

TAHIR ABBAS BSc (Econ) MSocSc PhD FRSA FAcSS

Over the course of my approximately thirty-year career, my intellectual trajectory has been defined by a continuous drive to understand the intense, often hidden, connections between systemic power and everyday human experience. From my early formative years as a doctoral researcher to my current position as Professor of Criminology and Global Justice at Aston University, my work has evolved into a comprehensive structural-relational framework. This framework carefully situates how the *macro*, *meso*, and *micro* levels of society interact to produce exclusion, marginalisation, and, ultimately, vulnerability to radicalisation.

Rather than being driven by a sequence of publications, my research has been organically shaped by global shifts, local crises, and my time embedded in three distinct national contexts: the UK, Turkey, and the Netherlands.

Here is the narrative of my intellectual journey, tracing how my conceptual framework developed in response to the changing world.

Phase 1: Foundations in the UK – Birmingham, Class, and Early Intersections (1995–2003)

My conceptual arc did not begin with the study of terrorism or global geopolitics; it began with the foundational issues of class, ethnicity, and education situated within the local, inner-city context of Birmingham. During my PhD at the University of Warwick, which examined the educational achievements of South Asians in Birmingham schools and colleges, and my subsequent postdoctoral work at the University of Central England Business School focusing on ethnic minority businesses and South Asian restaurants, I immersed myself in how these minority groups navigated their everyday realities. Both of these early research avenues were firmly grounded in the Birmingham inner-city context, allowing me to build a multilayered, **micro-experiential** understanding of how ethnicity, religion, power, class, family, neighbourhood, and community intersect and shape lived realities.

Seeking to understand how these local experiences were managed and governed at the **meso-institutional** and **macro-structural** levels, I took the opportunity to work in central government for three years. Serving as a Senior Research Officer for the Home Office (2000–2002) and the Lord Chancellor’s Department (2002–2003), I gained an invaluable inside view of the state apparatus, specifically evaluating New Labour policy and navigating matters of the courts, justice, and citizenship.

This critical juncture allowed me to bridge grassroots community dynamics with national policy frameworks. I then brought this integrated perspective back to academia when I returned to the University of Birmingham in 2003. This early recognition - that state policy, structural power, and deeply local community identities are inextricably linked - became the absolute bedrock of the structural-relational framework I would rely upon for the rest of my career.

Phase 2: Post-9/11 Britain, Securitisation, and the “Suspect Community” (2003–2009)

The tectonic geopolitical shifts of 9/11 and the 7/7 London bombings necessitated an acute evolution in my work. Returning to academia in 2003 as the Director of the Centre for the

Study of Ethnicity and Culture at the University of Birmingham, I witnessed the state's rapid pivot from multiculturalism to securitisation. My position at the Centre allowed me to actively facilitate crucial public and academic dialogues navigating this turbulent era; for example, I hosted comparative policy seminars with the Commission for Racial Equality that specifically examined anti-terrorism laws through the shared historical experiences of both the Irish and Muslim communities in the UK.

The focus of my research shifted to systematically address this new reality. I began to theorise how **macro-level** anxieties surrounding the global "War on Terror" filtered down into **meso-level** domestic policies, transforming British Muslims into a "suspect community." I critically examined how media discourses, state multicultural politics, and institutional Islamophobia were alienating young people - documenting how the British press often utilised Islam as a convenient "monster" during times of national anxiety, a theme I explored in my ideological analyses of media capital.

This era of my career was immensely productive in formalising my structural-relational framework, marked by a progression of pivotal volumes and fellowships. My 2005 book, *Muslim Britain: Communities under Pressure*, captured the immediate, localised socio-economic and cultural strains placed upon British minority populations. As my conceptual scope widened, my 2007 work, *Islamic Political Radicalism: A European Perspective*, broadened this critique beyond the UK to examine the continent as a whole. Concurrently, my academic theorising remained grounded in real-world institutional mechanics through my time as a Visiting Fellow at the University of Oxford Centre for Islamic Studies, and through applied civic roles, such as serving as Chair of the Hate Crime Scrutiny Panel for the West Midlands Crown Prosecution Service. These experiences provided an invaluable vantage point on how the state operationalised justice, security, and integration.

This period of intense conceptual development, tracing the symbiotic relationship between state securitisation and subjective alienation, ultimately culminated in my 2011 book, *Islamic Radicalism and Multicultural Politics: The British Experience*. It marked the formalisation of my central thesis: radicalisation is rarely just a crisis of theology; it is a complex, multi-level phenomenon deeply rooted in structural exclusion.

Phase 3: Turkey, Geopolitics, and Broadening the Macro Lens (2009–2016)

The next major leap in my intellectual trajectory occurred when I left the Western European context to become a Professor of Sociology at Istanbul University. Immersing myself in Turkey allowed me to radically expand the **macro-structural** pillar of my framework. I was no longer just looking at minority integration in the West; I was analysing state power, ethno-nationalism, and systemic conflict on a global scale.

Living in Turkey during the Gezi Park protests, I observed firsthand how the state deployed power to suppress civil dissent and academic freedom. However, my macro-level framework was most exceedingly reshaped by the fact that my time in Turkey was augmented by serving as a visiting scholar in three highly distinct and complex geopolitical environments in 2012: Islamabad, Jakarta, and Jerusalem. This unique global exposure provided a distinct appreciation of particular issues that are highly relevant to my wider body of work:

Islamabad, Pakistan: Serving as an Iqbal Fellow at the International Islamic University in Islamabad provided a grounded perspective on the enduring legacies of post-colonial borders, regional instability, and state fragility. It distinctly informed my understanding of the socio-

political struggles within the merged tribal districts (FATA-KP) and the structural marginalisation of Kashmiri communities, allowing me to trace how transnational ethno-national conflicts directly impact diaspora families back in the UK.

