



Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON



British Bangladeshis: Heritage, culture, history and the complexity of *identity*.

Dr Aminul Hoque, Goldsmiths College, University of
London

LETTA Trust staff INSET day, 3rd September 2024

Today's talk....

- Will offer insight, understanding, perspective into the everyday 'lived experiences' of British Bangladeshis
- Is informed by my **own** lived experience as a British-Bangladeshi **and** as a father to 3 young daughters; my academic & professional research journey; my journalism and TV documentary media adventure; and in-depth policy work with government



BBC ENGLAND

A VERY BRITISH HISTORY: BRITISH BANGLADESHIS

WITH AMINUL HOQUE

WEDNESDAY 26TH FEBRUARY 9PM

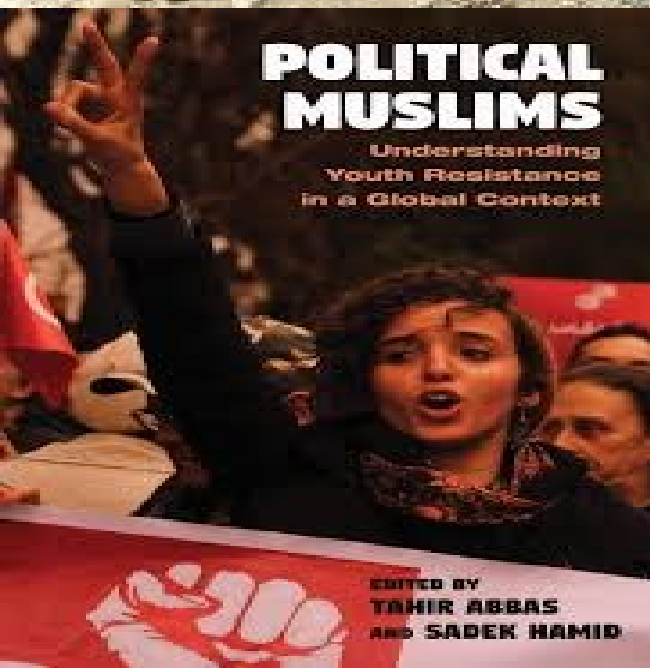
BBC
FOUR



BRITISH-ISLAMIC IDENTITY:

