



Transnational  
Practices in local settings

# Experiences of Citizenship among Bangladesh-origin Muslims in London, Luton, and Birmingham

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## Transnational practices in local settings: introduction to the project

A research project investigating the relationship between the local and transnational citizenship experiences of Bangladesh-origin Muslims in London, Luton, and Birmingham.

TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICES IN LOCAL SETTINGS: EXPERIENCES OF CITIZENSHIP AMONG BANGLADESH-ORIGIN MUSLIMS IN TOWER HAMLETS



TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICES IN LOCAL SETTINGS: EXPERIENCES OF CITIZENSHIP AMONG BANGLADESH-ORIGIN MUSLIMS IN BIRMINGHAM



TRANSNATIONAL PRACTICES IN LOCAL SETTINGS: EXPERIENCES OF CITIZENSHIP AMONG BANGLADESH-ORIGIN MUSLIMS IN LUTON



# Field sites

Field site	Dyad interviews with parents and children	Oral history interviews	Civil Society Interviews	<b>Total Interviews</b>
Tower Hamlets (Inner London)	15	5	5	25
Luton (Outer London)	10	3	3	16
Aston/Smethwick (Birmingham)	20	6	8	34
	45	14	16	<b>75</b>

# **Section 1: Education**



# Experiences of discrimination in education

“Not really no. I feel like I have, just a little bit. For example, at uni [a former polytechnic], because I wear a head scarf and stuff, I feel like there is a difference between the way they... it depends; just some of the teachers. For example, some groups, they get more help than us guys. We are brown and wear a head scarf and stuff...I feel like some groups get a bit more help than other groups”. **Excerpt from a dyad interview, mother and daughter (Birmingham)**

“...you go to (Russell Group University) and it's almost all white... I didn't know how to react to that and there was very everyday racism, but I didn't have the words to explain it to people so I would brush it off and I was known as a good brown person because I'd get along with everyone really well. I remember loads of white people telling me I am their favourite brown girl, which is really problematic now when I think about it but it's because they could be openly racist to me, get away with saying whatever...and it grounded down and I used to come home and cry and tell my mom I didn't want to go to uni [university] anymore. My mom was like no, you have to go. It did really affect. I went to university with amazing grades and I came out with a 2.1 and looking back at it now, it's because I had to deal with that and not wanting to stay in the library to work and wanting to come home straight away. That must have fit into it. It's not great, but it is what it is” **Excerpt from a Civil Society Interview (Tower Hamlets)**

# The Prevent Strategy - distrust

I don't understand what I'm supposed to do as a British citizen and then in all of that I'm bringing up my kids as well who are equally confused because they go to a very western school where, you know, there was a joke the other day...(a) conversation I had with my older daughter, she's run out of books to read in the house and I was saying to her...why don't you read Tariq Ramadan's book which is what I've got at home?" and she said, "Oh, imagine that mum, me taking that book to school and opening it up and reading it. Imagine what the teachers will say" and it hit me that oh my god, my kids have to be so careful of what they read in public and it's not visible to me but it's going through their heads as well that they have to hide certain aspects of what they're doing from the school because they'll be seen as extremist...

***Excerpt from a civil society interview (Tower Hamlets)***

It [Prevent] shocks me but ... just because of those two teenagers or because of a few of the teenagers that have left because that's a few compared to millions and millions of Muslim children in the ... so ... Made me angry when I saw it because when I was working in that school I saw the policy thing, I was really ... I thought wow! What are they going to notice, what are they going to see there, they aren't going to see anything but...It's kind of again, it's isolating Muslims, isn't it, within ... Even as a professional I was a Muslim, can you see what I mean, it's ... everyone is going to be constantly keeping a watch out, keeping an eye out. No one's doing anything wrong, it's not fair. ***Excerpt from a dyad interview - mother and daughter (Birmingham)***

# **Section 2: Labour Market**



# Experiences of discrimination in employment

Probably like job wise, like for certain jobs...I wouldn't get that equality, compared to a white group, because like with certain jobs, they would like a white face; if you understand what I mean. I think it is just to do with the skin type. It's like what is going on with islamophobia and everything what's going on with that and that just changes people's mentality...

