A Shahid Minar in Lisbon: Long Distance Nationalism, Politics of Memory and Community among Luso-Bangladeshis

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Introduction

1   On 21 February 2011, the *Shahid Dibosh*, the Bengali language day (also known as the UNESCO maternal language day), was celebrated in Martim Moniz Square in central Lisbon, Portugal.[1] The celebration was organized by an informal Bangladeshi association called *Friends of friends*, with the support of the Lisbon City Hall and *Renovar a Mouraria* (a non-governmental organization that aims to renovate this area of Lisbon). A replica of the *Shahid Minar*—the monument located on the campus of Dhaka University commemorating the Bengali students killed in 1952 by Pakistani forces while protesting against the process of Urduization in East Pakistan—was temporarily built on the south side of Martim Moniz square. This square is located in Mouraria, in what is frequently described by media and political discourses as an 'immigrant neighbourhood', and the name of the square—Martim Moniz—is evocative of a nationalist historical narrative about the conquest of Lisbon from the Moors and the foundation of Portugal in the 12th century.

2   The area was decorated with a green and red carpet, the colours of the Bangladeshi flag (coincidently partially the same colours as the Portuguese flag), and a large poster, in Bengali and Portuguese, announcing the event—'the international day of maternal language: 21 February'. The decoration of the panel also included the Bangladeshi and Portuguese flags and a picture of a decorated *Shahid Minar* in Dhaka. Portuguese and Bangladeshi national flags were flying all along the south side of the square.

3   A small *Ekushey*[2] book fair (*ekushey boi mela*), selling Bengali novels, children's books, teaching materials and DVDs, also took place. The programme for *Pohela Boishak*—the celebration of the Bengali New Year on 14 April, which included a day trip to Algarve—was also announced.

4   Throughout the day, and in different ritualized processions, the three main organized Bangladeshi political groups in Portugal—*Awami League Portugal*, *Bangladesh Nationalist Party Portugal* and the *Islamic Forum*—laid flowers on the replica of the *Shahid Minar* in homage to the martyrs of the language movement.

5   Several cultural events took place, including the singing of nationalist songs by groups of women accompanied by men playing the tabla and harmonium. The audience included not only Bangladeshis—women, children and men—but also a representative of Lisbon City Council: a prominent councilman and commissioner for Public Space and Urban Environment. The main figures of the two more significant factions took pictures alongside this politician. In spite of being an area with distinct immigrant and non-immigrant populations, most of the audience was Bangladeshi.

6   After nightfall, the *Shahid Minar* replica was removed and the celebrations, composed of concerts and poetry recitals, moved to the hall of a Portuguese regional association nearby.[3] In the days that followed, photographs of the celebrations were posted on Facebook pages and extensively commented on. It was the first time that Bangladeshis in Portugal had organized a public celebration on 21 February and the first time that Bengali/Bangladeshi cultural symbols had such public visibility.[4]

7   Claire Alexander (2013: 591) argued:

> The Shahid Minar monument, and the annual Ekushe ritual surrounding it, has become a primary site for a version of nationalist/cultural identity work and politics within the Bangladeshi community in East London, as well as in Bangladesh itself and across its diaspora.

8   This article will focus on the importance of the *Shahid Minar* and the *Ekushe* ritual in a specific part of what could be called a Bangladeshi transnational public space.[5] The existing literature on Bangladeshi transnationalism has grown significantly in the last few years and mainly focuses on the political activities of Bangladeshi immigrants and their descendants in the United Kingdom and in the USA (Eade 1989, Eade & Garbin 2006, Glynn 2006, Alexander 2013, Kibria 2011, *inter alia*). The UK and the USA are two of the most important long-term migration destinations for Bangladeshis (see Visram 1986, Gardner 1994, Kibria 2011) and it is in these countries that their transnational political activism has become increasingly visible and researched.

9   The themes researched are diverse and include the struggles between Bangladeshi secular and Islamist segments for incorporation in British mainstream political parties and local politics (Eade 1989), contemporary transnational political activism, the manipulation of Bengali cultural symbols, such as the *Boishaki mela,* and the making of a (urban and political) place for British-Bangladeshis in London (Eade & Garbin 2006), the role of Bangladeshis in the UK and the support for Sheik Mujibur Rahman and the Independence War in 1971 (Lynn 2006), and the relation between (contested) memories of the Bangladeshi War of Independence, Bengali identity and contemporary racial politics in the UK (Alexander 2013). In this special issue, Benjamin Zeitlyn reveals the transnationalization of debates over the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT), namely how British Bangladeshis have engaged differently with this recent polemic. Some have campaigned in support of the leaders of the Jama'at-e-Islami who were accused of crimes

in 1971, while others have supported secularist claims and arguments such as those emerging from the Shahbagh movement. In several of these approaches, the importance of transnational politics is frequently revealed.

10   With the diversification of Bangladeshi migration, this diasporic public sphere (Appadurai 1996) has expanded to include other locations, actors and dynamics that have so far been left out of the picture. For instance, Bangladeshi migration to Southern Europe—Italy, Portugal, Spain and Greece—began in the late 1980s and has grown steadily, as labour migration and family reunification, in the past decades (Knights 1996, Zeitlyn 2006, Mapril 2011, 2014). These new destinations were not transit locations for the more affluent and desirable destinations. Many *probashis* (migrants) settled in Lisbon, Madrid and Rome, invested in properties, in their children's education, businesses, and in some cases, in the creation of religious spaces, such as mosques and prayer rooms.

11   In spite of this settlement process in Portugal, there is a continuous investment in transnational ways of being—practices—and transnational ways of belonging— consciousness and imagination (Schiller 2004)—with Bangladesh and other countries where kinship and friendship networks are located.[6] Some of the examples that reveal such transnational engagements happen at the level of the household and include participation in the management of household resources, sponsorship of household rituals and ceremonies, entrepreneurial investments and the buying of land, social and cultural remittances and caring for the elderly and children (in this last case, this is especially visible during the holiday breaks when the children spend some time with their grandparents in Bangladesh). In this sense, most of the Bangladeshi households that are now in Portugal are part of transnational domestic units that link this Southern European country to Bangladesh and other third spaces in Europe or elsewhere.

