



Aminul Hoque
@BrIslam2015



Insights Lecture

Who are we? And who are they? An exploration of the complexity of 'identity': Case study of east London Bangladeshis - history, heritage and culture

About me

Dr Aminul Hoque MBE, @BrIslam2015

Lecturer/ researcher in Education, Goldsmiths

PhD – 2011

Key research interests: identity, youth cultures, multiculturalism, race, migration studies, Islamic feminism

Key publications: *British-Islamic Identity: Third Generation Bangladeshis from East London* (2015)

Presenter for *A Very British History: British Bangladeshis*, BBC4, Feb 2020

Londoner, dad, gardener, football-mad



Today's Lecture...

- Use the example/ case study of British Bangladeshis to discuss wider issues related to race, migration, identity and the question of 'home'
- Talk to you briefly about a recent BBC documentary I did which explored the migration history of British Bangladeshis
- I want to find out how much you ALL know about migration in the east end of London?
- I would like to also explore the notion of '**home**' with you all?
- Offer you a chance at the end to ask me ANY questions you would like related to today's talk



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

WITH
AMINUL HOQUE

Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON

Identity

- What do you understand by this concept?
- What is your identity and why?
- How would you identify yourself?
- How would your friends/ family identify you?

We all have a story to share, here is my story of identity...

Born in Bangladesh. Raised in extreme poverty in an estate in Bethnal Green. **Experienced mass racism/ violence.** Have a PhD. **Studied in California.** 3 best childhood friends – ‘white’. **Ridiculed for being too ‘white’ by friends/ family.** Reminded of my *difference* by white liberal friends. **Family members think I am too westernised.** Not Muslim enough. **Man Utd fan.** Eat with my hands. **Wear flip-flops to posh restaurants.** Middle class? **Working class? ‘Dad’/ fatherhood**

WHO AM
I?

Migration – east end

1. Who are some of the main groups that have migrated to the east end of London over the past 300 years?
2. Why the east end of London? What was so particular about this area?
3. How have migrants changed/ shaped the landscape of modern Britain? What contributions have migrants made to make Britain what it is today?

