

## Impact case study (REF3)

<b>Institution:</b> 10007140 – Birmingham City University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> 27 – English Language and Literature		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Stories of Sacrifice: increasing cross-cultural, cross-faith awareness and dialogue through a public exhibition and collaboration with the Armed Forces, Police and schools		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> September 2015 to November 2018		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b> Dr Islam Issa	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b> Reader in Literature and History	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> September 2015 to present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> January 2016 to December 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b> (indicative maximum 100 words)		
<p>Research conducted by Dr Islam Issa has doubled the previous estimate of Muslim soldiers that fought for the Allies during WW1. At a time of increasing Islamophobia, the research and resulting exhibition, <i>Stories of Sacrifice</i>, have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• increased cross-cultural and cross-faith awareness and dialogue in the UK, reaching hundreds of thousands of individuals;</li> <li>• altered perceptions of Muslims in the First World War and of Muslims in general positively, with 75% of visitors surveyed saying the exhibition changed their views about Muslims in Britain;</li> <li>• directly changed the British Army's Diversity and Inclusion strategies in the North West;</li> <li>• contributed to Greater Manchester Police diversifying its recruitment practices while helping it to combat racial profiling following the 2017 Manchester bombing;</li> <li>• increased Muslim students' awareness of the Muslim contribution and their sense of belonging, reaching over 2,000 students through lessons and school trips at Key Stages 3 and 4.</li> </ul>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b> (indicative maximum 500 words)		
<p>In 2014, the UK Army was concerned about a lack of diversity in the upcoming World War One (WW1) centenary commemorations and advertised funds to combat this problem. The same year, an ICM survey revealed that only 2% of the British public was aware of the extent of the Muslim contribution to the War. The British Muslim Heritage Centre (<b>BMHC</b>) responded by commissioning Issa to research and curate the <i>Stories of Sacrifice</i> project in 2015, half-funded by the Ministry of Defence's Covenant Fund (awarding £97,500). The primary aim was to create free-to-access information. Issa and the funders decided that a permanent exhibition, open to the public, schoolchildren of all ages, scholars, and official visits from the army and police, would be the best way to create cross-cultural awareness and understanding.</p> <p>Issa's rigorous research methods draw on archival, literary, and community-based research and engagement, revealing new narratives that challenge, re-examine, and re-orient canonical and seemingly familiar topics through the application of a new cultural lens. His previous research into the reception of English literature in global contexts and by Middle Eastern readers resulted in new narratives related to canonical writers. Given access to archives at the British Library, National Archives, and the private-access National Army Museum, Issa applied his style of literary research methods and aims to this largely unaddressed area of study on war history, and specifically the Muslim minority in WW1. First, traditional archival methods of surveying and reviewing exceedingly large quantities of primary items (documents, records, photographs, maps)</p>		

uncovered and brought to light new stories and statistics. This was followed by detailed textual and character analysis to examine and present, as works in their own right, literature formed of thousands of soldiers' letters, officers' regimental diaries, and other such materials. Through this textual and character analysis, Issa created profiles for these individuals in order to develop their stories and humanise them: a unique approach to history research. The research revealed that at least 885,000 Muslims fought in WW1, double the number estimated previously (R01, R02). This was largely because previous estimates limited the contribution to Indian soldiers.

The research formed the basis of the BMHC's long-term exhibition from January 2016 to present and a free-to-access website (R02). A travelling version of the exhibition has also toured the UK since 2016. The exhibition features previously undiscovered or unreported letters, photographs, and diary entries. Its narrative centres on a series of individual stories related to those involved in the war effort. The research was also developed into course packs for schoolteachers to utilise in order to diversify the curriculum.

The research grant proposal underwent rigorous review by Armed Forces Community Covenant Grant assessors. The quality of the exhibition's research led to dozens of academic citations and selection as a subject for a successful PhD thesis at Boston University, now forthcoming as a book (*Mobilising Memory: Commemorating Muslims in the First World War Centenary*, Routledge), and an MA thesis at the University of Glasgow. Findings have been published in the peer-reviewed Oxford University Press journal *Oxford Islamic Studies Online* (R01), under the editorship of renowned Professor John Esposito (Georgetown University). The research has received several highly prestigious awards including the *Times Higher Education* "Research Project of the Year" (R03).