THIRD-GENERATION
BANGLADESHIS FROM
EAST LONDON

AMINUL HOQUE



POLITICAL MUSLIMS

Understanding
Youth Resistance
in a Global Context

EDITED BY
TAHIR ABBAS
AND SADEK HAMID

Great Muslim Leaders *Lessons for Education*

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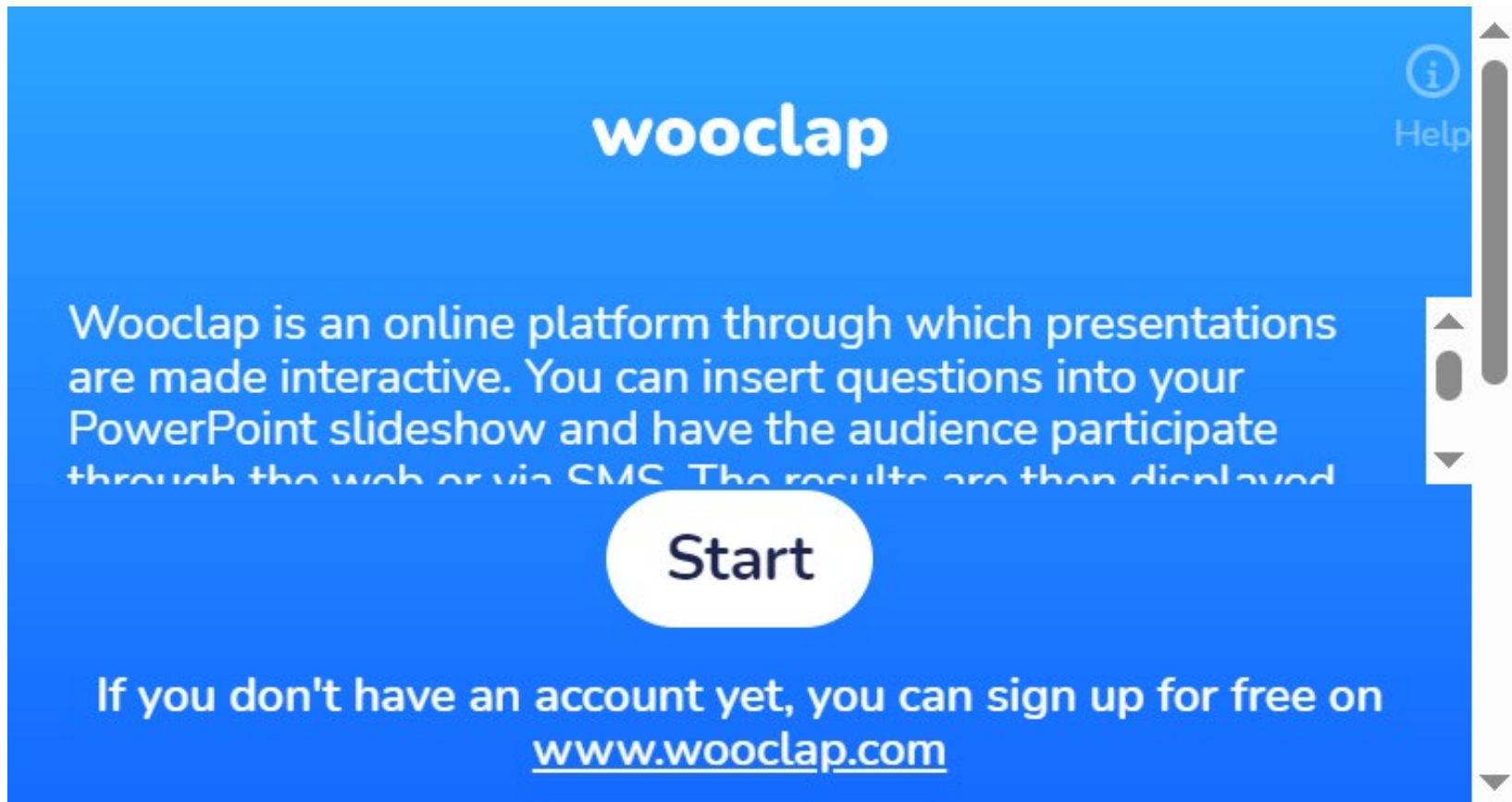
Volume 45 Number 6
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Structure of talk