12   Two other important dimensions of such transnational ways of belonging are participation in the politics of representation (Hall 1997) and in homeland politics (Vertovec 2009). The first concept implies the creation of representative institutions to participate and make claims in the public domain of the receiving societies; these are organized according to existing regimes of citizenship. Homeland politics, on the other hand, implies a continuous participation in a Bangladeshi political space— either through lobbying, informal political activities, campaigning, or different forms of what is known as long distance nationalism (Anderson 1998, Schiller & Fouron 2001).[7]

13   Based on the *Shahid Dibosh* celebrations described in the initial vignette, the objective of this article is to ethnographically explore the political dimensions of recently developed transnational social fields (Schiller *et al.* 1992)[8] between Portugal and Bangladesh. These political dimensions include not only homeland politics, but also the making of a Bangladeshi 'community' in the Portuguese public space. The paper argues, firstly, that this Bangladeshi transnational public space connects Bangladeshis in the UK, in Bangladesh and in other locations through symbols, long distance nationalism and especially through the politics of memory. As Ian Hacking (1995) argues, the politics of memory, or memoro-politics, manifests itself in 'communal' forms, such as the celebration of founding events, but also in personal accounts that individually trace the past.[9]

14   Secondly the paper argues that these discourses and projects are localized and thus transformed according to the contexts in which Bangladeshis are living. In this case, they are 'used' to produce a 'community' in the context of Portuguese immigration politics and regime of citizenship.[10] Community here is used not in the organicist sense of *gemeinschaft*

but as a discourse and a symbolic construction (see Cohen 1985, Baumann 1996, Amit 2002, *inter alia*) transmitted by certain sectors of society, not only in quotidian practices and ritual contexts (see Fog Olwig 2009), but also through claims making and the governmentality of the public sphere (see Baumann 1996). In spite of this, not all of these discursive formations have the same visibility and impact. For instance, as Baumann (1996) reveals in his Southall research, discourses and symbolic constructions about community are frequently produced by state actors themselves (or NGOs with the same role) in the context of certain citizenship policies and their related efforts to 'conduct people's conduct'. Such dominant discourses imply the production of sectors of society, among which migrants, as homogeneous communities and cultures, without having in mind the complexities of the demotic versions (discursive formations produced in everyday contexts, see Baumann 1996). In this sense, community is not an interpretive analytical tool but instead a political project.

15   Thus, if it is true that several of the arguments and debates in Lisbon have elements in common with the positions and arguments described by Alexander (2013) and Eade & Garbin (2006) in the British case, it is also essential to recognize that the Portuguese case has produced new interpretations about Bangladeshi/Bengali cultural identities, interpretations that are intimately related to the politics of immigrant representation in contemporary Portugal.

16   Inspired by the extended case method (Gluckman 1940), also known as situational analysis,[11] this argument will be presented through the analysis of an event and its dynamics and how it reveals transnational social processes in the making. In order to do this, I will firstly present some of the histories of migration between Bangladesh and Portugal. Secondly, I will show how the celebration described above reveals the existence of three competing long distance nationalisms in Portugal and their relation with the past. Thirdly, I will show how this same event is a clear reminder of the participation of Bangladeshis in the Portuguese public sphere, where they are expected to participate as a 'community'. Finally, I offer some concluding notes.[12]

Modernities, deportability and transnationalism: Bangladeshis in Portugal

17   The histories of migration between Bangladesh and Portugal date back to the late 1980s; today, according to official registrations from the Bangladesh consular office in Oporto, there are 4500 Bangladeshis living in the country (this includes naturalized Portuguese and those that requested Portuguese nationality after being born in the country or residing legally for 5 or more years).

18   The majority of these Bangladeshis come from intermediate social groups, those that in Bangladesh are commonly classified as the 'new' and 'affluent middle classes', urbanized and with high levels of educational capital (Mapril 2011, 2014; for a comparative analysis with Spain and Italy see Zeitlyn 2006 and Knights 1996, respectively). For these social strata, *bidesh* in general and Continental Europe in particular is associated with 'modern' ways of life, access to educational capital and adulthood (Mapril 2014) and a way of escaping an uncertain future (Bal 2012).[13]

19   To access *bidesh*, my interlocutors followed several routes. Some migrated directly from Bangladesh to Continental Europe while others migrated in steps. For those who moved

in steps, many first went to the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) countries and some time later remigrated to Continental Europe. Once in Europe, they travelled between countries searching for employment and legalization opportunities, following previously established networks of relatives and friends. Thus, most of my research associates were already in continental Europe—Austria, Denmark, Germany, Italy and France, to mention just a few—and arrived in Portugal during the regularization programs in the 1990s and the 2000s.[14]

20   Substantial economic and social change in Southern European countries in terms of European integration not only improved standards of living but also changed their position regarding the international division of labour and global migrations (King *et al.* 2000). In the early 1960s, Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal experienced high economic growth rates. The opening up of their economies (EEC membership), together with changes in the means of production, including rising investment in modernization, an expanding service sector and the growing mobility of capital, meant that these countries saw a change in their position in relation to global migration flows (King *et al.* 2000).

21   These structural changes slowed down intra-European migrations and, in the short run, led to an increase in the arrival of immigrants from Portuguese colonial spaces and from locations with no previous historical links with Portugal. Facing increasing immigration flows, Portugal, like other Mediterranean countries, developed legislation and special regularization programs in the 1990s and 2000s.

