

Graduate Conference

IMAGINED FUTURES:

Thought, Art and Ethics
in Muslim Societies



The Institute of Ismaili Studies



THE AGA KHAN UNIVERSITY

(International) in the United Kingdom

Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations



Imagined Futures:

Thought, Art and Ethics in Muslim Societies

IIS/AKU-ISMC Graduate Conference

September 2025



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(Internationally) in the United Kingdom
Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilisations

AGA KHAN CENTRE

10 Handyside Street, London N1C 4DN
www.agakhancentre.org.uk/



Welcome

Welcome to the third IIS and AKU–ISMC Graduate Student Conference. Following the success of our inaugural programme and last year’s gathering, we are delighted to bring together our vibrant academic communities once again here at the Aga Khan Centre. The Graduate Conference has already become a valued space for collaboration between students, faculty, and staff from IIS and AKU–ISMC, fostering dialogue, critical thinking and shared learning.

This year’s theme, ‘Imagined Futures: Thought, Art and Ethics in Muslim Societies’, invites us to look beyond the present and consider the possibilities that lie ahead. Our presenters will explore how intellectual inquiry, creative expression and ethical frameworks can shape the trajectories of Muslim societies in diverse contexts. Through this exchange of ideas, we hope to offer fresh perspectives, stimulate debate and inspire new connections across disciplines.

We are also pleased to close today’s programme with a special musical concert, celebrating the creativity and talent of our community.

Our sincere thanks go to the organising team — Ali, Minhas and Salimah — for their hard work and dedication in bringing this event to life. And to all our participants, whether joining us in person or online, we are grateful for your presence and look forward to your contributions to today’s conversations.



Professor

ZAYN KASSAM

Director, IIS



Dr

SHAHZAD BASHIR

Dean, AKU–ISMC



Welcome Note from the Conveners

Welcome to the third annual IIS and AKU–ISMC Graduate Conference. Building on the achievements of previous years, we are pleased to once again convene a distinguished and diverse group of emerging scholars from The Institute of Ismaili Studies and the Aga Khan University’s Institute for the Study of Muslim Civilizations.

This year’s theme, ‘Imagined Futures: Thought, Art and Ethics in Muslim Societies’, reflects our commitment to addressing the complex and evolving issues faced by Muslim communities worldwide. Our conference features 14 insightful presentations by talented participants, offering fresh perspectives on a range of subthemes:

Pedagogies in the Making of Muslim Futures

Muslim (Re-)Imaginations of Society and Politics

Identity and Heritage in Creative Expressions

Meaning-Making in Ismaili Communities

Gender, Power and Representation



These panels serve as a dynamic forum for meaningful academic dialogue, showcasing innovative research and encouraging a thoughtful exchange of ideas. Each presentation reflects the dedication, insight, and academic rigour of our participants, contributing significantly to a deeper understanding of these vital topics.

We extend our heartfelt thanks to Dr Maria De Cillis, Dr Alex Henley, Anila Bano, and Shabnaz Wali for their invaluable contributions to this year's conference and for supporting the exchange of ideas among emerging scholars. We also express our sincere gratitude to Dr Shiraz Kabani for his generous assistance with the concert arrangements and logistical coordination, ensuring the smooth running of the event.

We further wish to acknowledge the contributions of our preceding conference conveners, Nabila, Noor, and Zeinab for their unwavering support and leadership in shaping the foundation of this event. Our appreciation also goes to Faheem Hussain for his continued dedication to mentoring presenters and enriching the quality of their work.

We look forward to the rich exchange of ideas, critical discussions, and collaborative spirit that this year's conference will inspire.



**ALI
MUHAMMAD
MANSOOR
PIRANI**

IIS, GPISH



**MINHAS
ALI**

IIS, STEP



**SALIMAH
HAMEED**

IIS, STEP



Schedule

8:45 - 8:50	Opening Remarks by Prof Zayn Kassam
8:50 - 9:00	Welcome: Dr Alex Henley
9:00 - 10:10	<p>Panel 1: Muslim (Re-) Imaginations of Society and Politics - Dr Zamira Dildorbekova</p> <p>Haider Ali (AKU-ISMC 2026) Theorizing Democracy with People's Action Committees in Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Jammu & Kashmir.</p> <p>Moiz Rajwani (GPISH 2026) The Position of the Ismaili Imamat in International Diplomacy: Present and Future</p> <p>Noor Mansour (GPISH 2026) Social Integration During the Pandemic: Examining the Experience of First-Generation Syrian Migrants during COVID-19 in Sweden</p>
10:10 - 10:35	Health Break



10:35 - 11:45

Panel 2: Identity and Heritage in Creative Expressions
- Dr Walid Ghali

Gulguncha Lalbekova (GPISH 2025) Carving Futures from the Past: The Role of Architecture in Expressing and Shaping Identity

Saad Barcha (GPISH 2025) Preservation as Dispossession: Leif Larsen Music Center and Authorized Heritage Discourse

Mohsin Baig (GPISH 2027) To what extent does the interactive portrayal of the House of Wisdom and the Alamut fortress in Assassin's Creed Mirage balance game reality with historical narratives, and how does it (re)shape the contemporary understanding of these historical sites?