Jakarta, Indonesia: My time as a Visiting Associate Professor at the Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University in Jakarta offered a vital counterweight to Eurocentric and Middle East-centric views of the Muslim world. Experiencing the diverse, global nature of Islam in Southeast Asia deeply informed my later critiques of hegemonic Western security paradigms, ultimately feeding into my work on radicalisation in the ASEAN region and the necessity of a “Decolonial Approach” to global counter-terrorism.

Jerusalem, Israel: My tenure as a Schonbrunn Visiting Associate Professor at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem provided a visceral, everyday understanding of deeply entrenched ethno-nationalism, spatial segregation, and the securitisation of identity. This direct exposure to the realities on the ground was pivotal in shaping my critical understanding of ideological asymmetry, which later directly informed my recent analyses of the 2023 Israel-Gaza crisis, as well as my collaborative work on narrating antisemitism and the securitisation of Jewish places of worship.

This era, synthesised in my 2017 book *Contemporary Turkey in Conflict*, taught me a crucial lesson: the causal pathway from state oppression and structural exclusion to subjective radicalisation vulnerability operates through the same structural mechanics whether one is analysing Birmingham, Southeastern Turkey, Jerusalem, or Islamabad.

Phase 4: Transitional Crises, Return to Europe, and Deepening the Core (2016–2025)

The transition from my work in Turkey back to Western Europe was marked by a period of critical global and personal shifts. During my final year in Istanbul (2015–2016), I had the invaluable opportunity to serve as a Remarque Visiting Fellow at New York University. This fellowship was intellectually pivotal, granting me crucial philosophical and historical insights that added deep theoretical texture to my evolving structural-relational framework. However, the shifting political landscape and the pressures following the complex events of 2016 necessitated my departure from Turkey.

I returned to London to take up a position as a Senior Research Fellow at the Royal United Services Institute RUSI from 2016 to 2018. This role placed me squarely at the epicentre of applied policy during a period of intense global crisis. From 2014 onwards, the establishment of ISIS in Iraq and Syria was having devastating, violent reverberations across the West. With horrific attacks unfolding in cities like London, Berlin, and Nice - and increasingly in the US from 2016 onward - my work on countering violent extremism was thrust into sharp, immediate relevance. This period served as a stark reminder of the real-world stakes of my research, forcing me to continuously evaluate how **macro-level** geopolitical conflicts trigger **micro-level** radicalisation and violence on European streets.

This intense period of security-focused research at RUSI laid the crucial groundwork for my relocation to Leiden University in 2018 as Professor of Radicalisation Studies. By this time, Europe was grappling not only with the ongoing threat of Islamist extremism but also with the refugee crisis and a surge in far-right populism. In response, my framework underwent its most rigorous empirical testing as I took on leadership roles in considerable European Commission-funded initiatives, serving as Scientific Coordinator for the DRIVE project and Principal Investigator for PROTONE.

These projects allowed me to seamlessly connect the **meso-institutional** and **micro-experiential** levels across Northwestern Europe. At the meso level, I mapped how policies like the UK’s “Prevent” duty act as forms of symbolic violence, policing pre-crime thought and aggressively pushing university students “to the edge”.

But more importantly, my time in the Netherlands and my preceding experiences at RUSI deepened my focus on the human element. I theorised the psychosocial drivers of extremism, identifying how deeply personal feelings of humiliation, perceived power loss, and modern crises in digital masculinities push vulnerable youth from the margins to the extremes. I also realised that vulnerability is only half the story. To truly understand the micro-level, one must recognise agency. I documented the intersectional activism of Dutch-Turkish Muslim women who “talk back” to securitisation, and explored how women navigated the complex reintegration of female returnees from the Islamic State. My books during this period, including *Islamophobia and Radicalisation* (2019) and *Islamophobia and Securitisation: The Dutch Case* (2022), served as critical milestones in capturing this vicious cycle of state exclusion and community resilience.

Phase 5: Synthesis, Decoloniality, and Global Justice (2025–Present)

Today, returning to the UK to serve as Professor of Criminology and Global Justice - and importantly, as Director of the Centre for Radicalisation, Inclusion, and Social Equity at Aston University - my thirty years of research are culminating in a mature, integrated synthesis.

The logical progression of my career has solidified my structural-relational framework through a highly specific and grounded trajectory: moving from grassroots regional equality work and inner-city sociological research in the West Midlands, to central government policy evaluation at the Home Office and Lord Chancellor’s Department. From there, my work expanded into developing global sociological theory as a professor in Birmingham and Istanbul, and most recently, directing major European security and radicalisation research initiatives at RUSI and Leiden University.

I now explicitly advance a critique rooted in political economy, linking the production of extremism to global capitalism, racial capitalism, and neoliberal governance. I trace how macro-ideological asymmetries, such as those exposed during the 2023 Israel-Gaza crisis, dictate meso-level institutional realities and effectively define the micro-level borders of everyday identity and belonging.

This overarching synthesis is the driving force behind my most recent and forthcoming major projects, including *Radicalisation: A Critical and Integrated Perspective* (September 2026) and *The Routledge International Handbook on Social Exclusion and Radicalisation* (March 2026). My entire intellectual journey demonstrates that the crises of extremism and Islamophobia cannot be solved by policing ideology; they can only be dismantled by untangling the deep structural inequalities embedded within the global political economy and our everyday institutions.

tahir-abbas.com

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