22   For many Bangladeshis, the decision to move to Portugal was partially a way to escape deportability through a search for citizenship rights within the European Union; what Arendt (1951) has called the 'right to have rights'. In several European countries, and as de Genova (2002) and Calavita (2005) theorized, they were produced as 'illegal' or 'undocumented' third country nationals, vulnerable to processes of deportation and economic exploitation. Migrating to Portugal, as well as to other Southern European countries, such as Italy and Spain, even if initially seen as a temporary move, was perceived as a way of accessing rights and thus protection from deportation (see also Knights 1996 and Zeitlyn 2006 for similar cases).

23   Deportation was seen as a major risk, especially because most of these migratory projects were part of family investments (and not just individual endeavours) that often involved selling properties or borrowing money. As a result, being deported to Bangladesh without reciprocating some of these investments was not only seen as a failure and shameful for the migrant himself, but also to his family (in certain cases, failure in *Bidesh* might mean downward social mobility for the household).

24   After regularization, many decided to settle in Portugal, working in the lower ranks of the economy: in construction, street peddling and cleaning services. Soon though, personal savings and loans from relatives (in some cases, this also included the selling of plots of land in Bangladesh) and friends were invested in small commercial activities mainly in and around Martim Moniz Square and Mouraria neighbourhood, next to the city centre. This is an area of Lisbon where it is possible to find new *lisboetas* (Lisboners) coming from China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Cape Verde, Guinea Bissau, Mozambique and Senegal, among others. This presence, which began in the late 1970s and has transformed itself in the past 20 years, is not only commercial but also residential and is intimately related with the postcolonial migrations from former Portuguese colonial spaces and the changing position of Portugal in terms of global migration flows. The presence of migrants from several countries led to the emergence of discourses, produced by mainstream media and

politicians, that associate this area of Lisbon with 'immigration', 'multiculturalism', 'interculturalism' and a 'modern' Portugal. At the same time numerous initiatives developed by the city hall and non-governmental institutions, such as the festival *Todos* (all together) or the *Fusion* Market, aestheticize difference in order to be consumed by certain Lisbon residents.

25 Today, in central Lisbon alone, there are more than 200 Bangladeshi businesses, including neighbourhood groceries, convenience stores, ready-to-wear shops, handicraft shops, Indian and Bangladeshi restaurants, Bangladeshi sweet shops, travel agencies, internet cafés, döner kebab sellers, and newspaper kiosks. These cater to a very diverse market that ranges from Bangladeshi consumers of gastronomic nostalgia (Mankekar 2005) to peddlers who buy cheap clothes to resell in the open-air markets all around the country.

26 Initially this was a migration flow of single young male adults, but today most have married in Bangladesh and their wives and children are now in Portugal. This has led not only to the formation a new direct migration flow between Bangladesh and Portugal, this time centred on processes of family reunification, but has also created a significant change in the characteristics of this population. Several hundred Bangladeshi families have reunited in Lisbon, the majority of which are nuclear families along with another family member, typically either the husband's or wife's brother (usually, who comes to Europe depends their assumed capacity to deal with this new context, so for instance, according to some of my research associates 'you would not bring someone who has lived all their lives in the village *(gram)* and does not know how to speak English'). Members of this community have also invested significantly in their children's education in both the private and public schooling systems.

27 Those that set up businesses, reunited their families, invested in their children's education and accumulated economic capital (a large number are now Portuguese nationals) are seen as the successful *probashis*—frequently called '*patrão*' (the Portuguese word for boss). Besides their family and economic success, they also occupy political roles in certain Bangladeshi arenas; in the Bangladeshi Mosque, named after Dhaka central mosque—*Baitul Mukarram*, and the Luso-Bangladeshi Association. The Bangladeshi mosque is entirely financed by Bangladeshis themselves—the pioneers are the most important investors and see investing as a *waqf* (good deed) and a redistribution of their wealth for the 'community'—and caters to a congregation of 500-600 Muslims, the majority of whom are Bangladeshis and their children.

28 Another significant characteristic of this migration is the diversity of regional origins in Bangladesh. In Portugal it is possible to find Bangladeshis from at least twelve different districts: Dhaka, Faridpur, Noakhali, Sylhet, Chittagong, Comilla, Rangpur, Chandpur, Khulna, Shatkira, Tangail and Gopalgong (similar to Bangladeshis in Italy and Spain: see Knights 1996 and Zeitlyn 2006). Dhaka is the most strongly represented region and Chandpur the least. With the formation of migration chains and family reunification processes, regional diversity led to the emergence of several informal regional associations which provide services to their members, such as loans and repatriation of bodies, and organizing developmental initiatives in their region of origin.

29 Thus, in spite of the significant investments in Portugal, these Bangladeshis forge continuous transnational ties with Bangladesh. Whether buying properties, sending money to their kin, sending their children to spend time with their grandparents, sponsoring rituals—such as *Qurbani* (the sacrificial ceremony performed on the Id-ul-Ad'ha at the end of the pilgrimage to Mecca), marriages in Bangladesh or burying the

deceased in family plots, among others—Luso-Bangladeshis continue to sustain transnational ways of being and transnational ways of belonging (Schiller 2004). Even the households in Portugal are perceived as part of extended or joint households (*jouthko poribar*) that are continuously morally responsible for each other, even though they are spread between Bangladesh and Portugal.[15]

Long distance nationalism and the politics of memory

30   Another example of transnational ways of belonging is the engagement in homeland politics and the political imagination of Bangladesh. Besides migration, generation and regional background, the Language Day celebrations in Lisbon described above reveal other lines of fragmentation centred on transnational political activism. There are three organized political factions in Portugal: the Awami League Portugal, the Bangladesh Nationalist Party Portugal and the Islamic Forum which includes supporters of the political party Jama'at-i-Islami alongside followers of other groups.[16]

31   This factionalism is intimately associated with the pioneers and the most successful *probashis* and it frequently hides deep personal animosities between its leaders and factional supporters. The leaders and some members of each faction were already engaged in the student and youth wings of each party in Bangladesh before migration. The Islamic Forum, however, includes not only supporters of the Jama'at-i-Islami already in Bangladesh, but also younger generations that are only now beginning to participate politically. Most children of Bangladeshi immigrants,[17] either born in Portugal or living in the country from an early age, are generally disinterested in this political scenario and engagement (in both Bangladesh and Portugal). Those that are interested are only now beginning to participate politically and on a regular basis in Islamic parties such as the *Forum*, which, similar to other cases in Europe (see Zeitlyn this issue; Alexander 2013), appeal more to young European Muslims. Thus, political engagement continues to be an arena dominated by the pioneers and the immigrants themselves, for whom the personal and collective memory of the independence war is vivid and emotionally charged.