### 3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)

#### R01: Journal article

Islam Issa and Imran Awan, "Islamophobia: From the Renaissance through WW1 and the Alt-Right", *Oxford Islamic Studies Online* (Oxford University Press, March 2020). <http://www.open-access.bcu.ac.uk/9834/>

#### R02: Exhibition

Sole Researcher and Curator: 'Stories of Sacrifice', British Muslim Heritage Centre, Manchester. Website: <<http://www.storiesofsacrifice.com/>>.

Permanent exhibition, BMHC (January 2016 – March 2018)

Travelling exhibition (August 2016 – present) in over 20 public venues across the UK

Permanent corridor exhibition, BMHC (March 2018 – present)

#### R03: Awards

- Winner of *Times Higher Education Awards 'Research Project of the Year: Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences'*. 2019.

- Winner of the *Muslim News Awards 'Excellence in Community Relations Prize'*. 2017.

- Winner of *Manchester Culture Awards 'Highly Commended Exhibition'*. 2018.

- Winner of the *Queen's Award for Voluntary Service*. 2018 (BMHC).

- Winner of the *Armed Forces Awards Lifetime Award for 'Enduring Support to Cohesion'*. 2018 (BMHC).

### 4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

At a time when Islamophobia is on the rise, this research has been a catalyst for greater cross-cultural and cross-faith awareness and dialogue. Issa's research won the *Times Higher Education Awards* "Research Project of the Year" in 2019, impacting the judges who described it as: "a terrific

*piece of historical recovery notable for the strength of its primary research, the timeliness of its conception and the impact of its eye-opening results” (S01).*

#### **Building cross-cultural community understanding:**

From January 2016 to March 2018, the exhibition was the main attraction at the BMHC in Manchester, attracting 29,000 unique visitors. These included HRH the Prince of Wales, the Chief of the UK Army, the Mayor of London, and the Green Party leader (S02). Between January 2016 and August 2017, *Stories of Sacrifice* website visits exceeded 20,000; short videos about the research had 10,000 views; engagement on posts about the research on Facebook reached 200,000+ (S05). Versions of the exhibition toured 20+ public venues, including Blackburn Cathedral, Oldham Library, and events in such locations as Renfrewshire (requested by the Scottish Equality Council) and Glasgow, where First Minister Nicola Sturgeon attended and Minister Humza Yousaf stated that rising right-wing extremism can be curtailed using this research: *“We’re faced with a barrage of negativity about communities, racism, Islamophobia... If people understood ... this exhibition ... then I don’t think any right-wing fascist would ever have the audacity to say to somebody ‘you don’t give a flying monkeys about this country”* (S09). The City of Manchester put the exhibition in a prominent position in Manchester Central Library (January–March 2018), where the Lord Mayor acknowledged the *“important contribution”* of the research in building dialogue and stronger communities (S10). BMHC note that *“Dr Issa’s research created greater opportunities for cross-cultural understanding”*. BMHC built long-standing relationships *“with high profile bodies and visitors”*, was awarded the Queen’s Award for Voluntary Service, the Armed Forces Awards ‘Lifetime Award for Enduring Support to Cohesion’, and is the first Muslim organization to sign the Armed Forces Covenant (S05).

