Black Lives Matter Statement of Solidarity

The British Society for Middle Eastern Studies expresses solidarity with those facing the daily realities of anti-Black racism and the global movements they have catalysed.

The brutal murders of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor (among so many others), the removal of Edward Colston's statue in Bristol, and the Black Lives Matter activists marching across the country and the world have triggered critical conversations about racism and colonialism here in the UK and globally. As an academic society, we are committed to producing critical and historically grounded knowledge, and grassroots social movements have always been integral to this process. We are aware that racism is a systemic force shaping world politics and economies, even as it takes context-specific forms. As scholars of the region widely referred to as the "Middle East and North Africa", we recognise how racism and orientalism are integral to European conquest and colonial violence, creating enduring injustices and oppressions. For this reason, many communities and movements in the Middle East and North Africa recognise their struggles against oppression and injustice in the struggles of anti-racist movements here in the UK. Whilst those experiencing racialised violence in the UK, the US and elsewhere express clear solidarities with those battling the violence of settler colonialism in Palestine, or brutal border regimes killing Black lives in the Mediterranean.

At the same time, we recognise that we still have a lot to (un)learn about race and racism in Middle East Studies and commit to undertaking that work. This is fundamental, given the historical and contemporary complicity of our field in racist structures and interventions, and the more direct responsibility the discipline holds for producing knowledge that has justified invasions, violence and colonial practices in the region.

Black radical scholarship, Indigenous studies and intersectional theories, as well as empirical work focussed on violence, borders, (settler)colonialism, policing, racism – and struggles against them – within the Middle East and beyond, are all relevant to doing rigorous research on the larger relations that inform politics in the region. Scholars of colour, and Black scholars in particular, have developed an extensive terrain of radical intellectual projects that both reveal the way race operates in global and specific contexts, and how abolition, liberation and anti-racist solidarities disrupt these structures. Following in their footsteps will transform how we teach, learn and cultivate knowledge of and with the Middle East.

As an academic society, we are committed to developing resources that open up and enable conversations about race/racism within Middle East Studies and in the Middle East region. Moreover, as teachers we are committed to producing anti-racist classrooms that engage in radical, intersectional and internationally-focused teaching and learning that: 1) foregrounds the importance of race and anti-racist struggles in the topics we choose to teach and how we teach them; 2) seeks to unlearn academic structures that silence and erase the voices of People of Colour and 'Global South' scholars and students in our classrooms; 3) connects anti-racist pedagogy to anti-racist praxis that contributes to movements happening on the ground. By committing to decolonial, anti-patriarchal and anti-racist pedagogy, we hope to create the classroom as a safe space. In these spaces, we can learn from each other about the

personal and political nature of racism, so as to develop theoretical and practical tools that can build empathy and solidarity between peers, students and teachers.

This commitment is a long term-goal and BRISMES is developing a range of pedagogical resources that we hope will strengthen the discussion of race/racism among our membership, while contributing to building stronger links between the different anti-colonial, anti-racist mobilising work happening in the region and elsewhere.

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