

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



Research Methods

In total 16 qualitative interviews were conducted in Luton. Of these, 10 were semi-structured dyads with parents and children, 3 were narrative interviews with participants over 60, and 3 were semi-structured interviews with members of civil society.

Introduction

This project examines the relationship between the local and transnational citizenship experiences of Bangladesh-origin Muslims in Luton. The project considers how local political identities influence processes of transnational engagement, and explores how transnational identities and relationships in turn inform local political subjectivity. In recognition of the fact that formal citizenship by itself seldom guarantees that an individual will be able to participate in political life, this project considers citizenship through an examination of 'substantive' dimensions of socio-political engagement. This includes examination of the degree to which access to education, employment, housing and healthcare, as well as local political processes and civil society, reflect not only 'formal statuses' but 'effective citizenship'.

Key Findings

1) Interviewees discussed concerns around the 'effectiveness' of their citizenship particularly in relation to equal treatment in employment. Many interviewees described difficulties in accessing jobs as well as difficulties in seeking promotion.

Discrimination in the labour market was more pronounced among visible Muslims.

2) Interviewees discussed young Bangladeshis' strong performance in education not always matching their career opportunities. It was suggested that networks need to be created across generations within the community to help young Bangladeshis to excel and climb the career ladder.

3) Government policy was a core concern particularly in the form of the Prevent Strategy which interviewees argued closed down conversations and created an environment of fear in educational institutions.

4) Local organisations provide Bangladeshi women and elderly men and women with a wide range of courses and activities, including but not limited to ESOL, which develop skills, employability, improve health and well-being and reduce isolation. They were thought to be extremely valuable but under significant threat due to lack of funding.

5) It was suggested that the current political context, in terms of 'Hostile Environment' immigration policies and the rhetoric surrounding Brexit, was related to a significant rise in anti-Muslim hate crime. The Government will not build trust with this community until the effect of such policies on ethnic minorities, and specifically Muslim communities, is addressed.

6) Overall participants in Luton compared their citizenship experiences unfavourably to those of friends and relatives in Tower Hamlets. They believed that their communities were under-resourced in terms of education and healthcare and that as job opportunities were more limited for Bangladeshi-origin young people in Luton in comparison to Tower Hamlets educational aspirations were not as high.

Recommendations put forward by civil society members

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. Policies should address racial and religious discrimination by looking at pay gaps, promotion gaps, and by mandating name-blind CVs.

2) Attention needs to be paid to building up networks across different generations to enable a smooth transition for young people who enter employment. This would refer young people to role models in their fields of interest, improving confidence and preparing them for any difficulties they may encounter in employment.

3) 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.

4) Civil society organisations provide invaluable resources to the Bangladeshi community, particularly women and the elderly, which require investment.

5) 'Hostile Environment' immigration policies have created a climate of fear among Bangladesh-origin Muslims in the UK. 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.

6) Local government and civil society interventions to improve the citizenship experiences of Bangladesh-origin Muslims in the UK, need to ensure that investment occurs beyond (as well as within) central London.

Other details to include <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/ioe/departments-and-centres/centres/thomas-coram-research-unit/our-research/migration-mobility-and-diversity/transnational-practices-local-settings>

Picture Source: NBC News, Luton, Feb 2015