32   Each faction usually organizes separate celebrations of the main dates of the Bangladeshi civil calendar—Language Day, Independence Day, Victory Day and the Bengali New Year's Day—and in some cases it includes the organization of special events commemorating the history of each political party (*e.g.* the Jail Killing Day by Awami supporters).[18] In the case of the Islamic Forum, the only date in the Bangladeshi calendar celebrated so far is Language Day, although some of its members are quite critical about the celebration of Bangladeshi secular holidays because these are seen as celebrating 'artificial' divisions of Muslims.

33   Faruk[19] was born in 1990 in Dhaka and arrived in Portugal in 2002, together with his mother and three brothers; they were joining his father, Anwar, who had migrated to Portugal in 1996. Faruk studied until the 11th grade, but due to a complex family situation, he then began working in a pizza restaurant in downtown Lisbon. In spite of coming from a household of supporters of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, in recent years he has become closer to the Islamic Forum in Portugal. This political position is clearly visible in his criticism of the celebrations of Language Day in Lisbon (described at the beginning of this paper): [...] we Muslims are all one and the same community but some of us think that there are imaginary lines that divides us'.[20]

34   For Faruk, as well as other members of the Islamic Forum, Bengali and Bangladeshi nationalisms are perceived as a way of dividing Muslims. According to such discourses, those that organize the celebrations of 21 February and other occasions intimately related with the independence of Bangladesh are accused of thinking too much about the past while being reckless about the future.

35   Among those that celebrate occasions such as the *Sahid Dibosh*, these events are announced in the Bangladeshi shops, usually indicating the political support of the owners. For instance, if a shop announces the celebration of the Language Day organized by the BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party), it is not usual to announce the same celebration organized by the Awami League.

36   These ceremonies are frequently held in rented halls of hotels, in prayer rooms or restaurants and are organized as political rallies with guests who are from the same political faction and live in other countries being invited. For instance, during the Language Day celebrations in 2005, organized by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party Portugal and held in the conference room of hotel Mundial in downtown Lisbon, a representative of the BNP in Belgium was the special guest and the main speaker of the event. Thus, political factions in Portugal are intimately connected with the same factions in other European countries, frequently organizing and participating in the same events throughout Europe.

37   All these activities are part of a transnational political arena, a transnational *desh*, which includes not only similar movements in other parts of Europe but also the political parties in Bangladesh and the representatives of the Bangladesh government. As several authors have shown (Eade & Garbin 2006, Kabeer 2000, Siddiqui 2004), the UK is a frequent place for political activities by Bangladeshi politicians due to the economic and political importance of Bangladeshi migration and British-Bangladeshis. But in the past years, other European contexts have also gained prominence and visibility. For instance, in 2003, the Awami League Portugal organized a meeting of all the representatives of the League in European countries, including the main representatives of the party in the European Union. On 5 August 2003, Delwar Hussain Saydee visited Lisbon as an MP and member of the BNP/Jama'at-e-Islami coalition (the Four Party Alliance)[21] government and was received by Jama'at-e-Islami supporters at a function held in a Lisbon mosque. On 10 October 2010, Dipu Moni, Minister of Foreign Affairs, visited Portugal on an official visit and was received by the members of the Awami League Portugal at a public event.

38   All these events are not simply occasions to celebrate Bangladesh and its important historical dates, but they can also be interpreted as spaces for competing versions of long distance nationalism (Anderson 1998, Schiller & Fouron 2001) that include Bengali secularism, Bangladeshi nationalism and political Islam. The debate in Portugal, so far, is not only about the ideological underpinnings of each project, but also its legitimacy. Through a dispute about the role of several political actors in the political history of Bangladesh, each faction questions the legitimacy of the respective projects. In order to do so the past is continuously reinterpreted to support the ideological position of each faction.

39   This is illustrated by two events, one that occurred in 2003 and the other in early 2013. The first was the visit of Delwar Hussain Saydee to Lisbon in the summer of 2003; Delwar Hussain Saydee was a member of the national assembly of Bangladesh (*Jatyio Sangshad*) elected by the Four Party Alliance.[22] The initial idea was for the Member of Parliament

(MP) to visit the Bangladeshi mosque and the Bangladeshi businesses in Martim Moniz, but this had to be cancelled due to protests by secular groups. The main arguments against this visit were related with of his and his party's alleged role during the independence war of 1971:

> [...] we were talking about the visit of the MP when Mutiur argued that as a member of an Islamic party he frequently says some right things but politically, namely in relation to Bangladesh and Pakistan, he is completely wrong. The truth is that in Bangladesh people speak a totally different language, eat different food and dress in different ways, so why should they be together? Simply because they share the same religion? But even in this they are different. Thus the argument that the Jama'at-e-Islami sustains—that Muslims should not be separated—is absolutely false.[23]

40   Another revealing example is the following excerpt of a conversation with Amin, one of my interlocutors from Dhaka district, who arrived in Portugal in 2002:

> Many Bangladeshis don't want this MP in Portugal. According to what they say, namely the Awami League supporters, Saydee is a traitor because during the independence war he defended that Bangladesh shouldn't be independent from Pakistan. Furthermore, he argued: although they are an Islamic Party they never do what they say.[24]

