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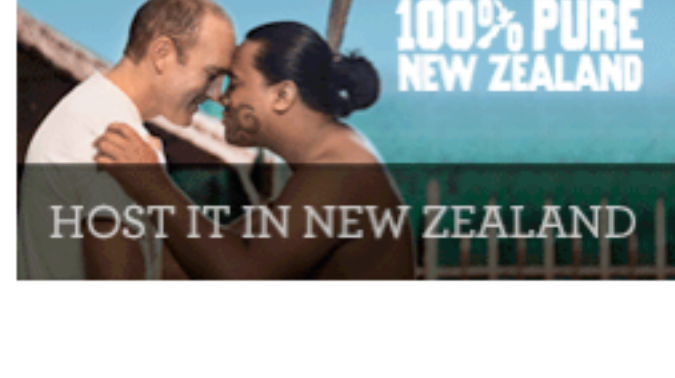


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By Rebecca Hill

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## Top PI Tariq Modood: 'There will always be demand for multiculturalism research'

University of Bristol sociologist Tariq Modood, an authority on the politics of ethnicity, talks to Rebecca Hill about a 30-year career that has netted £4m in research grants.

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### What's your career progression been like?

I think my career is actually quite unusual. I started off in political philosophy, and my PhD is in philosophy, but when I was writing up the cuts to higher education started. I was unable to get an academic job, so I went off and became a tax inspector. Later I became an equal opportunities officer in local government and then I worked at the Commission for Racial Equality. After that I got a one-year visiting fellowship at Nuffield College and then went to the Policy Studies Institute in London, which was quite a major break for me. After four and a half years there, I got a chair in sociology at the University of Bristol, which is my present job. I don't have any qualifications in sociology at all, except a GCE from about 1970; and it's pretty unusual to get a job in a different discipline to the one I did my PhD in.

### Why was the Policy Studies Institute your big break?

I was recruited to work on a really big national survey, the fourth PSI National Survey of Ethnic Minorities, for which they'd already raised £1m when they employed me. The most unusual thing was that I had no track record in sociology or social surveys—they said they had lots of expertise in surveys and wanted what they didn't have: expertise in minorities. It was a gamble, of course, but [turned out to be] a very wise decision. It was a fantastic break because it put me in charge of this massive survey and when that was finished it had massive publicity. It's easily been the most cited work I've produced. On the strength of that, and some other writings, I got my present job at the end of 1997.

### You've gained over £4m in grants, with £1.8m as principal investigator, are there any that stand out?

Probably the biggest I've had while at Bristol was shared with University College London. That was £1m from the Leverhulme Trust to do eight interlinked projects. Then I've had various other medium-sized grants—by that I mean about £250,000 in today's money—from British funders and other larger ones in multinational collaborations through the European Union's Framework 7 Programme.

### What are the differences between those funders?

The Economic and Social Research Council is a very good funder. While the academic standard is particularly high and competitive, it is rich in overheads and has relatively limited bureaucratic regulations. I've had a very good experience with the Leverhulme Trust, it has given me the most freedom and is very supportive, but it gives very limited overheads. Framework 7 is not as good on overheads as the ESRC and gives you less freedom than the ESRC because they have far more rules and regulations, including on the financial reporting, which is detailed and time consuming, especially for the support staff. It also assigns a manager to look after each project; some are very supportive, some are very interventionist. Finally, unlike the other two, the EU very much expects more policy relevance.

### How important is public engagement in your work?

I take the public engagement side of my work very seriously. I give it a greater priority than most academics, in terms of how much time I spend on it. I try to write in a way that's not too academic, meaning not too much jargon or too many technical terms, and for as wide an audience as I can. It's not just dissemination at the tail end of a project; the whole character of my work is to make a contribution to contemporary controversies and debates. Given the field I work in, on issues to do with ethnicity and multiculturalism, Muslims and integration, these are obviously highly topical issues and I'm quite willing to get out there and engage with controversy. You really have to demonstrate those things to a prospective employer today, when people were being recruited into the profession 25 years ago, they didn't have to.

### You work on issues closely related to policy, do you feel there is a steer on your funding to get specific results?

Of course I want to reach the Whitehall civil service, but I want to do it through public debate [via national newspapers], not through a kind of sideways channel or a back door. I've had relatively few grants from government funders because I like to be able to set my own agenda. In that sense, I am quite resistant to funder steering. The ESRC, for instance, won't steer you.

### Will that continue to be the case?

I think the government is more and more setting the priorities for research. It kind of cascades downwards and I think that government either directly or indirectly has set its own priorities as the limiting cases for what it's willing to fund. And so, it's not that you can't get any funding in what the government's not interested in, but it's much easier to get funding for what the government wants researched.

### Is that relationship acceptable?

I can see that there is an issue here and it would in particular be very difficult for more junior academics to be as choosy as I have been able to be. They probably would feel slightly more compromised in accepting certain funding and, once they were working to a project specification, in having less room to take it where they wanted to. I think that public money in universities and in research is demanding more say in what gets researched, there's no two ways about that.

