

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



Research Methods

In total 25 qualitative interviews were conducted in Tower Hamlets. Of these, 15 were semi-structured dyads with parents and children, 5 were narrative interviews with participants over 60, and 5 were semi-structured interviews with members of civil society. All interviewees were British citizens by birth or naturalisation.

Introduction

This project examines the relationship between the local and transnational citizenship experiences of Bangladesh-origin Muslims in Tower Hamlets. 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. This includes the media coverage around the Bethnal Green Girls. This incident continues to play a role in the portrayal of Muslims in wider political discourse, leaving 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, was related to a significant rise in anti-Muslim hate crime.
- 6) Interviewees felt that the size of the Bangladeshi-origin community in Tower Hamlets provided some protection from discrimination in education and employment. However they felt that the effect of hostile environment immigration policies, and in particular the increase in anti-Muslim hate crime, was starting to filter into the experiences of Bangladeshis in Tower Hamlets too.

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) The local government should forge stronger relationships with employers across the borough including Canary Warf, and bring them together with local organisations to provide appropriate mentoring opportunities - supporting local candidates to apply and addressing barriers to equal labour market participation
- 3) The independent review of the Prevent Strategy must work to build trust between institutions and the Muslim community in Tower Hamlets, 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. Adult education courses and ESOL classes should be a priority
- 5) 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) 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

Other details to include:

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