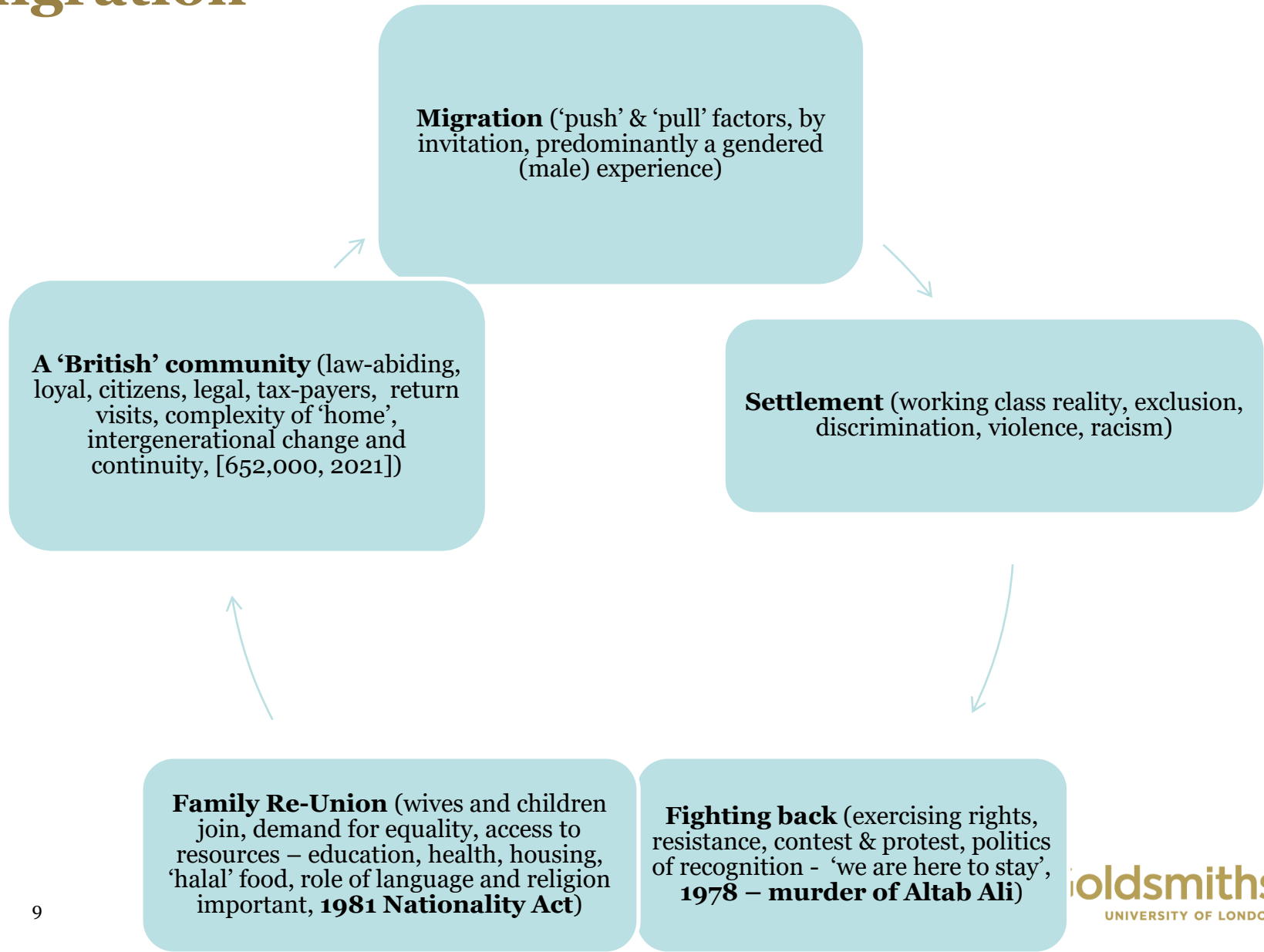
1. Context and background
2. Discuss my research & media work
3. British-Bangladeshis – current situation and challenges ahead (2024)

Context, history & background

British-Bangladeshis

A screenshot of the wooclap website interface. The background is a solid blue color. At the top center, the word "wooclap" is written in a white, lowercase, sans-serif font. In the top right corner, there is a white circular icon containing a lowercase 'i', with the word "Help" written in white text below it. Below the "wooclap" logo, there is a paragraph of white text: "Wooclap is an online platform through which presentations are made interactive. You can insert questions into your PowerPoint slideshow and have the audience participate through the web or via SMS. The results are then displayed". Below this text is a white, rounded rectangular button with the word "Start" written in a bold, black, sans-serif font. At the bottom of the page, there is another line of white text: "If you don't have an account yet, you can sign up for free on www.wooclap.com". On the right side of the screenshot, there is a vertical scrollbar with a grey track and a white slider, and a vertical arrow pointing upwards at the top and downwards at the bottom.

