

ACADEMIC KEYNOTE

How Religion Gets Stolen

Masculinity, Race and Political Power

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Unholy Alliance: Women, Race, Faith and the Far Right

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Religion, stolen twice over

From Powell's "Rivers of Blood" (Birmingham, 1968) to Starmer's "island of strangers" (2025): the same anxiety, the same grammar. Faith is not debated — it is lifted out of the hands of those who live it and repurposed.



Islam → made the threat

- A “floating signifier” of otherness — a word that no longer means a faith but a danger.
- Muslims are not a race, but Muslim identity is racialised (Sayyid & Vakil).
- Modood's cultural racism: prejudice aimed at deviation from a secular-Christian norm.



Britishness → made the weapon

- Operation Raise the Colours: flags saturating residential streets since mid-2025.
- The flag is bipolar — state emblem and far-right appropriation at once.
- Mainstreaming made spatial: the far right laundered into “professional” patriotism (Mondon).



THE FINDING — RACE

The credential reversal

For the white British majority, a degree is a golden ticket into belonging. For British Muslims, the formula is inverted: education buys exposure, not trust. And it is uniquely Muslim — no such penalty for other minorities.



Effect of a university degree on institutional trust. Illustrative of Abbas & Onay (2026) multi-level interaction coefficients (Muslim $\times$ higher education = +0.217 on distrust, $p < 0.001$).



Penalised most in the labour market — trusting most in democracy

30%

lower call-back rates for CVs with Muslim-identifying names, despite identical qualifications

Zschirnt & Ruedin 2016

+7.24

surge in institutional trust among UK-born Muslim women ($p = 0.006$) — the highest of any group

Abbas & Onay 2026

−5.80

collapse in trust among UK-born Muslim men ($p = 0.004$) — the generational divide is gendered

Abbas & Onay 2026

“Strategically engaged realism”. Muslim women face the largest employment penalties of any group (Khattab 2009; Miaari, Khattab & Johnston 2019) — yet refuse to cede their democratic claim. They are the anchors of civic faith inside their own communities.



MASCULINITY — AND THE CLOSE

The protection paradox

The far right claims to protect women. It manufactures fear in the very women it marks as targets. As Gentry argues, misogynist and racist violence are the same sorting machine — deciding which women are protectable, and which are the threat.

“I’ll wear a pink maxi skirt instead of a black abaya — just so I look less Muslim, even though I know I’m still going to look Muslim.”

Noor, 23 — a young Muslim woman recalibrating her body before entering a flagged street

*That their credentials trigger scrutiny rather than trust is not their failure to integrate — **it is ours. Our task is to give religion back.***