Preface and acknowledgements

My relationship with the East End could be said to have begun in the 1890s, when my infant grandparents arrived at London Docks to exchange the uncertainties and worries of life in the Russian Empire for the uncertainties and possibilities of life in London's Jewish ghetto. But I did not get to know the place until 1998, when I embarked on a PhD that compared the political mobilisation of the Jewish immigrants with that of the Bengalis who now live in this same area of London. After fifteen years' researching in Tower Hamlets, I have a wide network of Bengali contacts (and some dear friends) but I have never lived there. I am an experienced political activist outwith Tower Hamlets – and this has given me invaluable insights into the workings of political mobilisation and organisation – however, my political involvement in the borough has only been as an observer. So, for example, at the time of the 2005 general election, I went out with canvassers from both Labour and Respect, after first explaining that I would not take any active role. When, as sometimes happened, interviewees asked about my own ethnic background, I explained my family connection to the area, which maintained my distance from current events (though it could obviously have affected people's willingness to make comments that might be perceived as anti-Semitic). However, I have found that, for this type of research, good background knowledge and an ability to get on with all sorts of people and to portray their views honestly are more important than the personal 'identity' of the researcher. I hope my interviewees feel that I have succeeded in this portrayal, even if they do not agree with all the conclusions that I have drawn.

This book was made possible by all those who gave me their time and their memories – the many people quoted in the text (and all interviews not otherwise attributed were carried out by me), and also others who do not appear directly but whose thoughts and recollections helped me develop a fuller and more nuanced understanding of the events they lived through. My first thanks, then, must go to all those I interviewed – both in long recorded oral histories and in more informal discussion. It is a sadness of oral history work that some of

those who have taken part may be no longer alive at the end of the project, but I am particularly glad to have had the opportunity to meet and to listen to Shiekh Abdul Mannan, Shah Lutfur Rahman, Mala Sen, Jack Shapiro, Peter Shore, Lew Cherley and Jack Cigman. I would also like to thank (for interviews and in many cases further information and advice as well): Helal Uddin Abbas, Zoinul Abidin, Hena Ahmed, Junaid Ahmed, Maniruddin Ahmed, Massud Ahmed, Nahin Ahmed, Abu Sayad Ali, Afsar Ali, Farhad Ali, Rushanara Ali, Sunahwar Ali, Bodrul Alom, M. Hamid Hossain Azad, Rahim Baksh, Alima Begum, Amina Begum, Runa Bibi, Aziz Choudhury, Shofiqur Rahman Chowdhury, Abdul Gaffar Chowdhury, G.M. Chowdhury Najim, Jill Cove, Syed Nurul Islam Dulu, Uma Ezra, Shahagir Bakth Faruk, Terry Fitzpatrick, George Galloway, Ali Syed Goyas, Abdul Hannan, Emdad Haque, Anamul Hoque, Mohammad Hussain, Azmul Hussein, Abul Ishaque, Nurul Islam, Shirazul Islam, Hussain Ismail, Rajonuddin Jalal, Rahman Jilani, Dan Jones, Shirajul Alam Khan, Rohima Khanom, Shiria Khatun, Tahura Khatun, Max Levitas, Fatima Matin, Abdul Miah, Abjol Miah, Aisha Miah, Fanu Miah, Hanufa Miah, Harun Miah, Jusna Begum Miah, Sajjad Miah, Shazid Miah, Sundor Miah, Kumar Murshid, Ghulam Murtaza, Golam Mustafa, Michael Myers, Noore Nazneen, Nehar Begum Quddus, Masud Rahman, Oliur Rahman, Ruksana Rahman, Shanaz Rashid, Abdul Razzak, Muhammad Abdus Salique, Jack Shapiro, Abdus Shukur, Barney Shuster, Bertha Sokoloff, Azam Tamimi, Pola Uddin, Alhaj Shams Uddin, Jannathara Uddin, Ansar Ahmed Ullah and others who asked not to be named.

I am grateful to all those who helped me to get my bearings in a place I have now learnt to love, and especially the late Caroline Adams, who is justly remembered with affection throughout Tower Hamlets for her pioneering community work with young Bengalis and also for her unique account of the early Bengali immigrants. She assisted me in piecing together events in the early stages of this research, and was generous with ideas of people to contact. I wish she could know how valuable I have found her tapes and papers, which she left to the local history library.

My first regular contact with the area was through St Hilda's East Community Centre, where I did some voluntary work with Bengali women and children in 1999, and also organised and edited an oral history project. My thanks to all the staff and users for making me welcome. Thanks too, to all those we interviewed for the oral history project, and to Jasmine Begum-Miah and Subo Basu who conducted the Bengali interviews.

In recent years, my East End base has been the offices of the local Bengali radio station, and I would like to thank Najim Chowdhury, Shahina Moni and all my other friends at Betar Bangla for making me feel part of their community. And thanks too to Ansar Ahmed Ullah and Jamil Iqbal for sustaining me over the years with information and friendship.

I am grateful to Abdul Hannan and Harun Miah for introducing me to their work with young people on the area's streets, to Tower Hamlets College for

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Parimal Ghosh deserves the credit (or should it be the blame) for encouraging me when I was working as an architect to believe it was possible to move onto a serious academic path; and James Laidlaw and Chris Bailey gave vital help and advice. I am gratefully indebted to University College London – especially my PhD supervisors, Richard Dennis and Claire Dwyer – and to the ESRC for making this work possible, and for having faith in me despite my lack of formal training in social science. I would also like to thank John Eade for his generous assistance and for making his own collection of material on the Bengali community available to other researchers. Others who have given me help or shared their own research findings include Bill Fishman, David Garbin, Katy Gardner, Andrew Godley, Richard Halpern, Anne Kershen, Basil Mustafa, Richard Phillips, William Radice, Balihar Sanghera and Sallie Westwood.

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have given constant support, as well as detailed comments on the final product. Through their rigorous criticism, they have passed on to me a love of the craft of writing – and I hope that they have found that each time they read something I have written they have to make fewer suggestions. (What mistakes are left remain, of course, entirely my responsibility.) And thank you to Rebekah and Hadassah for your patience with an often abstracted mother and for keeping me connected to the world beyond my research.

Finally, I want to thank my partner Tony Cox, not just for his companionship, encouragement and confidence in me, but for enabling me to benefit from his experience of political involvement and of historical research. In so many different ways, without him this book could not have been written.

This book has allowed me, for the first time, to bring together all my research on the Bengali community – to present the whole story and develop fully the theoretical arguments that this generates. However, over the years, much of the material has appeared in different journals and edited volumes, which are all fully listed in the bibliography. In particular, Chapter 3 uses material from my article in the *Socialist History Journal*, Chapter 6 uses material from my article in the *Journal of Historical Geography*, Chapter 7 uses material from my chapter in *New Geographies of Race and Racism* and my article in *Urban Studies*, Chapters 8 and 9 use material from my articles in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* and *Ethnicities* and my chapter in *Muslim Spaces of Hope*, and Chapter 10 uses material from my article in *Human Geography*.

Sarah Glynn
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