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# Multiculturalism, gentrification, and Islam in the public space: the case of Baitul Mukarram in Lavapiés

Óscar Salguero Montaño[1] and Hutan Hejazi[2]

*Abstract*

*In plural and secular societies today, religious communities understand access to public space as a right to the city. This right legitimises their status as social actors and, through various notions linked to modernity and transparency, entitles them to have a public life and be recognised by others. By examining the case of Bangladeshi Muslims in Lavapiés, one of Madrid's multicultural district undergoing intense gentrification and touristification processes, this article analyses the conditions through which this community accesses public space and achieves legitimisation and recognition through different practices and discourses displayed in a variety of events and festivities.*

*Keywords: Islam; Bangladesh; Madrid; public space; right to the city*

## Recognised diversity and the right to inclusion

Muslim communities in the west are among the most diverse in terms of ethnicity and country of origin. That is due to transnational migratory flows from countries with different jurisprudential schools (*maḏāhib*) and non-religious practices that affect the understanding of religious phenomena, and how it should be organised (Shepard, 2004)—especially among youth (Hamid, 2011: 252-257; Téllez and Madonia, 2019: 124) and women (Repo, 2013: 177; Ramírez and Mijares, 2018: 145-146). Indeed, Islam coexists with other competitors in a "religious market" (Berger, 1967; Luckman, 1967) and, to a large extent, is the result of migratory flows and transnational networks (Casanova, 2007: 2009) that create important variations in devotional traditions.[3] As some have indicated, this religious context is characterised by a "plurality of sacredness [and] fragmentation" (Moreno, 1998: 170), and by the "persistence" of the religious as a relation to the sacred under new forms involving a "recomposition-decomposition" process (Briones, 2002: 295).

Religious denominations are subjected to a legal framework determined by a secular state that must guarantee the right to religious freedom. As a result, state institutions must be actively involved to bring about a "new form of management that favours a more democratic and inclusive approach to this phenomenon, but in turn also entails an intensification of the monitoring, regulating and controlling of religious organisations" (Astor and Griera, 2016: 247). Due to the progressive multicultural transformation of European societies, notions like public space, citizenship and secularisation have been rethought in a debate that takes the

[1] Óscar Salguero Montaño, GINADYC, Complutense University of Madrid, Spain. Email: oscarsal@ucm.es.

[2] Hutan Hejazi, European University of Madrid, Spain. E-mail: hutan.hejazi@universidadeuropea.es.

[3] In Spain, in October 2019, according to the *Observatorio del Pluralismo Religioso*, Islam became the third religious denomination in the number of places of worship, with 1,695, following evangelical churches (4,362) and Catholic parishes (23,021).

"new presence" of Muslims as "an example and also as the limit to which the principle of recognition is to be extended" (Moreras, 2017: 16). Citizenship consists of a series of rights ranging from being recognised as a full member of a political community that is different (i.e. recognised diversity) to being an active participant in that community (i.e. the right to inclusion). It is also about being able to show one's identity in the public space (Thiebaut, 1998: 24), however. It responds to a series of social "demands" related to the modernity of denominations and, in the case of Islam, transparency too. Similar to Hudson's (2003) "religious citizenship," in which the normative framework and the foundation of citizenship itself are reconstituted according to secular and multidenominational principles, diversity is characterised by claiming one's difference and finding one's place in society.

Claims of difference and the right to inclusion by religious denominations turn public spaces into political ones, thus enabling the exercise of civil rights and creating spaces of alterity (Alguacil, 2008: 204). Indeed, as some have indicated, public spaces tend to be social amalgams where citizens exercise their rights and, as such, "the appropriation [of these spaces] by different social and cultural groups" must be equally guaranteed regardless of gender or age (Borja and Muxí, 2003: 11). The increasing visibility of religious diversity in public spaces is highlighted by the fact that "those who opt seriously for religion in European societies will want to make their views heard in public as well as [in] private debate" (Davie, 2004: 80). The right to inclusion in public spaces is part of *le droit à la ville*, "the right to the city" (Lefebvre, 1968): a fundamental right of the city because that is where "the expression and social identification of diversity are constructed " (Carrión, 2007: 84).

Taking the case of the Bangladeshi Muslim community in Madrid's district of Lavapiés, this article pays particular attention to the circumstances in which the community accesses public space to achieve greater social legitimacy and institutional recognition.[4] At the same time, it takes into account how the different practices and discourses produced in secular events and religious holidays intersect with the community and congregations.