British Bangladeshis – A universal story of migration





Poverty

Deprivation



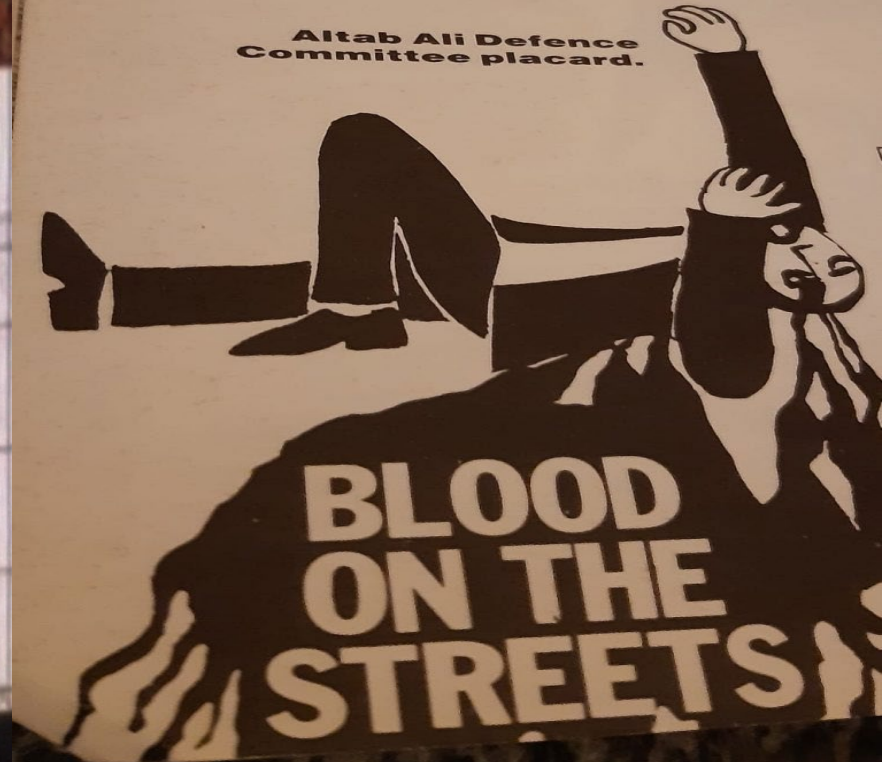
Disadvantage

Inequality

Destitution



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



Suburban movement (since mid 1990s) – from zone 2 to 3,4,5



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.