11:45 - 12:10

Health Break



12:10 - 13:10

Panel 3: Gender, Power and Representation
- Dr Karen Bauer

Ameeqa Qureshi (GPISH 2027) The Art of Power: Rethinking Gendered Sovereignty, Aesthetic Agency, and Political Authority Through Mughal Empress Nur Jahan's (r. 1611–1627 CE) Strategic Reign

Nabila Esmail (STEP 2025) Imagining Inclusive Futures: Intersectionality and Queer Muslim Youth in Educational Curricula

13:10 - 14:20

Lunch Break

14:20 - 15:30

Panel 4: Pedagogies in the Making of Muslim Future
- Faheem Hussain

Mehrullah Hussaini (STEP 2024) Unveiling Hidden Religious Education in Afghanistan's Language Subjects

Kiran (GPISH 2026) Digital Da'wa and the Ethics of Becoming: Platformed Piety and the Case of Youth Clubs

Imad Ali Khan (STEP 2026) How Can Existentialist Ideas About Meaning And Purpose In Life Be Incorporated Into Religious Education For Ismaili Youth?



15:30 - 15:50

Health Break

15:50 - 17:00

Panel 5: Meaning-Making in Ismaili Communities
- Dr Orkhan Mir-Kasimov

Mubashir Shah-Artas (GPISH 2027) The Transition of Ismaili Doctrine from Neoplatonic Metaphysics to Contemporary Ethical Pragmatism

Nazeer Rasouli (GPISH 2026) From Pirs to Institutions: Navigating Identity and Tension in Transnational Ismailism in Afghanistan

Saeedeh Kardan (GPISH 2025) Poetry as Pedagogy: The Art of Revolution Through Words of Wisdom

17:00 - 17:20

Thank you: Dr Gurdofarid Miskinzoda

18:30 - 20:00

Concert: *Echoes of the Earth: Voices of Responsibility*



Speaker Bios



**HAIDER
ALI**

Haider Ali is currently an MA student at AKU-ISMC. He researches the history of state-making and de/anti-colonial resistance in the colonial and post-colonial periods focusing on the areas now under Pakistan-occupied Kashmir. He uses co-production to centre the perspective of social movements and subaltern subjects in his methodology. He has published reports on recent social movements in Gilgit-Baltistan for international websites and co-authored a chapter in the edited volume *Beyond the Mountains* (Raachi Press, 2024).



**MOHSIN
ALI BAIG**

Mohsin Ali Baig is a GPISSH scholar currently pursuing an MA in Islamic Studies and Humanities at the IIS. He holds a BA in International Relations and maintains a strong academic focus on peace and conflict studies, comparative religion, digital Islam, and identity politics. He previously served as a Research Intern at the Centre for Critical Peace Studies (CCPS). He has presented at national and international academic forums, including the First International Conference on Critical Peace Studies in Lahore. His recent publication in an HEC-recognized journal, “Deconstructing the Fable of Inclusive National Identity in Pakistan: An Account of Dwindling Kalasha Indigenous Identity in Chitral”, critically examines the incentivized conversion and erasure of the Kalasha community’s indigenous identity in Chitral, Pakistan.



**IMAD
ALI KHAN**

Imad Ali Khan is a second-year STEP student. He holds a BA in Accounting and Finance from the National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad. His current interests include philosophy, particularly Western existentialist thought. His MA thesis focuses on a comparative study between Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy and the IIS Secondary Curriculum.



**SAAD
BARCHA**

Saad Barcha is a PhD candidate in Music at the University of Oxford. His research and virtuosity centre on the musical and literary traditions of Northern Pakistan. Saad is a GPISH graduate, and holds an MA in Musicology also from the University of Oxford. He is a recipient of the Farhad Daftary Doctoral Scholarship.



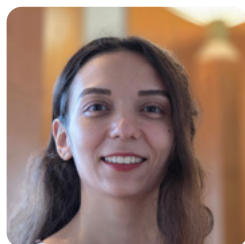
**NABILA
ESMAIL**

Nabila Esmail holds an undergraduate degree in Humanities and Education from the University of Lethbridge in Alberta, Canada, and is a graduate of STEP (IIS). Passionate about education and inclusion, she hopes to contribute meaningfully to teacher education. She is guided by the vision of the late Imam, Aga Khan IV, who reminded us that “diversity is not a reason to put up walls, but rather to open windows”.



