



# briefings

Research Project Progress

Oxford Leverhulme Diasporas Programme 2011–2015

## Religious faith, space and diasporic communities in East London: 1880 - present

### Project description

Our five-year project aims to map diasporic religious encounters and networks in East London from 1880 to the present. We will examine the ways in which different faith communities – specifically Christian, Muslim and Jewish – have shared spaces and resources in East London and have worked together to overcome social problems throughout the twentieth century and beyond.

Standard narratives of the history of the East End present a series of community displacements or distinct “waves” of migration. In these narratives, the ethnic and religious makeup of the diasporas of East London have shifted with each migration, from being predominantly French Huguenot-Protestant to Eastern European-Jewish to Bengali/Somali-Muslim. However, we wish to question the narratives of moving up/moving out by focusing on connections between different faith communities in East London, showing that there have always been interactions between different diasporic communities and between diasporic communities and the “receiving culture.” From the setting up of the London Mosque Fund – whose board members came from a diverse range of backgrounds and faiths – to present-day efforts to combat racial and religious hatred, we argue that ethnic and religious groups have always come together (sometimes through necessity) to collaborate or negotiate social problems in East London.

### Scope

We will be focusing on three areas: the “old” East End, around Brick Lane; the “new” East End (Newham); and the Docks – but we will also be examining community links beyond these areas where they occur. As part of our research, we will be paying specific attention to certain themes: the organisation of space (sharing, claiming, contesting); gender and faith



The ESRC Centre on Migration, Policy and Society (COMPAS) at the University of Oxford conducts high quality research in order to develop theory and knowledge, inform public opinion and contribute to policy debates on migration.

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practices (particularly how religious observance and use of space might differ for men and women) and how different generations of diasporic communities have negotiated issues of faith and space in East London.

## Methods

We will be conducting our research in three ways. Firstly, we will be undertaking a survey of historical archives, paying particular attention to mapping archives that haven't been examined by standard histories, such as oral history repositories, community group records and mosque archives. Secondly, we will also be conducting interviews with members of the three faith communities, community group leaders, and youth and women's groups. Thirdly, we will be getting directly involved in interfaith work in East London by working with groups to run community events (including a drama-based event with young people) and supporting archival work in the area.

## Outcomes

This project is a collaboration between Oxford University's History department and COMPAS, the Centre on Migration, Policy and Society. It is part of the five-year Oxford Diaspora Programme, funded by the Leverhulme Trust. Our project will result in the production of a body of academic research publications, including books and journal articles, which will be published throughout the five years of the Diasporas programme. We will also be presenting findings at national and international conferences and seminars, as well as in workshops and community events with local stakeholders in East London.

We wish to trace the East London stories that haven't been part of the standard historical and political narratives, stories of co-operation between the area's diverse range of ethnic and religious communities. If you would like to be involved with the project or have information that you think would interest us, please contact someone on the research team.

**For further information please see:**

**[www.compas.ox.ac.uk/project/faith-space-diaspora-london/](http://www.compas.ox.ac.uk/project/faith-space-diaspora-london/)**

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