

Six speakers boycott Bradford Literature Festival in anti-extremism funding row

From [5Pillars](#) is Dilly Hussain, deputy editor of 5Pillars.

Dilly Hussain posted on Facebook: “I was invited to speak at the Bradford Literature Festival to discuss the impact of Dirilis Ertugrul and Ottoman history on Muslim youth. Initially I had accepted the invitation, but later declined after I found out that the initiative had received money from the Home Office’s ‘Building a Stronger Britain Together’ fund, a counter-extremism program. I would encourage others who have been invited to decline the invitation in making a principled stand against government funded initiatives that are driven towards framing problematic narratives for our community under the guise of “celebrating literature and culture”.

Malia Bouattia – racist, [had enough](#) of her. Not that her replacement was [real terms](#), but she wasn’t invited to the festival, so that is off topic.



Lola Olufemi – keen to [professional niqabi](#)

Mr Kesvani was due to give a talk on Friday, June 28, with MP Imran Hussain, titled 'Conflicted Identity: South Asian British Youth', about his recent book *Follow Me Akhi: The Online World of British Muslims*.

He said speaking at the festival would be a conflict of interests after interviewing young Muslim Brits for the book, some of whom “expressed how the expansive counter-extremism programme had affected their ability to express their religious identity”.

Speaking to the Yorkshire Post, Mr Kesvani said: “I decided to pull out out of respect to my sources in the book. . . I felt they wouldn't have been okay with me telling their stories being told in a setting where [counter-extremism] had a key role.

A statement on Bradford Literature Festival's website said: "Some of this year's projects are supported by the Home Office's 'Building A Stronger Britain Together' fund (BSBT). The funding has allowed us to do important work with women's community groups. This has been hugely valued by the groups themselves, and has received appreciative feedback from participants and community leaders.

...for us, in the context of this festival, the focus of the BSBT work has been on promoting the value of education and the importance of literacy, which is central to the ethos of this festival.

As a **South Asian, Muslim-led organisation**, BLF is entirely conscious of the opinion some parts of the Muslim community hold about the BSBT programme – and whilst we acknowledge and value the perspective and opinion, it isn't one, on this matter, that we share.

"We regret that the support offered by BSBT to these specific projects has led to a number of speakers withdrawing from the festival programme. Our door is always open to working with these speakers in the future and we wish them well."

So a festival set up to promote non-white/nonEnglish literature, which by definition would not include local writers like Keith Waterhouse (from Leeds, best known work Billy Liar) Barry Hines from Barnsley (he wrote A Kestrel for a Knave, later filmed as