41   Later on the same day:

> Osman criticises Delwar because he helped kill thousands of Bengalis while participating in the *Razakars* during the independence war. For Osman, it is very difficult to accept Delwars' visit to Lisbon since he remembers his younger paternal uncle and how he fought alongside the *Mukhti Bahini* in *Keraniganj.* He clearly remembers the secret visit of his uncle to the house of Osman's grandmother. No one could know of his presence. Osman distinctly remembers that day and the way he was dressed, with some old rags, and a riffle. He will never forget that day![25]

42   Osman arrived in Portugal in 2002 after spending several years in Japan and Saudi Arabia; he had previously participated in the Awami League youth section (the *Jubo League*) in *Keraniganj.* He considered the presence of Delwar intolerable due to the alleged role this politician had played in the anti-independence militia (*razakar*) that fought alongside the Pakistani army against the freedom fighters (*mukti bahini* or *mukti judda)* who are said to be responsible for the murder of hundreds of thousands of Bengalis. Furthermore, his presence evoked personal traces of the past, especially concerning the role some of his relatives—in this case his uncle—had played in the struggle for independence and all the suffering the war caused not only to thousands of Bengalis, but to his own family.

43   The second event that reveals this politics of memory was the trial of this former MP, Delwar Hussain Saydee, by the International Crimes Tribunal (ICT) and the repercussions of this trial in Lisbon.[26] Faruk, mentioned above, argued that during the process:

> [...] many witnesses that are being heard by the court (over the implication of the Jama'at-e-islami and Saydee in the Razakars) have been bought. After testifying, many recognized publicly that they were offered houses in exchange for a testimony against the Jamaat and Saydee.
>
> Just the other day, Amin (the leader of the BNP faction in Portugal and one of the oldest Bangladeshis in the country) held a public meeting (in Lisbon) in order to explain that Jama'at-i-Islami never took an official position about the war. According to him, among jamaat supporters certainly, there were some who supported a united Muslim country but there were others that fought side by side with the *mukthi judda.* Furthermore, Amin continued, Delwar could not have participated in the Razakars simply because he was 16 years (old) then.[27][28]

44 In the following days, a protest against the International Crimes Tribunal and in support of Delwar Hussain Saydee was held in front of the recently opened Bangladeshi Embassy in Lisbon.

45 What is at stake, in both cases, are disputed notions of the past and the role actors played in what could be called, in Hackings' terms (1995), the politics of memory. In fact, and as we have seen so far, both of the sources of the politics of memory described above, are in this case intimately connected with each other in the form of embodiments of the past. The concept of embodied past was developed by Didier Fassin in order to explore the 'corporeal presence of memory' (Fassin 2008: 316), that is, '[...] the way in which individual trajectories and collective histories are transcribed into individual and collective bodies, in terms of affects and emotions, disease and comfort, mourning and pleasure'. Emotional, affective and visceral are some of the keywords that could be used to describe the ways my interlocutors mobilize memory in order to continuously (re)interpret the present. In a way, history still hurts and the debates in Lisbon reveal such tensions.

46 But why are there such debates? What is at stake in these arguments? The concept of long distance nationalism is frequently used to describe the formal political impact of immigrants in their homeland or the potential lobbying of immigrants in the receiving state in favour of a particular party or movement in the home country (see for instance Schiller *et al.* 1994, Vertovec 2009, *inter alia*). In this paper, on the other hand, I show how long distance nationalism is also associated with politics of memory in the general context of struggles between different political imaginaries. That is, *bidesh*, as a land of plenty, is a place of accumulation of wealth and prestige and thus, according to my interlocutors, allows migrants to have a significant impact on their relatives back home (see Gardner 1993 for a similar argument). In such contexts, the argument continues, migrants can be instrumental in changing the political support of their relatives in Bangladesh. Thus, Europe is another political arena to gather new support and reinforce ones position. This is quite explicit in a conversation with Jalal, one of my interlocutors from Dhaka, who has been in Portugal since 2002:

> [...] Jamaatis are doing in Portugal what they do in Bangladesh. They try to convince the migrants to vote for them and thus change their political affiliations. Afterwards, when these migrants go back home, either permanently or on holidays, and since they are respected and influential because they live abroad, they try to convince their relatives to change their votes.[29]

47 Although Jalal was not formally linked to any political party, he had sympathies with the Awami league and, for him, Portugal was part of a transnational Bangladeshi political space where different political movements make multiple efforts to mobilize migrants.

48 Reaching out to Bangladeshi migrants, even in a peripheral (demographically or economically) context such as Portugal, as compared to the UK, is a potential space for the creation of new political influences and thus a way of transmitting certain visions of what Bangladesh should be, that is, certain nationalist imaginaries and projects. One way of doing this is via the control of certain institutions, namely mosques and representative associations.[30] Through these arenas it is possible to transmit normativities and thus produce versions of what is considered 'normal', 'tolerated', 'forbidden' and 'accepted', not only in religion and ceremonial practices (defining *haram* and *halal* or what one should or should not do), but also regarding issues related to long distance nationalism, the politicization of memory and Bangladeshi contemporary public debates.

Creating 'community'

49   A revealing example is the creation of the Luso-Bangladeshi Association or the *Probashir community Lisbon* and the efforts to control such an arena. The celebration described in the initial vignette can be seen as part of the making of a Bangladeshi 'community' in the Portuguese public domain in which Bengali/Bangladeshi cultural identities and symbols are mobilized in the general context of the politics of immigrant representation. The history of the creation of a Bangladeshi association in Lisbon is a revealing case. According to Manosh, a pioneer who arrived in the late 1980s, and one the leaders of the Awami League in Portugal, the efforts to build a representative association of Bangladeshis began in 1993:

> Thirteen of us had a dinner in Lisbon to discuss the creation of an association. Everything was going just fine until a decision had to be made about its president. Then everything turned into a mess. One of them argued that just because he was older and a doctor he had more capacities/rights to the leadership! But that's not all that counts.[31]

50   It was after this first meeting that the Portugal-Bangladesh Cultural Union (União Cultural de Portugal-Bangladesh) was created. In spite of being close to the Awami League in Portugal, its main objective was to represent Bangladeshis to Portuguese institutions, such as the High Commissioner for Immigration and Ethnic Minorities (Alto Comissariado para a Imigração e Minorias Étnicas - ACIME),[32] the Borders Police (Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras or S.E.F.), the Bangladesh Consular Office, in Oporto, and the Bangladeshi Embassy in Paris. Furthermore, their aim was to provide support for *probashis* in bureaucratic procedures in relation to Portuguese and Bangladeshi institutions (*e.g.* translation of documents or sending forms for the renewal of passports).