***Excerpt from a dyad interview (Luton)***

The way I seen it, even now, if I go for a job interview I think first and foremost the problem would be my beard...Now there's a lot of people, I know my friends, they're on the top level, they work in solicitor's firms, accountants firms...but as they start lengthening their beard, slowly their jobs started getting lesser and lesser and then they start saying, look we're not that busy, but even though the company's, these are big firms I'm talking about. Some of the chambers in Birmingham two of my mates got redundant from QC, now they're working in a restaurant because of their beard and now you probably say, why do you say it's the beard? before that everything was okay but as they start lengthening their beard it became a problem. I honestly genuinely think sometimes because of my beard now they probably say, okay we'll let you know... ***Excerpt from a dyad interview , mother and son (Birmingham)***

I work in a Catholic school. So obviously, 9/11, all that crap that happened, you always feel it. And especially, when you're wearing a headscarf in a Catholic school, kids aren't understanding religion, you know, they don't even try and understand the religion so there's always going to be issues. There are people who call you a "paki" sometimes...So, you know.. ***Excerpt from a dyad interview, mother and daughter (Tower Hamlets)***



# Employment – raising aspirations and lack of role models

What we are seeing is our Bangladeshi kids are doing really well academically. But it is post-academia; they're not getting the jobs. We haven't got the network within the community, our dads and uncles are not doctors and lawyers and accountants. You will see other people, sub-continentals, Indians, they have gone far ahead of us because they have got that network around them. We haven't. So, we are trying to create that network where say for instance my friend phones me and her son wants to do work experience, I want to be able to facilitate that. We are trying to break those barriers and create those networks for our kids.

*Excerpt from a civil society interview (Tower Hamlets)*

# **Section 3: Local Resources**



# Access to courses run by and for the community

A lot of the women that come have very little interaction with money because their husbands are like their financial providers, they're the ones that work, they're the ones in charge of the benefits. A lot of the time, like, something like the Child Benefit money would, or the Child Tax Credit money would be in the women's name but they would go and withdraw their money and they'd give it to the husband, they wouldn't be spending it themselves. So, in that sense a lot of the ladies who, you know, they don't just, they don't spend that money, the husband does all the buying and all of those things. **Money workshops are quite fun but we have had women who are not comfortable, don't know anything about gas bills, electricity bills so our sessions are used as a way to introduce them to all of that and creating budgets for the family and things like that, yes.**

*Excerpt from a civil society member*

# Lack of funding for ESOL classes

We were all educated in the British system, you know, we were all Muslim in \_\_\_\_ School. If you go to \_\_\_\_ School now, the majority of the students are English speaking, all of them, the majority of the Muslims and the majority of the Bengali so it contradicts whatever David Cameron has said...it doesn't make any sense whatsoever. Yes, there are a handful of people coming who still struggle to speak English. I don't understand what that statement means because two, three years ago they cut the funding to ESOL classes, they, now learners have to pay at least £900 to £1,000 for ESOL classes, it's ridiculous to make a statement like that and also take away all the help that was being given to these ladies. I don't think the inability to speak English is a problem with extremism. So far, a lot of the students or young people that have gone to Turkey and have travelled to Syria, they're from very highly educated backgrounds, they themselves are very educated, their parents have gone that far to educate the children so I don't understand what that sentence was supposed to be about, it doesn't make any sense whatsoever. ***Excerpt from a civil society interview (Tower Hamlets)***

She's been good in terms of, even when she is watching television, trying to copy stuff. Her sentences aren't that great but she can understand a bit when she is trying to make out what's what but as she's getting older her memory isn't that good, so she struggles to learn now. ...Nowadays, it's difficult accessing ESOL classes because there have been a lot of cuts, in terms of like provision... ***Excerpt from a dyad interview, mother and daughter (Tower Hamlets)***

# **Section 4: Hostile Environment, Brexit and Islamophobia**



# The Hostile Environment, 'Brexit' and Islamophobia

## Excerpt from a dyad interview, Birmingham:

It (Islamophobia) is a big problem now here. It is a big problem. After the Brexit, somebody went to my restaurant and decided to go into the kitchen, just opened the door, it was about ten o'clock, and he was saying **what are you guys doing here? We voted for Brexit...**and then he started talking about the religion and all that...he started talking about the Muslims and this and that...

I: So this gentleman thought his vote for Brexit meant that anyone who wasn't, I'm assuming White British, had to leave the country?

R: That's what it was, yes. This is what he's thinking, you know...He thinks what are you guys doing here? I said we belong here... So we're not going anywhere.



**Excerpt from a dyad interview, Birmingham:** I don't think Islamophobia's going to go away, I think it will probably get worse, especially with, you know, the sentiment of the country following Brexit, because...you know people voted to say, Look, lets stop immigrants coming in...there is a lot of anti-immigrant feeling, anti Muslim sentiment

**Excerpt from a dyad interview, Birmingham:** Brexit highlighted Islamophobia, (it is) more highlighted now. All of a sudden, the people of this country think we're out of Europe; we don't need anybody else from any other country, they all need to go out.

