

A Very British History: British Bangladeshis



@BrIslam2015

British Bangladeshis

The migration
narrative of
Bangladeshis coming
to Britain is a very
'British' story...

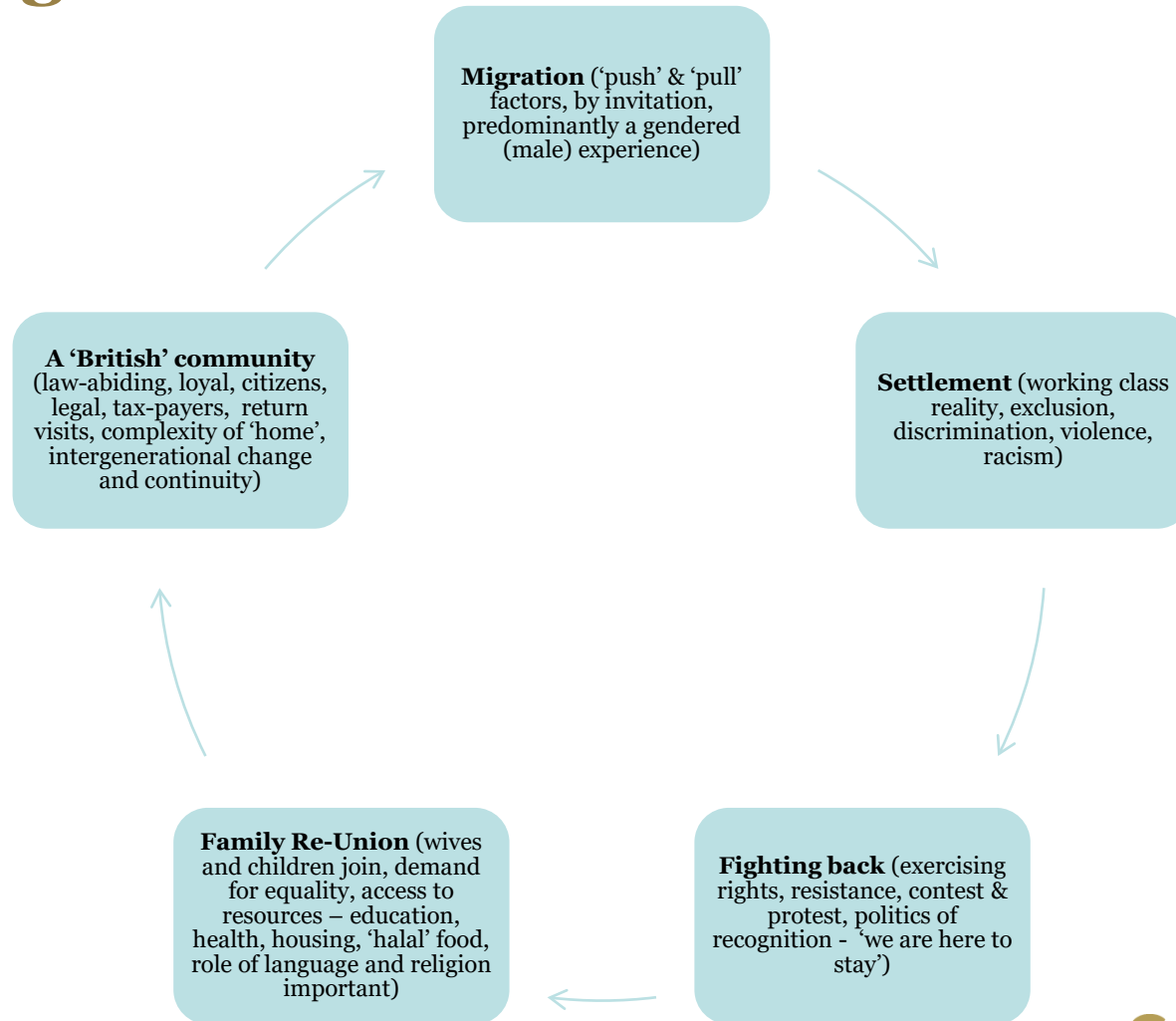
Key theoretical ideas...