51   It was also in charge of organizing several events celebrating Bengali cultural heritage, namely Language Day and Bengali New Year's Day, and important national dates. For instance in 2003, Language Day was celebrated in a hotel in Lisbon in the presence of the Bangladeshi Consul, the Bangladeshi Ambassador in Paris and a representative of the Borders Police (S.E.F.). The programme included the singing of Bengali songs, poetry recitals and speeches by its main representatives.

52   According to its president and the executive committee, the aim was to represent all Bangladeshis in the Portuguese public domain, an objective that was clearly visible in the opening speech of the celebration of 26 March—a national holiday in Bangladesh that celebrates the declaration of independence from Pakistan—in 2007 in Lisbon:

> I'm personally very grateful for the friendship between our two countries. We come from very far away but I could not overemphasise the importance of exchanging our cultures, our languages and our traditions. Once I had the opportunity to speak to the president of the republic and said: '500 years ago Vasco da Gama came to my homeland and we received him cordially. 500 years later the Bangladeshi people came here and we also hope you receive us cordially'. The president greeted all Bangladeshis. Currently we are almost four thousand and we contribute with our work, we pay social security, we pay taxes, in sum we are part of Portugal. Our children are born here and they study here. [...] We respect the rules and thus someday we too will be Portuguese. [...] Dear friends, we don't ask for food, clothing or money. We only ask for work so that we can make ends meet. I want to exchange ideas and cultures between our two countries. Today is the thirty-fifth anniversary

of our independence and we emphatically say: long live independence and let us live with liberty.[33]

53   Due to its association with the Awami League, the Portugal-Bangladesh Cultural Union was frequently criticised by the supporters of the BNP and the Jama'at-e-Islami. The argument was that in spite of its objective—the representation of all Bangladeshis, as expressed in the above speech—the União was first and foremost associated with the Awami League and thus the legitimacy of its claim to represent all Bangladeshis was questionable. Consequently, the other two factions frequently organized their own celebrations. This was in turn criticised by several members of the Union to whom such institutional fragmentation was incomprehensible. According to Mahmud (one of the older Bangladeshis in Portugal), its vice president: 'we are one, we are Bangladesh. How many are we in Portugal? 3000 or 3500 and we have three parties and groups!'[34]

54   In spite of such polemics and contestations, the União was for several years the only interlocutor between Bangladeshis and the Portuguese institutions that dealt with immigration issues.

55   In 2010, though, after several years of uncertainty, all the factions met to prepare a common ground for the creation of a new representative association. The idea came from a member of the Bangladeshi parliament; some of my interlocutors had a meeting with this member during a visit to Bangladesh. The objective was the creation of a new institution of representation of *probashis* that could liaise with the Portuguese authorities and the new and upcoming Bangladeshi embassy, a promise made by the Minister of Foreign Affairs during her visit to Portugal in 2010.

56   After several meetings, it was decided to elect the new executive committee for the Luso-Bangladeshi Association (Associação Luso-Bangladeshi or Probashir Community Portugal), which would be formally registered and created only after the elections. The preparation of the electoral process, including the voting process itself, the registration of all Bangladeshis over eighteen years old (each voter has an electoral card, with a number and a photograph) and the registration of the lists of candidates, should be guaranteed by a fourth independent and informal group composed of Bangladeshis in Lisbon with no political connections whatsoever. This fourth party, called Friends of Friends, was created in January 2011 and besides overseeing the creation of the new association, it was also responsible for the organization of several cultural events (until the new association was created).

57   The organization of the celebrations for Language Day 2011, described at the beginning of this article, was already part of this arrangement and was organized by this same fourth party. As if to distinguish themselves from the public and all other factions, on Language Day, 21 February 2011, the members of Friends of Friends were all wearing similar green and red t-shirts.

58   All the contending factions saw this as an important moment for the upcoming electoral process. For all of them it was important to be present and the way to do this was through processions and presentation of flowers at the *Shahid Minar* replica, paying homage to the martyrs of the Language movement.

59   Three lists were formed for the elections. Several members of the former executive committee of the União Cultural de Bangladesh-Portugal composed the 'blue list' and built an electoral programme that, in clear continuity with the past, aspired to be for all

Bangladeshis and independent of factional belongings. As Manosh argued while drinking a cup of afternoon *cha* during the campaign:

> This list is for all Bangladeshis and not only for Awami supporters. Otherwise we will run the risk of losing the elections![35]

60   In spite of this, for critics and non-critics alike this was informally called the 'Awami League list' and the group were never able to separate themselves from such an image. Yet Manosh continued to be regarded as the favourite candidate and the one who would surely garner the most votes. Everyone recognised that he was the most appropriate candidate for the position of president of the association—with social capital, knowledge of Portuguese language and institutions and connections with the Portuguese political establishment (he was part of the Socialist party).

61   The second list included members of both the BNP and the Islamic Forum and it was seen as the main competition for the blue list. It was known as the 'green list' and included the son-in-law of the main representative of the BNP Portugal, some very important Luso-Bangladeshi entrepreneurs, and some supporters of the Jama'at-e-Islami.

62   Lastly, there was a shorter list of independent candidates, who were all members of the same patrilineage and former members of the Awami League faction that had separated from the initial faction after personal and family grievances.