# Protective transnationalism - land, property and security

It's not good. ... It's going to get worse but we're just going to get on with it. It's not going to get any better, it's going to be life ... probably will be harder for us. Maybe even ... jobwise, even going out ... Sometimes you feel like on the inside people are... Feeling kind of wary of you ... cause obviously you look different ... and no one will say it to you ... but people who do feel uncomfortable by you won't ever go to you and ... I'll just go to Bangladesh ... we've got a home there, if anything gets worse.. **Excerpt from a dyad interview, mother and daughter (Birmingham)**

When I was young, they always used to say to us, my mom and dad ... there might come a time when we get kicked out of this country, so ... you need a place to live. So, maybe that is one of the reasons why (my father) built it (their house in Bangladesh). ... There is definitely a possibility, because as we have seen ... I don't think they will explicitly do that, like say 'get out of the country'. I think it will be more of an implicit thing, or more of a thing that is developed from the fear that the people are giving the South Asian community, and maybe they feel unwelcome. I think that would be the thing that takes us to another country or they will make it so difficult for us to lead our lives ... in that sense ... it is important to invest purely because at any point in time that we did decide maybe we want to go back home ... it is good to obviously have something there to go back to. **Excerpt from a civil society interview (Luton)**

... you know, you are brown and you are Bangladeshi ... and, if ... ever anything happened you would need to go to your ... back to your country ... where your land is ... **Excerpt from a dyad interview, mother and son (Tower Hamlets)**

# Tower Hamlets providing a level of protection against discrimination

I would say working in Tower Hamlets, I think certain things about my identity isn't seen as a challenge or as a barrier, so I am quite lucky to be working in Tower Hamlets and giving back to my community. But I do think if I was to work outside of a diverse community such as this, I think I would struggle.' ***Excerpt from a dyad interview, mother and daughter***

Not really, in Tower Hamlets I'm quite protected, pretty much everywhere I walk into I will see a Bengali person, I will see, yes, I, although I speak English if I didn't speak English someone would be there to help me, you know, you can pretty much grab someone off the street and they'll help you to ... I do it for people all the time. ***Excerpt from a civil society interview, female interviewee***



# Recommendations



# Recommendations for education

1. The independent review of Prevent must finally be concluded, and recommendations made in relation to the statutory duty imposed on public bodies to report concerns of extremism. Our data suggests this fosters discrimination against people of Muslim faith, generates mistrust among the Muslim community, stifles learning in educational environments, and is counterproductive.
2. Schools and Universities must make a commitment to collecting data on race and/or religion related matters so local and central government can adopt a wider strategy to tackle inequalities and discrimination faced by young Muslims.

# Recommendations for employment/ labour market

1. Discrimination in the labour market can be addressed through introducing policies that would encourage more data collection on the part of employers (public and private sector) in relation applications, interviews and offers but also promotion, retention and pay.
2. The local government should forge stronger relationships with employers and bring them together with local organizations to provide appropriate mentoring opportunities - supporting local candidates to apply and addressing barriers to equal labour market participation.

# Recommendations for local resources

1. Civil society organisations provide invaluable resources to the Bangladeshi community, particularly women and the elderly, which require investment.
2. Adult education courses and ESOL classes should be a priority

# Recommendations in relation to racism and Islamophobia

1. More research needs to be conducted to examine the effect of hostile environment policies on ethnic minorities and to determine whether the effects are so discriminatory that they violate international human rights law
2. More resources need to be put into tackling hate crime at the local level. In particular it needs to be made easier to record hate crime to the police and more work needs to be done in schools to challenge Islamophobia

# Covid-19, Health and Discrimination



- Analysis of NHS England hospital death data shows excess deaths are around 3 times higher (than average) in British Bangladeshis.
- In June, Public Health England's report on Covid-19 deaths confirmed that, after accounting for the effect of sex, age, deprivation and region, people of Bangladeshi ethnicity were at most risk, with about twice the risk of death compared with people of white British ethnicity.
- The Office for National Statistics reported that males of Bangladeshi ethnicity are 1.8 and females of Bangladeshi ethnicity are 1.6 times more likely to die due to COVID-19.
- There are structural reasons for this - Bangladeshi's are overrepresented in public-facing industries where they cannot work from home, and 10% of Bangladeshi households were likely to be living in multigenerational households which means more risk and exposure to Covid-19 for individual household member.

## Questions for you...

- What are your thoughts on this data in relation to the experiences of British Bangladeshis in your constituency?
- Do you have any suggestions for informing the direction of future policy-making in this area?

# Thank you and stay connected..

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