to this day. I loved the city and university, and my ego loved the prestige. Lincoln College was beautiful, the resources great, and I remember my tutors fondly. But what I mean is that though the university is grand, becoming an

insider didn't reveal hidden depth. Instead, right at the heart of university culture I found a deep hollowness, like piles of dead, cold ash where they should have been roaring fires. A shallowness pervaded almost everything. For a place populated almost entirely by the most successful and privileged young people in society, Oxford sure had a lot of unhappiness. I watched as my best friends from school were impacted in profound, quite sad ways.

It's funny how quickly you get used to things. As far as I was concerned, this was now just the Oxford experience. And then there was the Islamic Society. At school, I hadn't known ISocs existed, nor had I thought I'd spend university seeking out the company of Muslims. But through the glimpses I had of Oxford ISoc, I found myself drawn in, driven almost by instinct. There was something special, something inexpressible in this little pocket of students.

What I remember most from ISoc are the times we created our own versions of those Damascene houses; bubbles of true beauty within the most unassuming places. In my first year, an undergraduate's room in St. Benet's hosted a weekly gathering of remembrance (dhikr). Those gatherings meant a lot to me, shaping my whole week and my connection to God. I understood why later, when I came upon this hadith:

Abu Huraira reported: The Messenger of Allah said,

"No people gather to remember Allah Almighty but that the angels surround them, cover them with mercy, send tranquillity upon them, and mention them to Allah among those near to Him."

And in another hadith:

“The angels sit with them [in gatherings of remembrance] and fold their wings round each other, filling that which is between them and between the heavens”.

It makes me smile that, around the top floor of St. Benets, or by the labs in the Robert Hooke building, there was often a congregation of angels covering the skies.

I developed spiritually through my time in ISoc, and in time I came to realise: this was the authentic Oxford experience. It's worth remembering that most Oxford colleges were originally established as academic religious communities. That's why every college is built around three features: the library (a place to study together), the Hall (a place to eat together) and the Chapel (a place to

worship together). It's a three-part system and skipping over the worship throws the whole system into whack. Trying to get through Oxford just on food and study is like riding a bike missing the front wheel – it's just so much more stressful and the chances of hurting yourself are a lot higher.

When I was elected to the ISoc committee, I chose a quote from Shaykh Abdal Hakim Murad to go on the website, and here's another one:

British Islam: We came as rebels and found ourselves to be heirs.

This is how I felt at Oxford. The great wealth of most colleges comes from centuries of donations, intended to fund communities of worship and learning (rather than, say, to bankroll bops). Few take that seriously in Oxford now - but in the ISoc I found the most amazing people, serious about developing academically, socially, and religiously. It may look like a humble student society, but on the inside, this community carries the torch of the true Oxford education.