### What do you think the future is like for your research field?

One thing I say to my PhD students and postdocs is that the issues we're working on, namely ethnicity, minorities and Muslims in the western world, are only going to grow. Even if they tell you at one point that things look bleak in terms of job certainty or career progression, in general these issues have grown year by year since the 1950s and 1960s, and quite astronomically in Britain. My expectation is that it will continue to grow. So, is this a good field to be in, in terms of future intellectual challenges, future practical contributions and job and research funding opportunities? I would say yes, very much so.

### Do you consider your relationship with PhD and postdoctoral students to be a mentoring one, rather than just supervisory?

Yes, certainly. You obviously develop a relationship with your PhD students, you see them grow and mature and then become collaborators. It's not always possible with every single one, because there are issues about personalities and interests. But I've been quite lucky: several people who I've supervised have become collaborators beyond the period of me employing them, and we both get something out of it. They benefit from having some of my reputation, experience and track record on their applications and I benefit by being able to work on a project where someone else is going to do most of the hands on work. I'm always thinking about job opportunities for them, giving them strong references and guidance for particular employers and so on. So, yes, I think of myself as trying to be a mentor and not just a professional supervisor.

### Did you have a mentor yourself?

Yes, there has been one person that has been very important to me, as an intellectual influence, and that's Professor Bhikhu Parekh. Even though he's never been my supervisor, has never been my employer and has never even been a senior colleague in a department, we got to know each other around 1990 and I find him an inspiration and a role model, both intellectually and in terms of public engagement. I think Bhikhu is somebody who is genuinely intellectually very deep and very profound, but who tries to express difficult theoretical issues as simply as he can, so that they are meaningful to people who are not specialists. That for me is a very important standard and I try and live up to it myself and I try to pass that on to the next generation.

### Is it harder to publish that sort of writing in academic journals?

Yes, I think it probably is, academic journals have a certain style of their own, which has both strengths and weaknesses. The strengths are that you are highly focused on a particular problem or research question and that you have to reference other people who've worked on it. The negatives are that you tend to be forced to write in a quite narrow and scholastic way. There's nothing wrong with journal articles, but there's nothing wrong with monographs and good essays. It's just that the standards that we've been using to measure academic excellence have become so narrow that we've ended up making the journal article too dominant, and this is partly a result of the Research Assessment Exercise and the Research Excellence Framework.

### Tariq Modood's five 'big break' grants

**The Fourth National Survey of Ethnic Minorities, 1993-1996.** £1.1m from the Department of Health, Department for Employment, Department of the Environment and the ESRC. This led to the publication of *Ethnic Minorities in Britain: Diversity and disadvantage; the fourth national survey of ethnic minorities*. Modood et al (Policy Studies Institute, 1997).

**Population Movements: Geography, Identity, Markets and Integration**, an interdisciplinary programme shared between the University of Bristol and University College London, 2003-09. Modood says this grant was most important to the creation of the Centre for the Study of Ethnicity and Citizenship at the University of Bristol. It also led to the publication *Global Migration, Ethnicity and Britishness*. Modood, J Salt (eds) (Palgrave, 2011).

Two European grants, which were led by Anna Triandafyllidou at the European University Institute, with Modood being responsible for the theoretical lead. The first was **EMILIE—A European Approach to Multicultural Citizenship: legal, political and educational challenges**, with eight EU partners, 2006-09. €1.4m from the EU's Framework Programme 6. This led to the publication of *European Multiculturalisms: Cultural, religious and ethnic challenges*. A Triandafyllidou, Modood and N Meer (eds) (Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

The second European grant was **Tolerance, Pluralism and Social Cohesion (ACCEPT Pluralism)**, with 15 EU partners, 2010-13. €2.6m from the EU's Framework Programme 7. This led to the publication *Hard To Accept*. J Dobberneck and Modood (eds) (Palgrave, 2013).

Modood's most recent fellowship was **Political Secularism and the Accommodation of Muslims in Western Europe**, an Arts and Humanities Research Council fellowship for £64,000, 2010-11. Modood gives the 2011 Paul Hanly Furfey lecture *Is There a Crisis of Secularism in Western Europe? Sociology of Religion*, 2012.

### CV Tariq Modood

**1997-present** Professor of sociology, politics and public policy, University of Bristol

**1993-1997** Programme director, Policy Studies Institute, London

**1992-1993** Hallsworth research fellow, University of Manchester

**1991-1992** Gwilym Gibbon research fellow, Nuffield College, Oxford

**1989-1991** Principal employment officer, Commission for Racial Equality, London

**1982-1983** HM Inspector of Taxes, Oxford

**1980-1984** PhD in philosophy, University College, Swansea

**1980** PGCE in further education, University College Cardiff

**1976** Masters degree in politics, University of Durham

**1974** Undergraduate degree in philosophy and politics, University of Durham

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