



Goldsmiths
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON



BRITISH-ISLAMIC IDENTITY: **THIRD-GENERATION BANGLADESHIS FROM EAST LONDON**

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Important disclaimers

- Issues discussed (identity confusion, rejection, displacement, racial alienation etc) are universal and can be applied to other communities/ social groups
- My analysis is sociological and anthropological and NOT theological
- Using words from my participants in order to construct and re-tell *their* stories
- I do not speak for **all** Bangladeshi young people
- Understanding and insight **as opposed to** answers or solutions







‘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'



Identity is complex...

- Identity (postmodern): is fluid, dynamic, multifaceted, diverse, always in flux, never static, open to change and often contested by its members (Kearney, 2003)
- It is not about *who we are*, but *what we are not*?
- Identity is also situational, intersectional and multifaceted
- Identity operates through a paradoxical prism of *sameness* and *difference* (Lawler, 2007)
- **Representation:** how we view ourselves is important but how we are **represented** perhaps more so (Hall, 1996)

'Their' stories (5 key narratives)

- Identity (British, Bangladeshi or Muslim)?
- Britishness (a problematic term)
- Home (where is it ?)
- Br-Islam (Fusion, hybrid culture)
- The development of the 'Hijaabi Barbie' (more confident vocal girls)

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... its 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)*

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'...

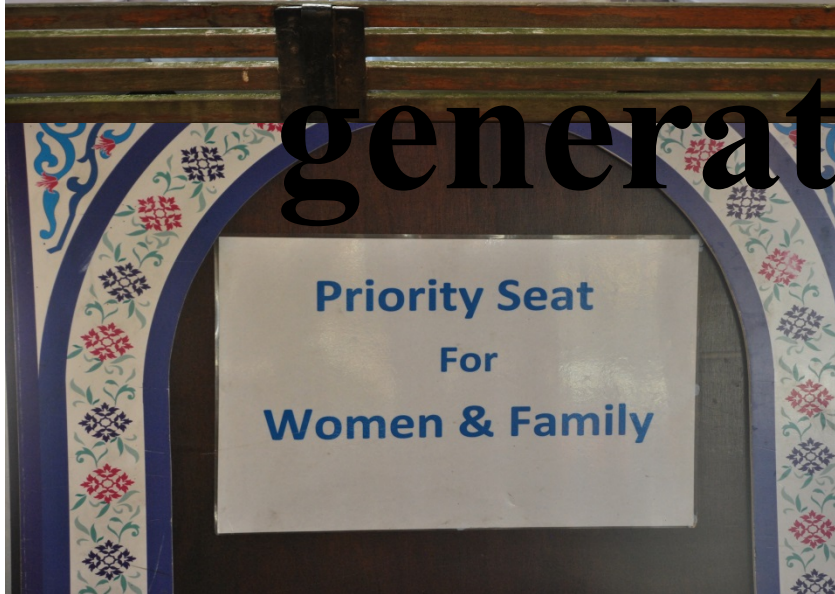


Where do they go?

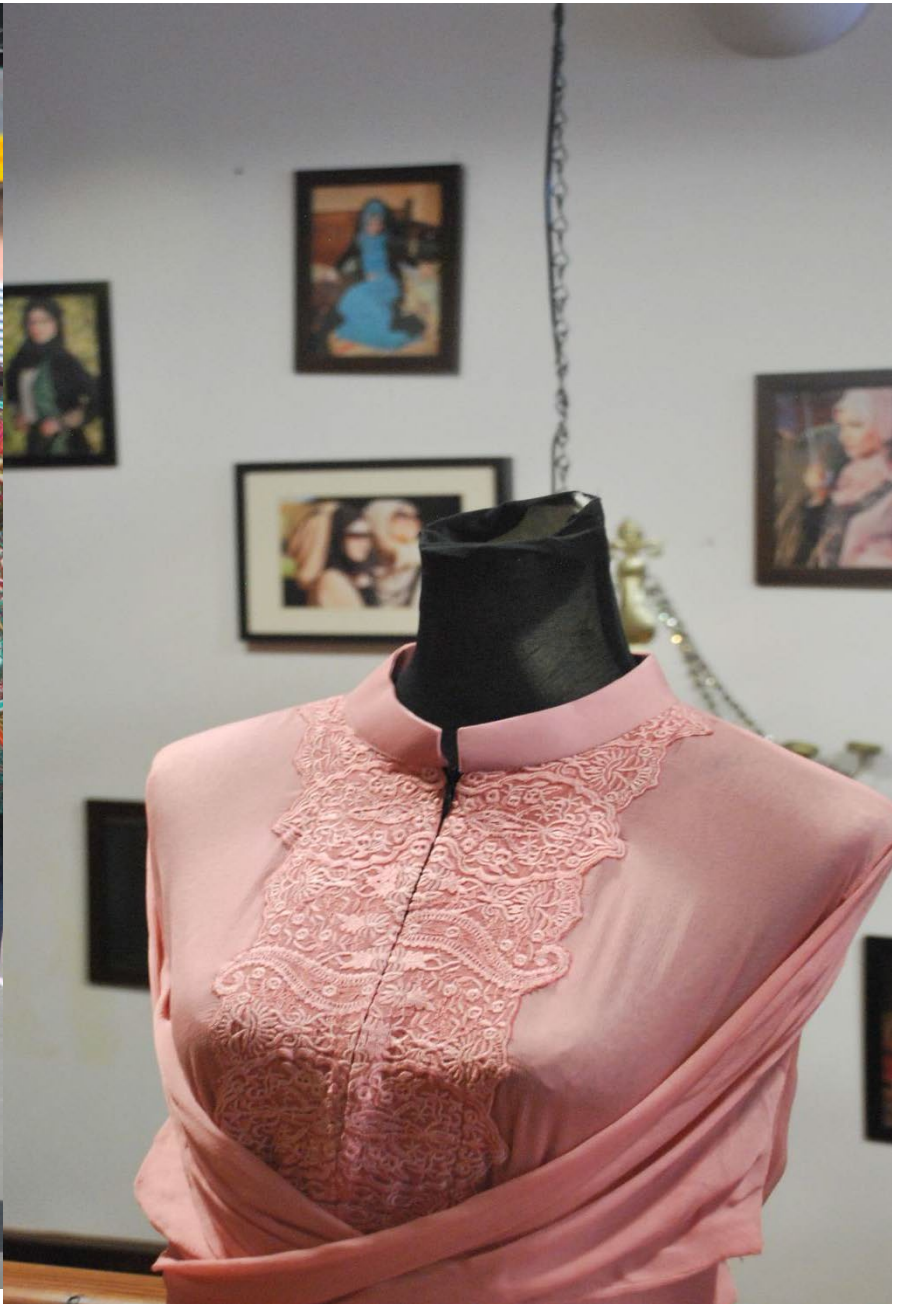
A positive/ vibrant British-Islamic identity



A new Islam for a new generation







The debate continues...

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@BrIslam2015

#WhoAmI?

#WhereDoWeBelong?

#PingPongGeneration