#### **Altering perceptions of Muslims:**

The WW1 centenary commemorations needed to be inclusive to recognise the UK’s Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) and Muslim communities (>13% and >5% of UK respectively). *Stories of Sacrifice* addressed the lack of diversity in the commemorations. The exhibition included letters, diaries and photographs on public view for the first time and was recognised by the *i* newspaper as the *“first exhibition devoted to the Islamic contribution to the conflict”* (S02). It had an immediate positive impact on perceptions of Muslim integration in Britain. Sir Warren Smith, Lord Lieutenant of Greater Manchester, described it as *“exceptionally important”*, adding *“Not only does it commemorate the Muslim contribution to the First World War, but it’s an opportunity for the wider community to see that for themselves”* (S04). The exhibition was covered extensively by media (e.g. Discovery Channel News, S02), most leading with the significant finding regarding the doubling of Muslims estimated to have fought in the war. The news featured on the front page of *Asian Leader* (UK English-language newspaper, circulation 120,000 – cf. *Guardian* 111,000), and was covered as far afield as Canada, the USA, India, and the Middle East (S02). *The National* newspaper (UAE) noted: *“As extremists and fearmongers try to create division, organisers of an exhibition in England fight back with inspirational tales of unity to remind us of how natural it is for Muslims and non-Muslims to stand side by side”* (S02). The exhibition was visited by a diverse demographic from around the UK. Exhibition visitor questionnaires show **changes in perception of the Muslim contribution and of Muslims**. Before the exhibition, 24% of visitors were aware of the contribution of Muslims compared to 93% post-exhibition, an increase of 291%. The attendees who had no prior knowledge at all reported back confident (97%) or somewhat confident (3%) of their newly acquired knowledge. On attendee perception of Muslim integration in British society, pre-exhibition 41% did not think or were unsure whether Muslims were integrated (10% and 31%, respectively), compared to 11% (2% and 9%, respectively) post-exhibition. 86% of exhibition attendees reported they had shared the knowledge they gained with family, friends, colleagues and other people (S03).

#### **Enhancing Diversity and Equality Training in the Armed Forces:**

The Armed Forces engaged significantly, which transformed their Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategies. The Deputy Commander of the British Army in the North West publicly praised the *“fantastic”* exhibition (S04). He subsequently requested support reviewing the army’s diversity training. Issa worked with the project manager Ashraf Ali (awarded an MBE in 2020 for this project) to embed the research into diversity training days (250+ cadets in two years), helping develop and

deliver new material that covered BAME contributions to Britain historically (S05). The Commander of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Brigade confirmed the relevance of this new material to the Army's training strategies: *"It's absolutely critical that we inform everyone of the importance of the Muslim contribution to the Armed Forces"* (S04). During 2016-2017, 12+ group visits to the exhibition were organised for different military brigades. The HQ 11<sup>th</sup> Signal and West Midlands Brigade displayed an abridged exhibition in Birmingham and the Army arranged for the exhibition to be featured at Edinburgh Military Tattoo (attendance 217,000). In 2018, Army recruitment commercials included "Keeping My Faith", centred around a Muslim soldier praying.

#### **Police Education and Recruitment:**

The research benefitted Greater Manchester Police (GMP) in the immediate, unstable aftermath of the Manchester Arena Attack (May 2017). The week following the attack, the mobile version was installed in the main lobby of the GMP Force Headquarters (upon request of GMP's Chief Constable). Issa was invited to launch it (July 2017) alongside the Head of the North West Counter-Terrorism Unit to the entire Counter-Terrorism team. A GMP Detective Inspector and senior figure in the Muslim Police Association notes: *"The exhibition ... was a great way to make GMP staff aware of the contribution and sacrifice made by Muslims from across the world"* (S06). *Times Higher Education* reports that GMP *"acknowledged how important this had been for non-Muslim staff and how it had helped to combat the dangers involved in racial profiling"* (S01). Issa received confidential correspondence from Muslim officers detailing how the research increased their sense of pride and belonging.

These events also served as a manifestation of the Force's continued efforts to engage collaboratively with Muslim communities at difficult times. GMP twice worked with Issa and the BMHC (the second time in July 2018), whom they acknowledge as *"a partner in promoting Greater Manchester Police vacancies to underrepresented groups"*, as a springboard for diversifying recruitment practices and generating suitable recruitment processes for minority communities (S06). By attending the exhibition, GMP met and recruited community members. GMP's successful strategy was enhanced by the connections and spaces forged by and at *Stories of Sacrifice*. They became the most successful UK force outside London in recruiting BAME individuals in both volume and percentage, having increased the percentage of new recruits to more than double the national average: in the three annual cycles since collaboration, 350+ BAME officers were recruited (21% of new recruits), and in in the four annual cycles since collaboration, BAME officer numbers rose from 4.9% of the total GMP force to 9.2%, with other forces now seeking GMP's advice (S07). This success led to Issa being invited to sit on the Police Uplift Programme's national working group for diversity and inclusion. In recognition of the Detective Inspector's recruitment successes, he was promoted and appointed as the Police Uplift Programme's national lead for Diversity, Equality and Inclusion in 2020 where he supports all 43 UK forces in striving to achieve similar success.

