

# PLENARY

## OMAR KHAN

Wednesday 11 April, 17:15 - 18:45  
ROOM 001, CCE

### **ANALYSING AND RESPONDING TO RACE INEQUALITY: WHY SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY MATTERS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY ACTION**

The popular press, our political leaders, and public debate all claim that we have overcome racism. I outline three challenges we need to overcome to get beyond this public and policy denial about racial inequalities. These challenges – of analysis, mobilisation, and policy – are interlinked, as I will explain based on my role as Director of the Runnymede Trust – or more as a ‘practitioner’ than an academic. In particular, the way we analyse race in the UK has wider implications for how people mobilise or create a movement to challenge racial inequalities, and the sorts of policies that might actually tackle those inequalities.

The first challenge is the challenge of analysis. Evidence continues to show significant and persistent racial inequalities in the UK. At the same time changing demographics and the changing evidence on race has led to some confusion regarding our analysis of the cause of racial justice. Confusion regarding if or how to adapt our analysis to respond both to the changing nature of ethnicity in Britain, as well as the continued salience of colour-based racism partly explains why race has moved off the agenda, which is an issue not just of categories and analysis, but of mobilisation and policy. The shifting analysis described above is partly a response to different mobilisation(s) among various ethnic groups, and so the relatively weaker political power of BME people collectively. As Runnymede learned in its ‘End Racism this Generation’ campaign, it is not easy to build and sustain a common position or mobilisation around race, and some of this is due to different analysis of what it is that we are or should be talking about.

Policy is the third and final challenge for achieving race equality. How we analyse those inequalities, and how we collectively organise in opposition to those inequalities, obviously suggest different answer to ‘what should be done’: what sorts of responses will be most effective and which should be prioritised.

I will conclude by suggesting how we might respond to these challenges, and in particular how sociological analysis on race might better reflect on and support mobilisation and policy to tackle racial inequalities.

**Omar Khan** is Runnymede's Director. Prior to this he was Runnymede's Head of Policy and led the financial inclusion programme. Omar is a Governor at the University of East London and a 2012 Clore Social Leadership Fellow.

Omar's other advisory positions include chair of Olmec, chair of the Ethnicity Strand Advisory Group to Understanding Society, chair of the advisory group of the Centre on Dynamics of Ethnicity at the University of Manchester, Commissioner on the Financial Inclusion Commission and a member of the 2014 REF assessment, the 2011 Census, and the UK representative (2009-13) on the European Commission's Socio-economic network of experts.

Omar is the author of *Financial Inclusion and Ethnicity; Caring and Earning Among Low-income Caribbean, Pakistani and Somali People; Who Pays to Access Cash?; Why Do Assets Matter?; A Sense of Place; and The Costs of 'Returning' Home.*

Omar has also published many articles and reports on political theory and British political history for Runnymede over the past eight years and has spoken on topics including multiculturalism, integration, socio-economic disadvantage, and positive action. These include giving evidence to the United Nations in Geneva, the European Parliament in Strasbourg, on Capitol Hill in Washington DC, academic conferences in Manchester, Oxford, Paris, and Warsaw, the CRE Race Convention, the Lithuanian Centre for Human Rights, a Treasury/DFID conference on remittances, St George's House (Windsor Castle), Wilton Park and many other engagements in the UK and Europe.

Omar completed his DPhil in Political Theory from the University of Oxford, a Masters in Political Science from the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and a Masters in South Asian Studies from the School of Oriental and African Studies.



**Chair:** Nasar Meer, BSA Publications Director (University of Edinburgh)