63   The elections took place on 10 April in a Lisbon hotel owned by a Portuguese Muslim from Mozambique. For hours after the ballots closed, members of each faction and other Bangladeshis waited for the announcement of results that took until after three o'clock in the morning. Against all expectation, the green list won and by the time the results were publicized Manosh and several of the Awami League supporters had already left, as if they had been forewarned about the results. After months of preparation, the Luso-Bangladeshi association was finally created.

64   But what is the link between this recently created association and the *Shahid Dibosh* described at the beginning of this paper? And what does this tells us about the link between local and transnational political activism? The celebration in Lisbon of the 21 February in 2011 was an event specially created to prepare the electoral process that would lead to a new and overarching association—the *probashir community Portugal.* In this context Bengali/Bangladeshi cultural symbols were essential to participate in the Portuguese immigrant politics—based on an intercultural model of citizenship (for a distinction between Intercultural and Multicultural models of citizenship see Modood 2011)—in which migrants are expected to participate as members of 'communities' organized in accordance with 'national' belonging, their 'national' cultural heritages and their representative associations. These must be recognized by the High Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue (ACIDI), a consultative body of the Ministry of Internal Affairs, in order to participate in several consultative bodies that influence government decisions and programmes about 'integration' and 'immigration' issues. Without this recognition, an association is virtually invisible, at least when it comes to the definition of policies and making claims. The celebration of Language Day in 2011, which later led to the creation of the *probashir community Portugal*, was intimately linked to claims on the part of Bangladeshis, namely the pioneers, to participate in the Portuguese institutions that deal with immigration issues.

65   At the same time, however, Bengali/Bangladeshi cultural identities and symbols are highly contested and debated among Bangladeshis themselves, not only in Bangladesh

but also across *bidesh* and this is clearly visible in the politics of memory and competing nationalist imaginaries revealed in the previous section. Thus, who controls this new arena—secularists, nationalist or Islamists—controls the political message the new association will transmit and thus could possibly influence other Bangladeshis living in Portugal. And due to the economic importance and successful image of the *bidesh*, they in turn have the potential to ultimately influence relatives and friends back in the *desh*, therefore helping shape and transform political imaginaries and ideologies in Bangladesh itself.

Some concluding notes

66   Using an extended case method (Gluckman 1958) of the *Shahid Dibosh* celebrations in downtown Lisbon in 2011, this article has revealed the political dimensions of the transnational social fields between Portugal and Bangladesh.

67   On one hand, the Bangladeshi transnational public space connects Bangladeshis in the UK, in Bangladesh and in other locations through cultural identities and symbols such as the *Sahid Minar* and the *Ekushey*. On the other hand, though, these identities and symbols are transformed according to where Bangladeshis are located. It is true that the arguments and debates in Lisbon have elements in common with those described, for instance, by Alexander (2013) and Eade & Garbin (2006) in the British case. But it is essential to recognize that these symbols are differently appropriated according to the different historical and political contexts. For instance, as Alexander shows in her research (2013), the creation of Bangladeshi representative institutions in the UK, including the construction of a replica of the *Shahid Minar* in London, was part of the anti-racist struggle. In Portugal, though, Bengali and Bangladeshi symbols were 'used' to participate in the intercultural politics of immigrant representation in which immigrants are supposed to participate as 'national communities', with their own cultural symbols and heritages. Paradoxically though, these same symbols are highly contested, debated and emotionally charged among Bangladeshis themselves, especially in the context of Bangladeshi transnational politics. These debates over the importance of certain symbols reveal precisely the existence of competing long distance nationalisms

68   Thus, the celebration of the language day in 2011 in Lisbon was linked, on one hand, with the participation of Bangladeshis in the Portuguese immigration regime, in which migrants are expected to participate as members of specific national communities and, on the other, with the continuous engagement of these same actors in a Bangladeshi transnational political space.

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NOTES

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2. Ekushe is the name given to the month of February (also known as Ekushe February) and is intimately associated with the celebrations of the mother language day celebrated on 21. It is also the name given to a book fair organized in Dhaka, also in February, which celebrates Bengali language, literature and culture.

3. In this area of Lisbon it is possible to find several Portuguese regional associations and their clubhouses. These are not only used for the associations' activities but are also rented for private celebrations.

4. As we will see later, there have been other celebrations of Language Day and the Bengali New Year in Lisbon in the past but none had such public visibility as the one celebrated in 2011.

5. The concept of transnational public sphere or space draws on the works of John Bowen (2004) and Nancy Fraser (2007).

6. See Zeitlyn (2013) for the relation between British Bangladeshis, transnational *habitus* and third spaces of migration.

7. Long distance nationalism is a concept initially proposed by Benedict Anderson in 1998 and was further theorized by Nina Glick Schiller and George Fouron (2001) in their research about Haitian Americans and transnational political activism. According to Schiller and Fouron (2001: 4), long distance nationalism is '[...] a claim to membership in a political community that stretches beyond the territorial borders of a homeland. It generates an emotional attachment that is strong enough to compel people to political action that ranges from displaying a home country flag to deciding to 'return' to fight and die in a land they may never have seen'. This kind of nationalism has five main characteristics: (i) it assumes that national borders do not exclusively delimit belonging; (ii) it is not only an imaginary and emotive but also a set of concrete actions and politics; (iii) the aim of long distance nationalists is the creation of a transnational nation-state; (iv) its emergence and manifestations depend on the conditions in receiving and sending contexts; and finally (v) long distance nationalism and diasporic phenomena frequently go together but nonetheless remain distinct. This theoretical proposal implies a notion of nationalism as a discursive formation, that is, a set of symbols with multiple and frequently conflicting meanings.

8. Transnational social fields or spaces is a concept first proposed by Glick Schiller *et al.*, in 1992, to describe the way transnationalism changes peoples' relations with space by creating '[...] social spaces that connect and position some actors in more than one country' (Vertovec 2009: 12).