An illustration of a traditional Arab house by Tayiba Sulaiman

OULSOC Termcard - Michaelmas Term 2021

| | SUNDAY | | | MONDAY | | TUESDAY | | WEDNESDAY | | THURSDAY | FRIDAY | | SATURDAY |
|--------------------------------|--|---|----------------------------------|---|---|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|---|---|--|----------|
| Week 0 3rd Oct | Magazine Launch (7pm) | Sisters' Chai & 'Hi' (5pm) | Brothers' Dessert Night (7pm) | Sisters' Games Night (7pm) | Brothers' Games Night (7pm) | Sisters' Scavenger Scout (5pm) | Brothers' Paintballing (10am) | Meet the Committee (7pm) | Sisters' Laser Tag (4pm) | Brothers' Football (8pm) | Grad Hilltop Scenes and Ice-creams (2pm) | | |
| | Port Fajr Sunrise Walk (6:15am) | Sisters' and Brothers' Settling Into Uni Talk (2:30pm) | | Sisters' Movie & Henna Night (7pm) | Brothers' Kebab Van Crawl (9pm) | Sisters' Kebab Van Crawl (7pm) | Brothers' Bowling (5pm) | Lessons from Imam Ghazali's Ihya by Sh Riyad (7pm) | Grad Freshers' Dinner (7:30pm) | | Mount Snowdon Climb (6:15am-11pm) | | |
| Week 1 10 th Oct | | Before the Last Hour Part 1 (7pm) | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Week 2 17 th Oct | Freshers' Dinner (7pm) | Lessons from Imam Ghazali's Ihya by Sh Riyad (7pm) | | Q-Club (7:15-9pm) | | CW: Brothers' Fifa Social (7pm) | CW: Sisters' Masquerade Ball (7pm) | | | | Oxford Muslim Research Conference | | |
| Week 3 24 th Oct | Charity Week Fayre (11:30am) | Sisters' T-Shirt Tie-Dye (7pm) | | Lessons from Imam Ghazali's Ihya by Sh Riyad (7pm) | | Brothers' Social (7pm) | Community Volunteering (10:30-3pm) | Before the Last Hour Part 2 (7pm) | Quiz Night (7pm) | | Auction Dinner (7pm) | | |
| Week 4 31 st Oct | Football Tournament (Sisters 1-3pm) (Brothers 4-6pm) | Our Beloved Prophet (SAW) (6pm) | | Lessons from Imam Ghazali's Ihya by Sh Riyad (7pm) | | 'Sister' Maker Arts and Craft (7pm) | | Revivers of Islam Part 1 (6-7:30pm) | Women in Islam (6pm) | | Brothers' Chai Meetup (6pm) | | |
| Week 5 7 th Nov | Harcourt Arboretum (9:30am) | Current Affairs in Palestine with Lowkey (6-7:30pm) | | Lessons from Imam Ghazali's Ihya by Sh Riyad (7pm) | | Before the Last Hour Part 3 (7pm) | | Subject Advice Session (7-8pm) | Graduate Research Showcase (3pm) | Fresher Sisters' Hot Chocolate & Chill (8pm) | | | |
| Week 6 14 th Nov | Careers Week: Engineering (5-6pm) | Careers Week: Law (5-6pm) Medicine (7:30-8:30pm) | | Careers Week: Finance and Consulting (5-6pm) | Lessons from Imam Ghazali's Ihya by Sh Riyad (7pm) | Careers Week: Tech (6-7pm) | | Revivers of Islam Part 2 (6-7:30pm) | Understanding Finances in Islam (6-9pm) | | | | |
| Week 7 21 st Nov | Grad-Undergrad Sisters' Formal (7pm) | Subject Family Quiz Night (7pm) | | Lessons from Imam Ghazali's Ihya by Sh Riyad (7pm) | | Before the Last Hour Part 4 (7pm) | Community Volunteering (10:30-3pm) | Friendships and Sisterhood Talk | Brothers' Day Out in Oxford (3pm) | | Come Dine with ISOC (6pm) | | |
| Week 8 28 th Nov | Grad Cycle Tour (2pm) | Lessons from Imam Ghazali's Ihya by Sh Riyad (7pm) | | Q-Club (7:15-9:00pm) | | Brothers' Games Night (7pm) | | Film Screening and Discussion | Sisters' Mocktails (8pm) | | Alumni Dinner (6-9pm) | | |

| REGULAR EVENTS | | | | | | |
|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|----------------|---------------------|
| Event | Bros' Fajr Breakfast | Bros' Tilawah Circle | Sisters' Fajr Breakfast | Sisters' Tilawah Circle | Bros' Football | Sisters' Kickboxing |
| Date/ Time | Friday After Fajr | Wednesday After Isha | Tuesday After Fajr | Saturday 11am | Friday 8pm | Sunday 10-11am |

| KEY | | | |
|---------------------|-----------|-------------------|------------------|
| Religious Education | Community | Politics | Other |
| | Graduates | Islamic Awareness | Welfare & Social |

CRYPTOGRAM

Ahnaf Farabi

[illegible][illegible]

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رَبَّنَا تَقَبَّلْ مِنَّا
إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

“Our Lord! Accept (this) from us.
Indeed! You are the Hearing, the Knowing.”



IKHLAAS

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