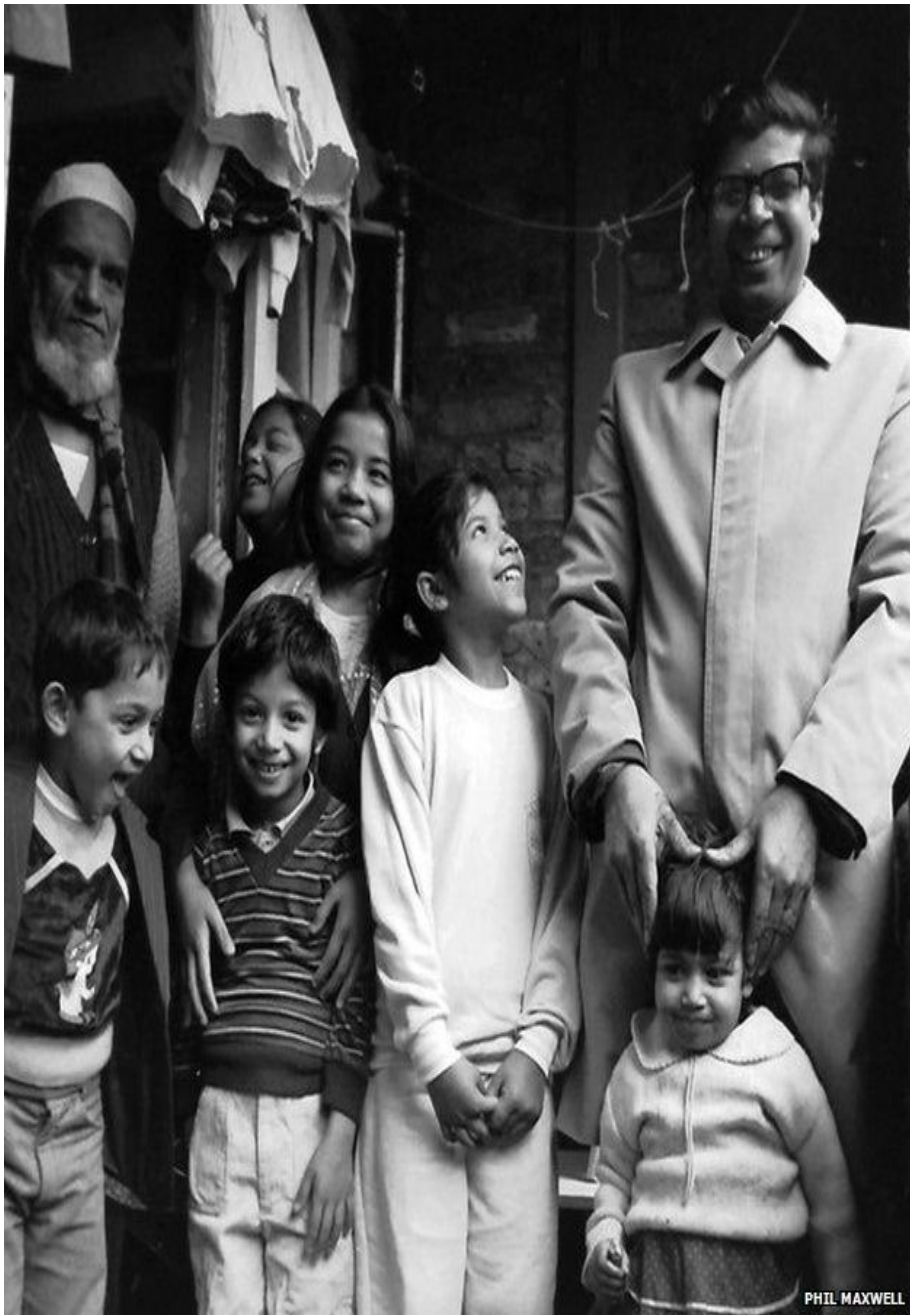
Recent research

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



PHIL MAXWELL





‘The Bengali people are so backwards and the Bengali language is useless. What is the point of speaking it? My first words were ‘mum’ and ‘dad’ and not ‘*amma*’ and ‘*abba*’. I prefer English’

(Taiba, aged 17)

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'



A Question of Identity is situational...

Who Am I ? *British, Bangladeshi or Muslim ?*

“Sometimes I am a proper Muslim. Like during Ramadan when I am fasting. Sometimes I am Bengali like when I go round my aunties with my family and we have to dress up and eat lots of food. Err, and sometimes I am British when I am out with my mates going out for a meal or to the pictures” (Zeyba, aged 15)

The complexity of Britishness

“I have a right to be British. I was born and raised here. No one can take that right away from me”
(Saeed, aged 19)

“As Bangladeshi Muslims, we are different to most British white people. But we can be different and also be British at the same time” (Taiba, aged 17)

“I cannot be British because I am not white” (Leila, aged 18)

Where is 'home' ?

“I didn't enjoy my visit to Bangladesh. I was sick and did not enjoy the hot weather. I missed my mates in London. My family always talk of Bangladesh as 'home'. My visit to Bangladesh made me realise that home for me was East London” (Saeed, aged 19)

“I don't think that I would be able to adapt to the Bangladeshi way of life. Life is very different over there. The food, weather, drainage, culture, clothes, transport, electricity, and too much poverty. I know how lucky I am. I am happy that they [grandparents] came here...” (Sanjida, aged 16)

“I hate going to Bangladesh. London is my home” (Zeyba, aged 15)

The Complexity of 'home'

However, 'home' was a complex and painful concept in that:

*“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... it's 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)*

**A Very British
History: British
Bangladeshis
(2020)**



BBC4, 26th Feb 2020, 9pm

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)?
- Can we have 'multiple homes' and 'multiple allegiances'?

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)



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.'*



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'...