**MEHRULLAH
HUSSAINI**

Mehrullah Hussaini is a STEP teacher at ITREB Afghanistan. He studied at The Institute of Ismaili Studies, earning an MA in Islamic Studies from SOAS and a Postgraduate Diploma in Teaching and Reflective Practice from UCL. He also holds an MEd (Master of Education) from Pune University, India, and a BA in English Literature from Baghlan University, Afghanistan. His main areas of interest include Islamic Studies, with a particular focus on Afghanistan, as well as education and poetry.



**SAEEDEH
KARDAN**

Saeedeh Kardan is a recent alumna of GPISH who completed her MA in Islamic Studies at SOAS. She previously earned a BA in Jurisprudence and Fundamentals of Islamic Law from the University of Tehran, Iran. She will begin her PhD in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Oxford. Her research interests span Quranic studies, Islamic intellectual history, and Ismaili literature, with her doctoral thesis focusing specifically on “The Major Concepts of Ta’wīl in Mu’ayyad fi’l-Dīn’s Arabic and Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s Persian Works”.



KIRAN

Kiran is a third-year GPISH student at IIS. Her research focuses on digital and visual cultures, ethics, and contemporary Islamic reform movements. Her current project examines digital da’wa in Pakistan, focusing on how online platforms mediate ethical self-formation among Muslim youth.



**GULGUNCHA
LALBEKOVA**

Gulguncha is an alumna of The Institute of Ismaili Studies (GPISH) programme. She is currently pursuing an LLM in Art, Business and Law at Queen Mary University of London. Her academic interests lie at the intersection of cultural heritage (particularly within Muslim and indigenous communities), the art world, and legal protection. She is especially focused on supporting the ethical and moral stewardship and restitution of displaced cultural property, particularly on behalf of historically marginalized communities. She is passionate about applying legal tools and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms, such as mediation and negotiation, to advance cultural justice in post-colonial, post-imperial, or politically sensitive contexts.



**NOOR
MANSOUR**

Noor Mansour is an MA candidate in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH 2026) and an incoming MSc student in Health and International Development at the London School of Economics (LSE). She holds a BA in Pharmacy and Pharmaceutical Chemistry from Damascus University, Syria. She is passionate about global health and international development. Recently, Noor conducted field research in Sweden to explore the experiences of first-generation Syrian migrants during COVID-19 and their responses to voluntary health policies.



**AMEEQA
QURESHI**

Ameeqa Qureshi is a second-year GPISH student with a BSc in Global Humanitarian Studies from University College London. She is particularly interested in exploring the invaluable contributions of women in historical and contemporary Muslim societies. Her fieldwork with the British Red Cross and United Nations International Organization for Migration fuels her passion for exploring how contemporary power structures shape the mobility, agency, and lived experiences of women across varying contexts in developing countries.



**MOIZ
RAJWANI**

Moiz Rajwani is a third-year GPISH student and an MPA (Master of Public Administration) candidate in Digital Technologies and Policy at UCL's Department of Science, Technology, Engineering and Public Policy (STeAPP). He holds a BA in Politics, Philosophy, and Economics from Western University, Canada. Moiz's current research explores the evolving role of the Ismaili Imam in international diplomacy. Moiz is deeply committed to the Jamat's well-being, especially in conflict zones, and aims to strengthen Imam partnerships with state and non-state actors to build capacity and expand opportunities.



**NAZEER
RASOULI**

Nazeer Rasouli recently completed the Graduate Programme in Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH), jointly offered by the Institute of Ismaili Studies (IIS) and SOAS, University of London. His dissertation, titled “The Soviet Occupation of Afghanistan in 1979 and Its Socio-Religious and Political Implications on the Shi’a Imami Hazara Ismaili Muslims of Afghanistan” explores the historical and religious transformations triggered by foreign intervention. He is currently pursuing an MSc in Intellectual History at the University of Edinburgh, with a focus on intellectual traditions and political thought in Afghanistan from the late 19th to the 20th century. His research interests centre on Afghanistan’s intellectual and political history, with a particular emphasis on Ismaili history and thought.

Prior to GPISH, Nazeer earned a BA in Political Economy from Kabul University in 2015 and an MA in Educational Leadership and Management from BRAC University in Dhaka, Bangladesh, in 2022. His MA dissertation, titled “Exploring the Socioeconomic Impact of Higher Education on Private University Graduates in Afghanistan: A Case Study”, examined the relationship between higher education and employability in fragile contexts.



**MUBASHIR
SHAH-ARTAS**

Mubashir Shah-Artas is a communications professional with experience in media, community engagement, and storytelling for development. Previously, with the Aga Khan Agency for Habitat in Pakistan, he worked on climate resilience, youth capacity-building, and heritage preservation initiatives. His work often explores the intersection of identity, environment, and visual culture. He is currently pursuing an MA Islamic Studies and Humanities (GPISH).



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