Third-generation British-Bangladeshi Muslims and education: developing a culturally responsive pedagogy

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Structure

– Provide some wider socio-political context of east London

– Introduce my ethnographic research

– The construction of a Br-Islamic identity

– Muslim children negotiating identities within schooling spaces

– The significance of a culturally responsive pedagogy

– Outline a few strategies to make education inclusive for children who value *faith* as a key component of their multifaceted identity

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Important disclaimers

- Issues discussed (identity confusion, rejection, displacement, racial alienation, *mis*recognition etc) are universal and can be applied to other communities/ social groups

- My analysis is sociological and anthropological and NOT theological

- Using words from my participants in order to construct and re-tell *their* stories

- I do not speak for **all** Bangladeshi young people

- Understanding and insight **as opposed to** answers or solutions

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Poverty & disadvantage

Racism & discrimination
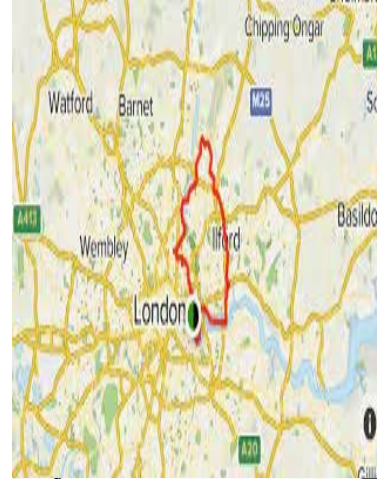
Lack of accessible role models

Intergenerational conflict
(language, culture, patriarchy)

Disengaged, marginalised,
alienated

Relative wealth disparity

Crime & anti-social behaviour

Young carers

Islamophobia

Earlier research

2004-2010 – ethnographic research focused on identities of British-born Bangladeshis from east London in community, cultural, educational settings. Involved multiple in-depth life history interviews and participant observations.

Recent research

2015-16 - Group & in-depth one-to-one interviews with young Bangladeshi Muslims of their schooling experiences, advocating a more culturally responsive pedagogy.

BRITISH-ISLAMIC IDENTITY: THIRD-GENERATION BANGLADESHIS FROM EAST LONDON

AMINUL HOQUE

3ʳᵈ/4ᵗʰ generation Bangladeshis – a definition

1ˢᵗ generation – primary migrants who came and settled here en mass between 1940-1965. Mostly men

2ⁿᵈ generation – the wives and children of the primary settlers. Born in Bangladesh and came to the UK predominantly in the 1970s and early 1980s

3ʳᵈ/ 4ᵗʰ generation – the children of the second generation children. British born and raised. Predominantly born around the mid 1980s and 1990s

Overlapping stories

Dislocation, *alienation*, exclusion, upheaval, `struggle`, poverty, *deprivation*, austerity, disengagement, disconnection from language and culture, racism, *Islamophobia*, `the complexity of 'home'`, the question of 'Britishness', challenges of integration, the social role of Islam, the multiple meanings of hijab, **non-belonging, questions of identity**

Identity crisis of 'non-belonging'

Identity is complex...

- Identity (postmodern): is fluid, dynamic, multifaceted, diverse, always in flux, never static, open to change and often contested by its members (Kearney, 2003; Kershen, 1998; Lawler, 2013; Maalouf, 2000)

- It is not about *who we are*, but *what we are not*?

- Identity is also situational, intersectional and multifaceted

- Identity operates through a paradoxical prism of *sameness* and *difference* (Lawler, 2013)

- **Representation:** how we view ourselves is important but how we are **represented** perhaps more so (Hall, 1996)

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'Their' stories (5 key narratives)

- Identity (British, Bangladeshi or Muslim) ?

- Britishness (a problematic term)

- Home (where is it ?)

- Br-Islam (Fusion, hybrid culture)

- The development of the 'Hijaabi Barbie' (more confident vocal girls)

The complexity of 'home'

*"No matter how much I consider myself as British**, they**, will never consider me as such because I have a different skin colour and a beard... its just the way they 'look' at me"* (Shahin, aged 20)

"I really wanted to have white skin. I was scared. I hated being black or brown or whatever else. I wanted to be white just so I wouldn't hear things as 'go back to your own country, you don't belong here'" (Sanjida, aged 16)

*"we would constantly hear things as 'go back to your own country, you don't belong here'... where do we actually belong if we don't belong here ?... why can't I be white ?, I used to ask my mum. I used to scrub myself hard. **I used to ask my mum to bleach me**"* (Taiba, aged 17)

*"**where is it exactly that I am supposed to go back to** ?"* (Zeyba, aged 15)

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The conundrum of non-belonging

Not being considered as being 'British' because of cultural, religious **'differences'** and the colour of skin

Viewing Bangladesh as a place of **'holiday'** and NOT 'home'

