

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



HARRIS BROS
ANGLO-CONTINENTAL STORE
WHOLESALE & RETAIL

Research Methods

In total 34 qualitative interviews were conducted in Smethwick. Of these, 20 were semi-structured dyads with parents and children, 6 were narrative interviews with participants over 60, and 8 were semi-structured interviews with members of civil society. All interviewees were British citizens by birth or naturalization.

Introduction

This project examines the relationship between the local and transnational citizenship experiences of Bangladesh-origin Muslims in Birmingham. 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. Interviewees also discussed a lack of trust in Government due to local issues which had garnered national attention. These include the Trojan Horse Affair and the 'Project Champion' spy-camera scheme (the placing of cameras outside mosques in East Birmingham). Such incidents continue to play a role in the portrayal of Muslims in wider political discourse and they left interviewees feeling surveilled and under attack.
- 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.
- 6) While the research did not find a relationship between citizenship experiences and religious or political transnational engagement it did find a relationship between citizenship experiences and social forms of transnationalism. Specifically, interviewees of all ages discussed the decision to acquire or maintain land and property in Bangladesh because of experiences of discrimination in the UK and fears around the fragility of their British citizenship. Again, this was related to 'Hostile Environment' immigration policies and an increased fear of deportation. Interviewees argued that it was necessary to develop connections with Bangladesh for the sake of their future security. We have conceptualised this as 'protective transnationalism'.

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.
 - 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 the Prevent Strategy must work to build trust between institutions and the Muslim community in Birmingham, with attention paid specifically to the role of Prevent within educational institutions.
 - 4) Civil society organisations provide invaluable resources to the Bangladeshi community, particularly women and the elderly, which require investment.
 - 5) More resources need to be put into tackling hate crime at the local level. In particular it needs to be made easier to record hate crime to the police and more work needs to be done in schools to challenge Islamophobia
 - 6) 'Hostile Environment' immigration policies have created a climate of fear among Bangladesh-origin Muslims in the UK. The Government will not build trust with this community until the effect of such policies on Muslim communities is addressed.
- Other details to include
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