#### **Schools and curricula:**

In cooperation with two schoolteachers, the research was developed into course packs for Key Stages 3 and 4, linked to the UK curricula for integration into classes. The lessons – with learning objectives and outcomes, available for English, Geography, History, and Religious Studies – are unique to the research. For instance, English lessons use extracts from soldiers' diaries uncovered by Issa. Lesson structures include start, main, and expansion exercises, plus detailed notes for teachers and downloadable resources from the research (e.g. maps from the National Archives). Islamic faith schools also used these to assist with Citizenship lessons on integration. The packs are free to download and have been distributed countrywide to 150+ schools and used by 1,000+ students. Schoolteachers describe this as *"an important resource for making the curriculum relevant to their students today"* (S05). The research was also developed into three educational resource packs, each containing research findings and group tasks, utilised on school trips to the exhibition; in a one-year period, 1,000+ schoolchildren aged 6-18 visited (S08). In particular, students identifying as Muslim reported that, after the knowledge acquired at the exhibition, they felt a sense of pride and belonging (e.g. *"This exhibition has made me proud to be a British Muslim, and has made me feel an important part of society"*), while some wished for Muslims to be recognised and appreciated further in British society (e.g. *"[...] they deserve to be recognised for*



*their efforts*” and *“We should be treated equally and with respect as we helped Britain a lot in the World War.”*) (S03).

**5. Sources to corroborate the impact** (indicative maximum of 10 references)

- S01** “**THE Awards 2019 winner: Research Project of the Year: Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences**”, Times Higher Education (29th November 2019).  
THE email award letter (including attachments)
- S02** **Key press coverage.**  
The *i* newspaper article (picture)  
Copy of *Seeker* article (part of Discovery Communications, US, linked to via Discovery Channel News page)  
Copy of *Asian Leader* front page (screenshot)  
Copy of *The National* article (UAE)  
Other selected press coverage (showing national and international circulation)
- S03** **Key exhibition visitor questionnaire statistics**  
Summary
- S04** “**Muslim contribution to Britain during WW1 (1914-18)**, YouTube (2016), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uq\\_AMtbYZ5U&feature=youtu.be&t=1m38s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uq_AMtbYZ5U&feature=youtu.be&t=1m38s), screenshots of website with video and (auto-generated) transcript
- S05** **Written statement from the British Muslim Heritage Centre (30th January 2020).**  
Letter from Head of Projects BMHC [Named Corroborator 1]
- S06** **Written statement from GMP (9th December 2019).**  
Email from GMP Detective Inspector [Named Corroborator 2]
- S07** **Police workforce statistics**  
Data table D3 from “Police workforce, England and Wales: 31 March 2020: data tables third edition” <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/police-workforce-england-and-wales-31-march-2020>, with percentages added, and statement from GMP Detective Inspector [Named Corroborator 2]
- S08** “**Learning and Resources**”, **Stories of Sacrifice website (2016-2020)**, <http://www.storiesofsacrifice.com/learning-and-resources/>, copy of website
- S09** “**GlaswegAsian Exhibition – Humza Yousaf MP**”, YouTube (2017), [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7-ELEL\\_8kE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X7-ELEL_8kE), screenshots of website with video and (auto-generated) transcript
- S10** “**Manchester Central Library to host ground-breaking exhibition on Muslim soldiers in WWI**”, Birmingham City University Press Office (13th March 2018). <https://www.bcu.ac.uk/news-events/news/manchester-central-library-to-host-ground-breaking-exhibition-on-muslim-soldiers-in-wwi>, copy of website