A cultural and linguistic gap between themselves and their parents/ grandparents

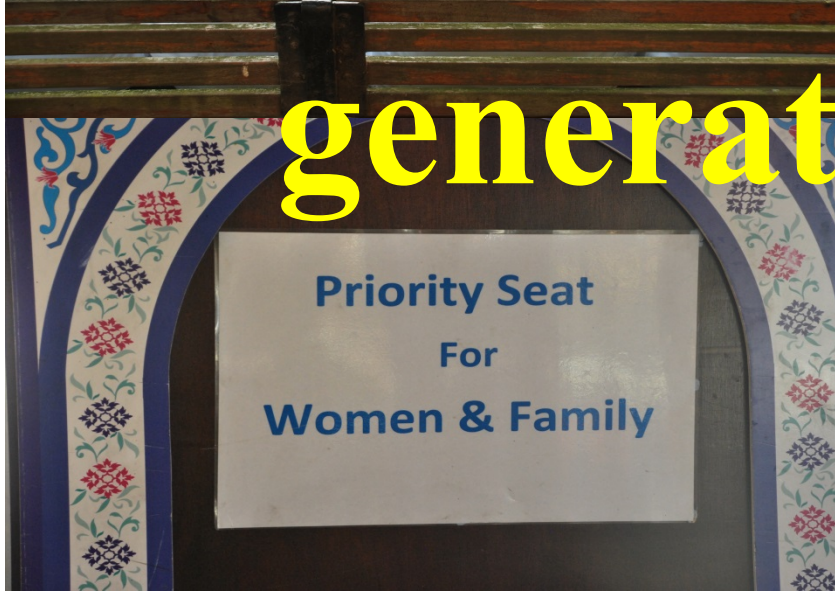Dismissed by Bangladeshis as 'tourists', 'Londonis' and 'British'...

↓

Where do they go?

A positive/ vibrant British-Islamic identity

A new Islam
for a new
generation

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The appeal of Islam…

- Young people have **agency** over the development of a syncretic, dynamic, modern, British-Islamic identity
- No passport
- No race
- No social class
- No nation
- Part of something global
- Part of something political
- Part of something spiritual
- Part of something historical
- Located within the 'politics of recognition' and representation, young Bangladeshi Muslims also gain visibility and develop a voice
- A sense of belonging and acceptance

Key questions

1. Do we really know who our students are? **Do/should** we care?

2. Are we aware of the wider social, community and cultural issues that many of our students are living through?

3. How do we get to know our students and ensure that their views, interests, lived experiences, aspirations inform and guide our pedagogical practices?

Culturally responsive pedagogy

In light of neoliberal reforms to education, there is a need to revert back to a more **inclusive** and **collaborative** form of education where the line between the school and the community is blurred and where the complex cultural, linguistic, ethnic, gender and religious identities of our pupils are explored within the curriculum. **As a teaching philosophy, a culturally responsive pedagogy is premised on the idea that valuing culture is central to learning.** Educators cannot trivialise or pay token attention to the cultural world and lived experiences of their pupils, and instead take time to understand their pupils and their sociocultural worlds, listen to them as well as valuing and maintaining their cultural identities and heritage within pedagogical practices. Such an approach empowers pupils intellectually, socially, emotionally and politically (Hoque, 2015b, 2018; Lucas and Villegas 2013; Nieto 2000).

The term 'culturally responsive pedagogy' taps into various kinds of knowledge and lived experiences of pupils as a means of making classrooms and curricula more inclusive and refers to a 'dynamic or synergistic relationship between home/ community culture and school culture' (Ladson-Billings (1995: 467).

Students/ pupils/ young people do not leave their sociocultural worlds and identities behind once they enter the school gates — and nor should they!

(Bullock Report, 1975)

In my research, I argue...

In an area such as Tower Hamlets, which has a Bangladeshi resident population of 32% – the majority of whom self-identify as 'Muslims' – educators need to consider some key philosophical and professional questions:

- Do we really know who our students are?
- Are we aware of the wider social, community and cultural issues that many of our pupils are living through?
- Do we know why faith and religion (Islam) is important to many of our pupils?
- How do our pupils understand and negotiate complex notions of culture, community, nation, faith, religion and spirituality?
- Why is it important that our curriculum is relevant to the lives of our pupils, reflecting their social world?
- As educators, do we know why some girls wear the *hijab* – the headscarf – and what it means to them? Or why some young men grow facial hair and wear the thobe – traditional loose clothing?
- Would it be useful to hear directly from our pupils? Should this be our concern? Or do we continue approaching these highly sensitive and ethically challenging issues with our own biases and prejudices without taking into account the worldviews, aspirations and experiences of those directly affected by these issues? (Hoque, 2018: 182-83)

The importance of mother tongue

Adnan (aged 15) speaks about his experience of how his 'home' language is not *'valued'* and *'welcome'* at school: *'I get told off all the time by this one teacher for speaking Bengali with my boys at school. He said it was rude. But sometimes I find it more comfortable speaking Bengali'.*

Adnan also talks about how his mother is marginalised from the schooling process because she cannot speak English:

'My mum is really involved in my schooling life and encourages and supports me at home. But she cannot speak English at all. She always attends every parents evening at school and always feels left out and confused because she is unable to understand my teachers who speak English with her. Often, I act as an interpreter. Even the Bengali teachers speak English with my mum, which I find very odd.'