- **Identity** (postmodern) - is fluid, dynamic, multifaceted, situational, intersectional, diverse, always in flux, never static, open to change and often contested by its members (Kearney, 2003; Kershen, 1998; Maalouf, 2000; Omaar, 2007)
- It is not about *who we are*, but *what we are not*?
- Identity operates through a paradoxical prism of *sameness* and *difference* (Lawler, 2013)
- **Representation** - how migrant communities have been consistently ‘represented’ through an ‘orientalist’ lens as criminals, dangerous, different, *burdens* on the welfare state, *un-British*, and have been situated in the discourse of ‘swamping’ (taking over) – Thatcher, 1978; Farage, 2016. (Hall, 1996; Said, 1979)

Theoretical ideas cont...

- **Race** – as something that is not real and has been socially constructed as a divisive marker of ‘us’ and ‘them’, built on a history of colonial unequal power relations (Ashcroft, 2000)
- **Diaspora** – the construction of transnational diasporic identities is ‘social’ as opposed to ‘natural’. Diaspora – the emotional, political and ideological connection to other people ‘like us’ – is the transnational workings of identity. The study of modern diaspora offers us new possibilities of understanding the post-modern nature of identity as fluid, complex and dynamic (Gilroy, 1997: 303-04)
- **‘Home’** – (Paritus, 2011; Ndlovu, 2010)
- **‘Britishness’** – as a social construct, and a series of ‘biopolitics’ – field of practices, moral, legal, social, media – that includes and excludes certain groups of people as ‘British’ (Tyler, 2010)

British Bangladeshis – A universal story of migration





Poverty

Deprivation



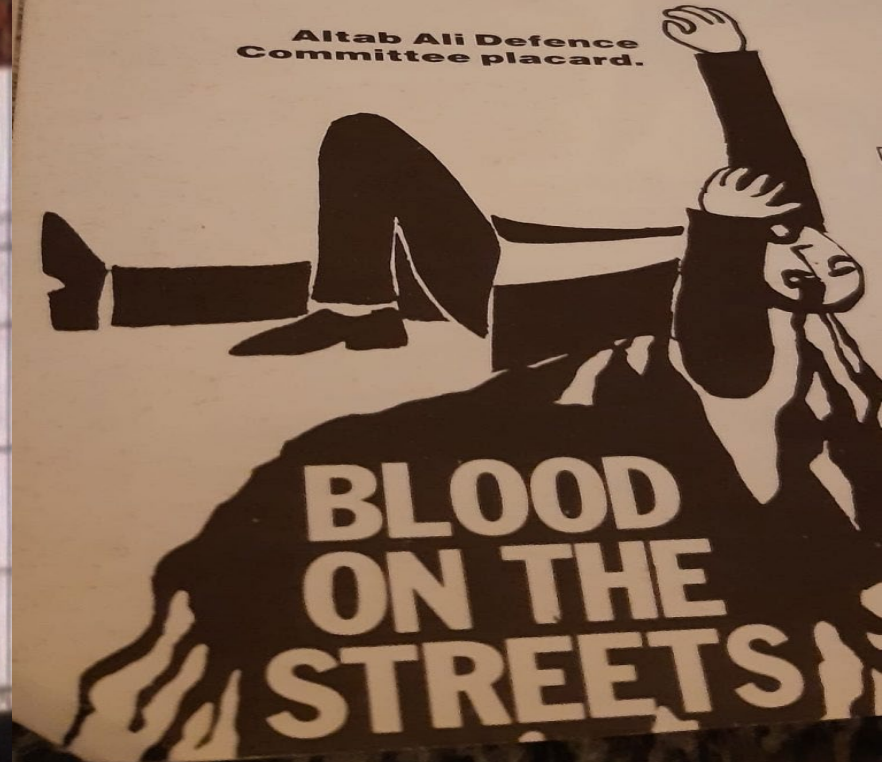
Disadvantage

Inequality

Destitution



My child was playing in the kitchen and a rat bit her.



Why is this documentary important?