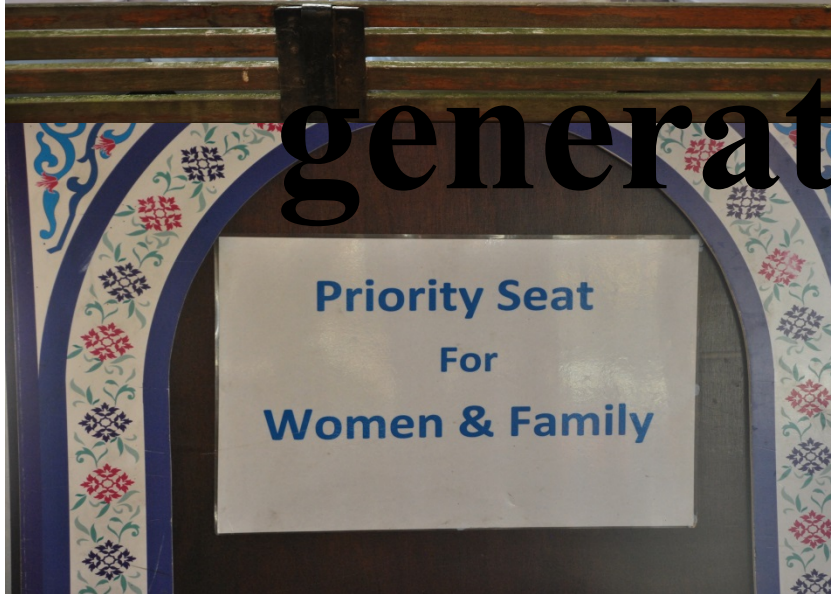


Where do they go?

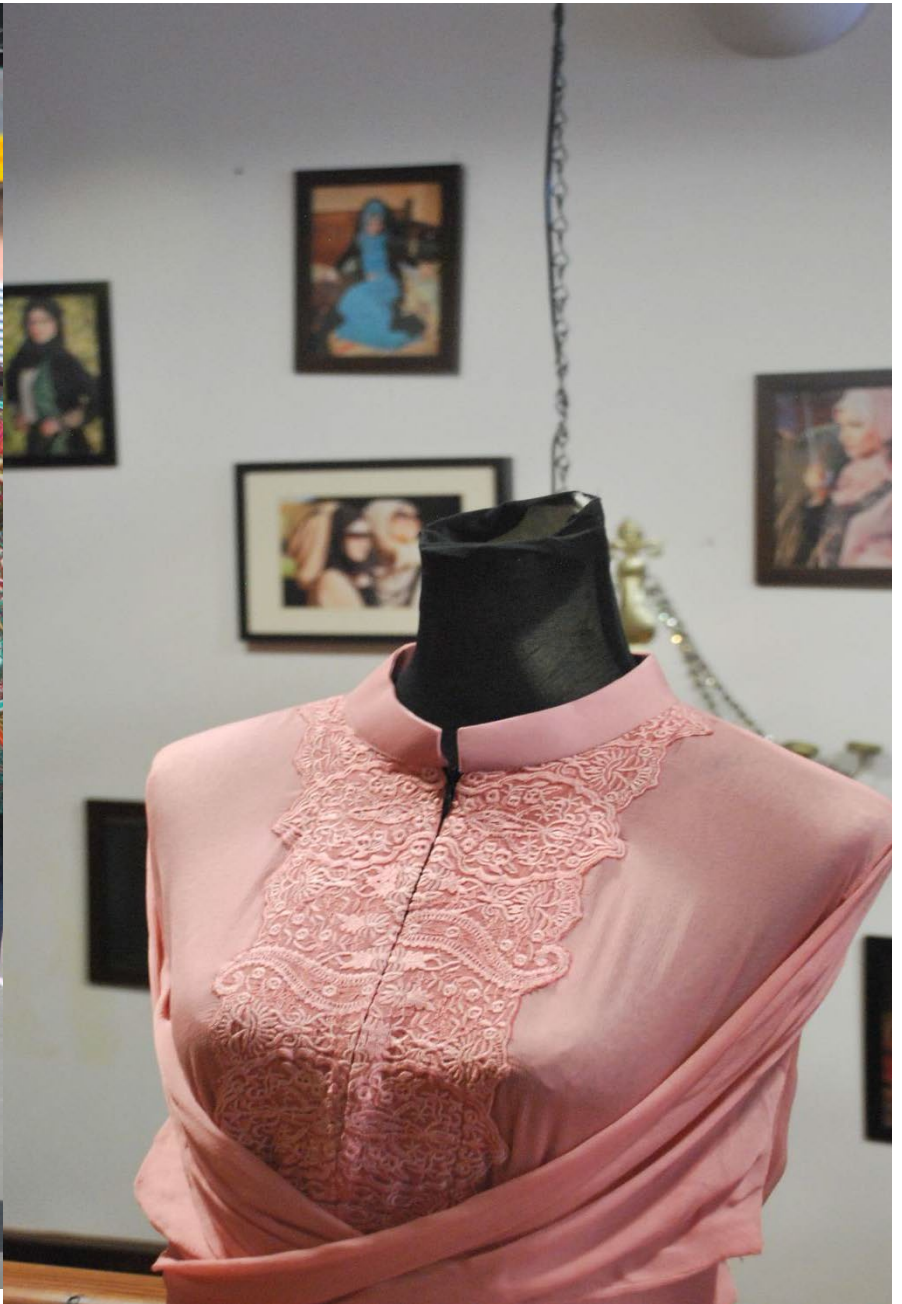
A positive/ vibrant British-Islamic identity