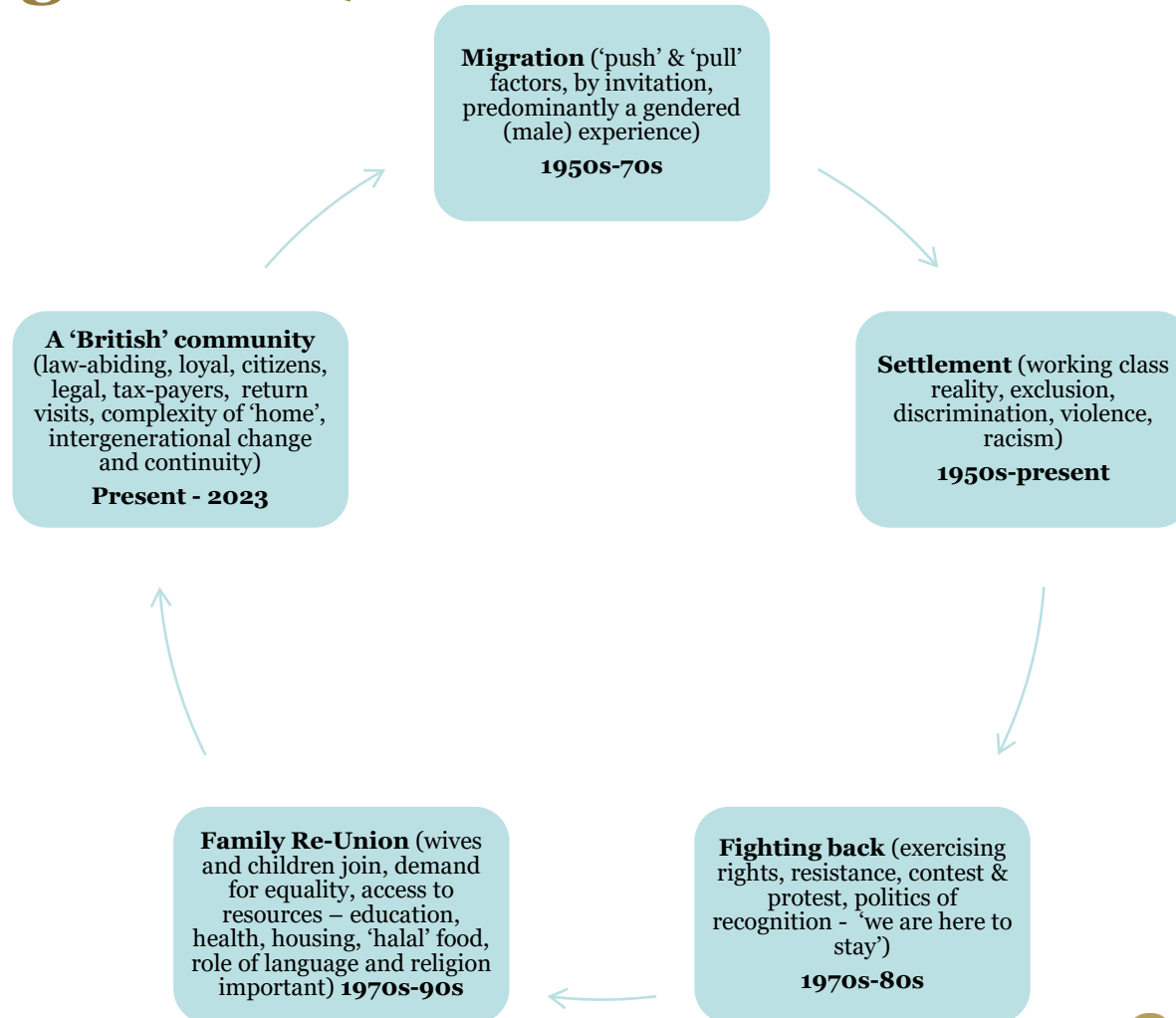
British Bangladeshis

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

Post-War Migration – Historical Context

- Britain needed labour after WWII to rebuild the economy, and many people from the Commonwealth nations (the Caribbean, East Africa, Indian subcontinent) came over to work in certain industrial sectors no longer attractive to the domestic workforce
- Britain was now a ‘visibly’ multi-ethnic/ cultural society
- Indigenous British population, especially in cities, were now overtly exposed to new and diverse cultural, religious and linguistic traditions
- A hostile housing policy and other socio-cultural factors meant that many immigrants were segregated as ‘separate’ communities often living in impoverished, squalid conditions
- As of Census 2021, approx 645,000 Bangladeshis in England and Wales (1.1% of total population)

British Bangladeshis – A universal story of migration (timeline)





Poverty

Deprivation



Disadvantage

Inequality

Destitution

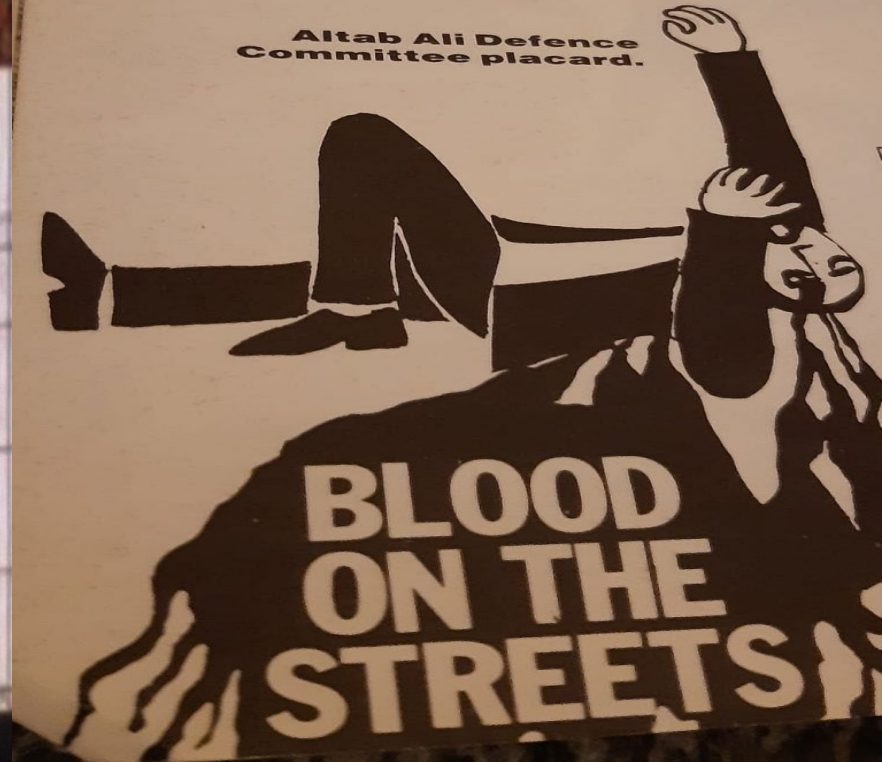


My child was playing in the kitchen and a rat bit her.



Protest

Contest



Altab Ali Defence Committee placard.

BLOOD ON THE STREETS



Equality

Resistance

Recognition



TRADE Specialist
7-3762

NINE



A very British history: British Bangladeshis

- 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
- Provides insight on how these communities have contributed positively to the wider socio-cultural scene of British life
- 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...

#BLM

1. What is the context of this hashtag?
2. What does this hashtag/movement mean to you?
3. Why is it important?

Another key objective of the doc was....

Given the current socio-political climate:

- of heightened xenophobia (mistrust/ hatred of ‘outsiders’)
- rise of populist nationalism (France, ‘Trump’ America, India, #Brexit etc)
- and a climate of hate, violence, racism, Islamophobia towards minority communities (George Floyd, Child Q etc)

The Doc highlights that migrant communities are just normal, hard-working folk and have hopes, desires, anxieties and aspirations - just like everyone else! **#BLM**

**‘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)**



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' for
you?

Where is 'home' for my British-born daughters?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PoD-JrLgkOw>

47 mins....

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)



The debate continues...

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