- Is part of a wider BBC4 television series entitled *A Very British History* (#AVBH) and focuses on a variety of migrant communities (Jewish, Romany, Ugandan Indians, Vietnamese, Caribbean, Irish etc) who have settled in the UK
- Shed's light and provides insight on how these communities have contributed positively to the wider socio-cultural scene of British life
- Uncovers invisible, often hidden narratives of underrepresented communities
- Essentially, these personal and historical documentaries are global stories of migration and we get to see and hear of the many narratives of dislocation, upheaval, struggle, resistance, sacrifice, hope and triumph. These are very *'British'* stories
- Relevant also in this current geo-politics of heightened xenophobia, rise of populist nationalism and a climate of hate towards minority communities, as it highlights that migrant communities are just normal, hard-working folk and have hopes, desires, anxieties and aspirations - just like everyone else! #BLM
- Important that we don't forget the stories and also capture these stories of our forefathers/ ancestors
- As a second generation migrant myself, I often wonder whether my own very Westernised **British-born** children have a sense of their 'roots', ancestry and heritage? Where is 'home' for them? And a large part of the documentary focuses deliberately on the 'visit' back to the motherland...

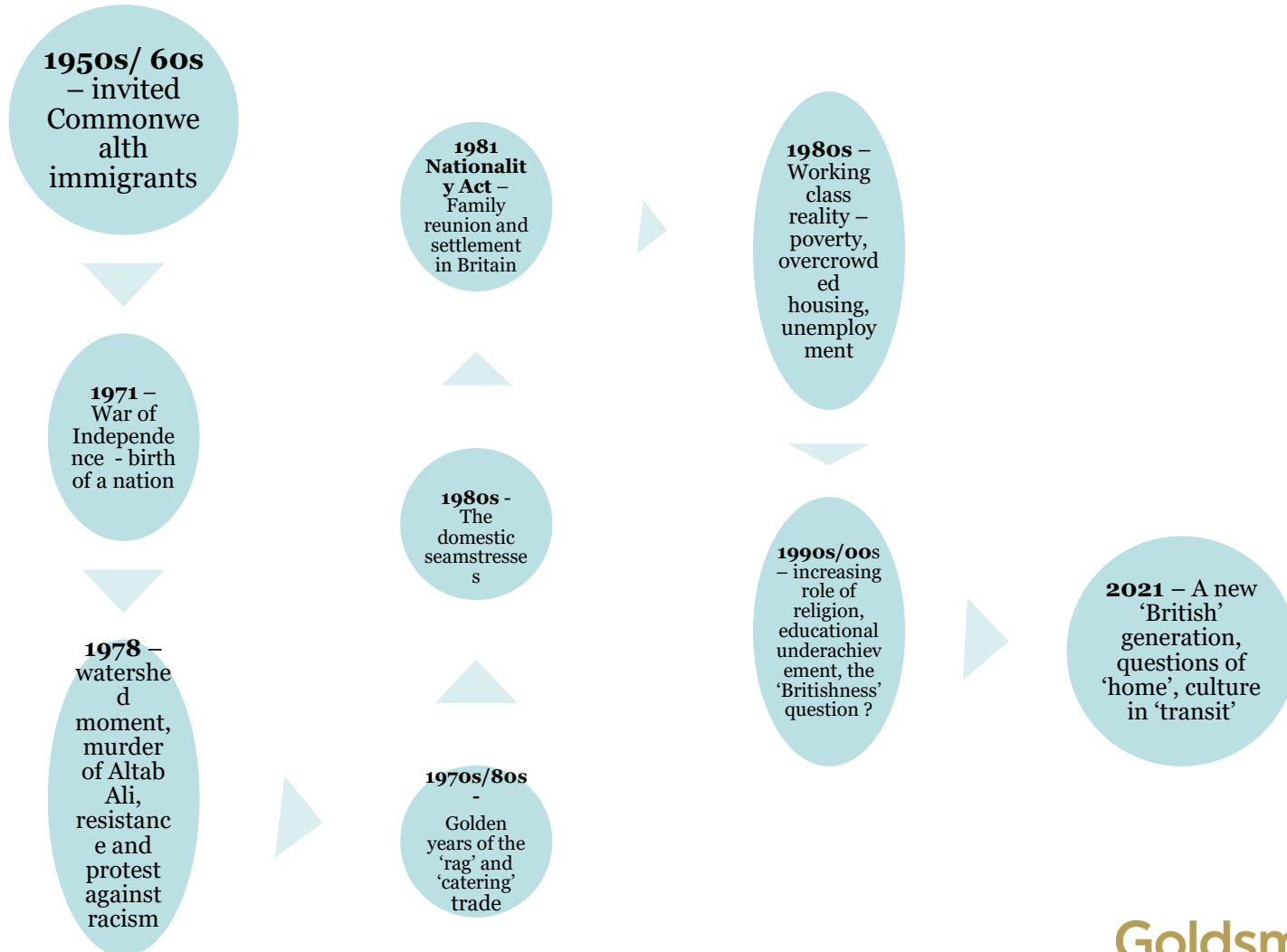
**‘This documentary reminds us that we are a normal, hard-working British community. We have fears, hopes, anxieties just like everyone else. We also drink Costa Coffee, watch Netflix and follow our football team passionately’
(Hoque quoted in Cox, 2020)**