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The importance of Islam and the multiple meanings of 'hijab'

Ayesha (aged 15) speaks of the hijab as:

'… *something very personal to me. You are asking us to describe what the hijab means to us and why we wear it? No one has ever asked me that question before and to be honest, I've never given it much thought. This is a very hard question to answer [pause]. For as long as I have known it, the hijab has been an important part of who I am. It is an important part of me and my identity and my personality. I'm lost without it.'*

Serena (aged 15) speaks about the time when one of her non-Muslim friends was *'concerned'* about her sudden desire to wear the headscarf and whether it was *'forced'* upon her by her father. This turned into a wider class discussion and Serena felt that the teacher was also siding with her friend: *'my teacher was also very worried and concerned about me … it was very difficult for me to convince them that I was happy and that it was my choice'.*

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Ayesha (aged 15)

Ayesha recalls a playground conversation where she felt alienated and **'victimised':**

'I am a bit more practising [religiously] than some of the other girls in my immediate friendship circle. So when the terrible Paris attacks happened in 2015, one of my teachers stopped our group in the playground, looked specifically at me and said 'I hope that there is widespread condemnation within the Muslim community towards those barbaric attacks'. I was shocked and also felt victimised. Why was he directing those comments towards me? What had I done?'

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Yasmin (aged 16)

At the time of the interviews, the news of three schoolgirls from Bethnal Green, two of whom were Bangladeshi, who had left Britain to go to Syria in 2015 was emerging and this became a point of discussion for Yasmin:

*'It is really sad what happened with those three girls. I mean they must have been in a bad place mentally. I feel sorry for their families. And I can't believe that this sort of stuff goes on within our very own community. I mean. I know it is hard, really hard being a Muslim nowadays. The way that we are being treated. The way people look at us. What we read in the newspapers and what we see in the news everyday. It is hard but still does not explain or justify why those girls went to Syria? I hope that they are ok and that they come back to their families ... We are not terrorists. We don't hate people. I'm not violent. **I'm just a normal teenage girl just like every other teenage girl. Don't make judgements on me because I'm wearing this headscarf.'***

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Key studies…

– Viewed as an important agency of socialisation,it is argued that the school plays a crucial role in constructing the fluid identities of young people, shaping and reshaping who they are, and therefore it needs to be a ***safe space*** where young people can discuss and debate facets of their individual and collective identity important to them.

– In-depth research in London (Archer, Hollingworth, and Mendick 2010), Manchester and Peterborough (Royal Society for the encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce 2010, 2012) has shown that when there is a physical and ideological disconnect between the school and the community, it becomes very difficult to engage, inspire and motivate the students of that school to learn.

Key studies & theory...

- Moll et al (1992) developed the idea of 'funds of knowledge' for teachers as a way of connecting the homes and cultures of their pupils (Mexican pupils living around the border region of Mexico/ USA) with the classrooms.

- Iqbal's (2019) study of British Pakistani boys from Birmingham and their experiences in state schools found that the religion of Islam was a key defining feature in the lives of these boys. The study reiterated the central premise of today's talk - **that educators cannot teach children effectively if they lack an understanding of their students' cultures and lives** (especially those from minority and disadvantaged backgrounds), and if they don't build meaningful relationships with their families.

- A recent study by Hickey-Moody and Horn (2022) further illustrates the educative value and social justice imperative of integrating the **faith identities** of pupils within classroom practices and curriculum. The study conducted in Australia and the UK found that engaging with the family stories, religious and community practices of pupils can positively enhance the teaching process, and can also challenge the persistent racism present in many educational institutions.

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Strategies to include faith and culture in educational curriculum

1. Adopt an additive and positive view of pupils, as opposed to a deficit one.

2. Develop a *horizontal* model of education premised on dialogue, interest, experience and humanity.

3. 'Decolonise' the curriculum, resources and mind-set.

4. Educators to develop an open, transparent, critical and reflexive approach to education and teach with a sociopolitical consciousness (social pedagogy).

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A culturally inclusive pedagogy: Some practical suggestions

- There must be 'buy in' from management/ hierarchy.

- Get to know your students. Listen and talk to your pupils. Give them space to tell you 'their' stories.

- Activities, readings, sports, curriculum, discussions to reflect diverse student population.

- Continuous staff training.

- Take a 'walk' in the community (events, read local papers, gov data, etc).

- As a teacher, if you don't understand something about your pupils, **ask them to tell you about it!** Be non-judgemental and don't just fall back on your own prejudices and bias. Take a reflexive approach.

- Encourage parental/ family/ community engagement in the child's learning.

- Make the 'national' curriculum a 'relevant' one

The debate continues......

Stay in touch

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Questions?

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