A new Islam for a new generation







An 'orientalist' imagery (Said, 1979)



How accurate is this portrayal?

“I’m not like my mother and grandmother. If I don’t agree with something then I will let others know. I am not a ‘yes’ person. I have my own mind, my own bank account and am in control of my own future”
(Taiba, aged 17)

“I meet up with my girlfriends every Thursday evening and go to smoke shisha (flavoured tobacco) in Mile End. It’s a chilled place and the owners have segregated seating which means that it’s ok Islamically and we can also let our hair down and have fun without being harassed by boys for our phone numbers” (Taiba, aged 17)

Islamic feminism?



2024 – challenges and opportunities

Poverty & disadvantage

Racism, Islamophobia & discrimination (recent riots 2024)

Lack of accessible role models

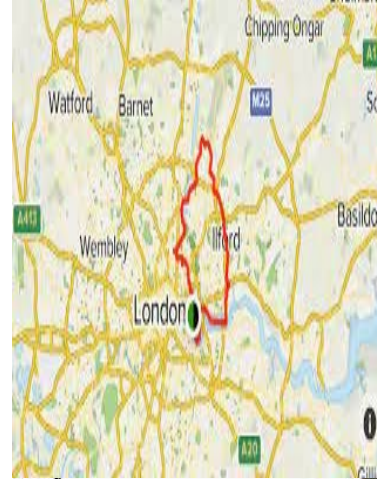
Intergenerational conflict (language, culture, patriarchy)

Disengaged, marginalised, alienated

Relative wealth disparity

Crime & anti-social behaviour

Young carers



British-Bangladeshis 2024: *A sociology*

- The question of identity (subjective/ multifaceted) lingers...
- The claim to 'Britishness' is real – fluid/ complex/ subjective/ exclusive/ difficult to grasp and define
- Inter-generational disparity/ conflict (culture, language, technology, ideology)
- Patriarchy is 'real' – educated and confident generation of women pushing the boundaries
- Working-class reality (overcrowding - housing, health disparities, unemployment, service sector/ retail low paid jobs, crime)
- Racism as a 'lived experience' – 'new' cultural racisms of 'difference', Islamophobia
- Diversity among British-Bangladeshis (geography, social class, caste, urban/ rural, education, profession, 'new' European migrants)
- Lack of representation in arts, media, sports

The debate continues...

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@BrIslam2015

#WhoAmI?

#WhereDoWeBelong?

#PingPongGeneration

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