Key objectives of the doc

1. Tells a **universal** story of migration
2. Tells a very **human** story of a community that has been here for the past 60-70 years and has contributed so much to the social, political, cultural scene of Britain
3. Uncovers these **hidden** stories – experience of racism and discrimination in the 1960s, 70s, 80s; the domestic seamstresses; the emotions of the visit back to the motherland with my very *British* children

Key moments of history...



A very 'British' history

- Many thousands of Sylheti Bengali seafarers fought in the British navy during WWI & WWII
- My fathers generation helped rebuild post-war Britain – steel, cotton mills, car manufacturing, the 'rag' trade
- The 'curry' industry in the 1980s



Where is 'home' ?

Where is 'home'? Is it where you are born? Where you live? Is it to do with legal definition? Where your friends and family are located? Where your childhood memories are? Where you feel comfortable and have a sense of belonging? Is it where you feel safe and accepted and where your childhood memories are situated? Can you have more than one home? Can you feel emotional and ideological attachment to a place you have never visited before? Like culture, do we also need to think of 'home' as something that is in 'transit' (Bhaba, 2004)?

The fractured concept of 'home'

'I love this country. This is my home but I'm also connected spiritually to my motherland. That's ok – to have multiple homes and multifaceted identities. It is what makes humanity so diverse and interesting' (Hoque quoted in Cox, 2020)



Other key moments...

- The hidden stories from the seamstresses
- That very ‘emotional’ moment when I see my mothers entry passport for the very first time with the entry visa stamp
- Meeting and conversing with so many community heroes and inspirational role models
- Giving that space to my father to tell **his** story and then being able to retell this story to a mass audience
- Going back to the country of my birth with my own children, and then hearing about their reflections and experiences
- #Emotional

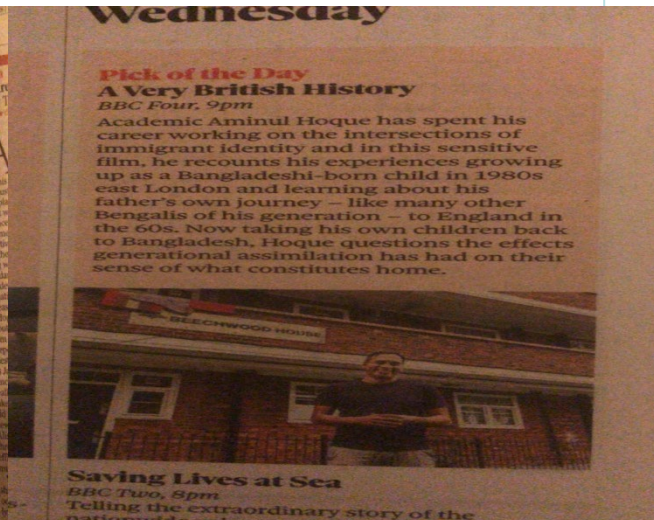
Critical response and reception

- Social media was 'buzzing'
- Lots of emails/ letters from people sharing their personal stories of migration

'Pick of the day' @Telegraph, @guardian, @thetimes

'Critic's choice' @theipaper

'Soul-stirring' @Telegraph



Some comedy/ surreal moments

- Selfies with people
- #CorianderGate
- International ‘celebrity’
- Household conversations (young people watching it with their families)
- Bangladeshi tourism
- A universal story of dislocation, upheaval, sacrifice, memory, struggles, hope, triumph.

I conclude the documentary with the words: *'My hope and aspiration is that they will continue to come – our challenge as parents is how we instil that connection with the motherland – where it began for all of us.'*



Final reflections...

Home as a place of ‘identity and belonging’

We are able to have ‘multiple homes’ and ‘multiple allegiances’

‘home’ as a ‘lived experience’...

The debate continues...

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