9. According to Ian Hacking (Hacking 1995: 211) 'the politics of personal memory is a politics of a certain type. It is a power struggle built around knowledge, or claims to knowledge. It takes for granted that a certain sort of knowledge is possible. Individual factual claims are batted back and forth (...). Underlying these competing claims to surface knowledge there is depth knowledge; that is, a knowledge that there are facts out there about memory, truth-or-falsehoods to get a fix

on. [...] Power struggles are fought out on the basis of surface knowledge, where opponents take the depth knowledge as common ground. Each side opposes the other, claiming it has better, more exact, surface knowledge, drawing on superior evidence and methodology. That is exactly the form of the confrontations between those who recover memory of trauma and those who question it.'

10. The Portuguese regime of citizenship or the legitimate forms of representation in the case of immigrant populations is based on intercultural policies in which immigrants are expected to participate as members of 'communities' organized in accordance with 'national' belonging, with their 'national' cultural heritages and their representative associations, see last section for a more detailed discussion.

11. The extended case method was proposed in 1940 by Max Gluckman in his *The Social Situation in Modern Zululand*, a study of the inauguration of a bridge in South Africa (also informally known as 'the Bridge'). The main objective was to describe in great detail an event—a social situation—from which it would be possible to analyse the sociological patterns of the wider society. The same method was used years later by J. C. Mitchell (1956), a student and later a colleague of Max Gluckman, in his famous analysis of the Kalela Dance, in Northern Rhodesia. For an analysis of the importance of the extended case method within Anthropology see Evens and Edelman (2006).

12. This article is based on three periods of ethnographic fieldwork. The first began in 2003 and finished in 2006 and led up to a PhD in social and cultural Anthropology at the University of Lisbon. In this first case, the ethnography included Portugal and Bangladesh and a total of 70 interviews (including the life and family histories of important interlocutors). The second and third periods were: from February to late May 2011 and from February to April 2012. These two latest periods of fieldwork were updates on previous data about transnational political activities of Bangladeshis in Portugal and included 20 in depth interviews (most of which applied to previously known contacts in order to collect longitudinal data).

13. This sense of *bidesh* (the Bengali word for foreign lands) as spaces of well-being, fortune and success (although morally menacing) as opposed to *desh* (the Bengali word for homeland) as a land of failure, corruption and poverty (although morally and religiously upright) are tropes long associated with the migratory experience (Gardner 1993). From the experience of Sylhetis in the UK, to the massive migrations to Middle Eastern countries, including the long-term migrations to North America, it is possible to find a 'culture of migration', as Massey *et al.* (1993) have defined it, where those that do not migrate are perceived as lazy and bad marriage deals while those that live in *bidesh* are perceived as rich, successful and prosperous.

14. In total, three regularization programs took place between 1993 and 2004 and were linked to Portuguese geostrategic interests (namely the relations with Portuguese Speaking African Countries) and as an answer to pressures from several sectors of the labour market (*e.g.* construction).

15. This predicament has also brought some tensions between kin in Portugal and in Bangladesh, especially when there are conflicting claims about channelling resources to the children's education or to support relatives in the *desh.* This becomes increasingly visible during the divisions of family properties. In such tense moments, the redistribution of wealth by *probashis* to other relatives in the *desh* is carefully considered in the general redistribution and frequently ends in bitter conflicts between siblings and parents.

16. For a history of the Islamic Forum see Eade & Garbin 2006.

17. In this paper, categories such as 'second generation' are explicitly avoided because of its problematic assumptions regarding the place (or lack thereof) of children of immigrants in the so called host society. For a critical appraisal of the concept see Ali *et al.* 2006.

18. The day is commemorated on 3 November and is a reminder of the killing of four leaders of Awami League in 1975 in Dhaka central jail.

19. The names of my research associates have been changed in order to maintain anonymity and protection of identities.

20. Fieldnotes, 2 March 2012.

21. The Four Party Alliance, formed in 1999, was led by the Bangladesh Nationalist Party and included the Jama'at-e-Islami, the Jatyo Party and the Islami Oikyajote.

22. This Member of Parliament originally came from the ranks of the Jama'at-i-Islami.

23. Fieldnotes, 5 August 2003.

24. Fieldnotes, 6 August 2003.

25. Fieldnotes, 6 August 2003.

26. For a contextualization of the ICT see Zeitlyn in this special issue.

27. The following day Faruk shared a video in Facebook about Saydee.

28. Fieldnotes, 20 December 2012

29. Fieldnotes, 4 August 2003.

30. For a comparative case see Werbner (2002).

31. Fieldnotes, 21 October 2006.

32. In 2007, ACIME changed its designation to High Commissioner for Immigration and Intercultural Dialogue—ACIDI. It is a state institution that consults on migration issues. It manages Local Centres for Immigrants (Centros Locais de Apoio ao Imigrante—CLAI) and organizes several commissions from NGOs, migrant associations and other institutions of the third sector in order to produce policy orientations to the government.

33. Fieldnotes, 26 March 2007.

34. Fieldnotes, 12 March 2007.

35. Fieldnotes, 11 April 2011.

ABSTRACTS

The literature on what could be called a Bangladeshi transnational public sphere has grown significantly in the last few years and has focused mainly on translocal political activities and ways of belonging for British Bangladeshis and Bangladeshi immigrants in the UK. However, this public sphere includes other locations and actors that have so far been left out of the picture. Based on a situational analysis of the celebrations of *Sahid Dibosh* (Language Day) in a square in Lisbon in 2011, this article explores the political dimensions of the transnational social fields that exist between Portugal and Bangladesh. The main arguments are firstly that this Bangladeshi transnational public space connects Bangladeshis in the UK, Bangladesh and other locations, such as Portugal, through symbols, long distance nationalism and politics of memory. Secondly, the paper argues that these are interpreted according to the contexts where Bangladeshis live and thus assume new meanings.

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