## Multiculturalism, religious pluralism, gentrification and the "politics of change"

Popularly known as Lavapiés, this historic district or neighbourhood (usually referred to as *barrio*) is located in the ward of Embajadores—one of the six barrios that comprise Madrid's Central District. In 1861 Ramón de Mesoneros described it as "*castizo*," that is, as a "genuine" or "authentic" (2005: 189) barrio, because it lacked the cosmopolitan identity common to the working class of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Madrid. Since the mid-1990s, however, large numbers of third-country nationals settled in Lavapiés (Gómez, 2012: 5) and became one of the main multicultural enclaves in Madrid (Peñalta, 2010: 111), and Spain, in recent years.[5] Accommodating the largest foreign population in Madrid, Embajadores is the

[4] This article is part of a larger research project: "EREU-MyB. Religious Expressions in the Urban Space of Madrid and Barcelona" directed by Mar Griera, and funded by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (Project Reference: CSO2015-66198-P). It is based on fieldnotes and seventeen formal and informal interviews conducted with key community informants and a variety of government employees during fieldwork in 2015-2019.

[5] According to the official census, as of January 2019, the population in Madrid's Central District is 135,314.

most populated administrative ward, with a population of 45,433, out of which 11,908 are from 88 nationalities other than Spanish.[6]

Lavapiés is multicultural and multireligious too. Its public space hosts a variety of religious events which range from popular Catholic processions to end of Ramadan prayers (*Eid al-Fitr*) and *On The Red Box* evangelical proselytism. In addition to the two historical Catholic parishes (San Millán and San Cayetano), there are seven different evangelical communities (Baptists, Pentecostals and Philadelphians, among others); six mosques by country of origin (Moroccan, Bangladeshi, Pakistani and Senegalese); two Buddhist centres (Tibetan and Zen); one Kingdom Hall for Jehovah's Witnesses; and four more places of worship for other denominations (Rosicrucians and pagans among them).[7]

Like other multicultural neighbourhoods in historical city centres, Lavapiés is undergoing a profound urban transformation that follows a "capitalist city" model designed for tourism. Rather than being a planned space for its inhabitants, it has turned into a marketable asset of urban development and restoration (Rodríguez-Medela, Salguero and Sánchez-Cota, 2016: 276). Real estate speculation breeds gentrification (Sequera, 2014: 237) and online multinational lodging platforms touristification.[8] As a result, there is an annual variation rate of 3.8% in housing prices according to a real estate portal (Idealista, 2020), turning a large part of residential parks into spaces for tourism and displacing the most vulnerable—many of whom are migrants.[9]

New affluent residents replace the displaced like an elitist "creative class." Turning Doctor Fourquet Street into one of the streets known for its many art galleries, the growing population of tourists and visitors want to have the same experiences as locals and are found in public squares, monuments or browsing at local stores. Vegan bistros begin to substitute local stores that do not cater to new consumer trends, franchises, nightlife, or restaurants.

This particular urban development model brought with it the deterioration of the urban landscape, noise pollution, street drug trafficking and "drug flats" (*narcopisos*), reminiscent of

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[6] After Spanish, the most common nationalities are Italian, with 3,194 people and Bangladeshi with 2,935. These demographic figures have changed steadily in recent years, increasing from 4,622 people in 2016 to 6,288 in 2019.

[7] Many of these places of worship are discretely located in small ground-floor rentals between shops and leisure establishments. In the case of the Muslim communities, neither Baitul Mukarram (written "Baitul Muqarram" by locals) nor the Pakistani Religious Centre—that is, the two largest mosques in the district—have enough space to accommodate members for Friday prayers or other celebrations. The need for more space, described by some as an "endemic scarcity of resources" (Alonso et al, 2010: 171), causes many hardships to communities. Moreover, well-established congregations also seek visibility in public spaces through varying strategies that suit their objective possibilities. The massive annual celebrations of *Eid al-Fitr* organised by Baitul Mukarram in Lavapiés, or the Twelver Shi'i foundation of Alulbeyt teaching Islam in Madrid's central square of Plaza de Sol after Ashura is a case in point (Salguero and Hejazi, 2020: 3). According to a member of the Islamic Commision of Spain when asked about this problem:

> One issue is the need for public space [...] and the problem of places of worship. There are always bureaucratic hurdles to get permits because, sometimes, the law that regulates pubs or club industries is the same one regulating places of worship, and that shouldn't be the case. These hurdles make things difficult for both, the civil servant issuing permits and the Muslim community that needs them (25/10/2016).

[8] Lavapiés is usually advertised as a "trendy district" in a "multicultural neighbourhood" suitable for leisure acitivties and weekend tourism. In March 2017, the international trend magazine *Vice* published an exoticising article on the Muslim community of Lavapiés (Bernal, 2017). In September 2018, international travel guide *Time Out* declared the district as the "coolest" in its City Life Index for "being a place where people from all over the world live together" and for its "popular and frenetic cultural life" (Bac, 2018).

[9] In the words of a Baitul Mukarram member: "I've lived in Lavapiés for 15 years, and I'm leaving the neighbourhood due to the shameful economic situation. Living with my son and my wife, I can't make ends meet at the end of the month (09/04/2019)."

the eighties when it was a marginal working-class district during the drug epidemic. Despite gentrification, Lavapiés continues to be a marginal neighbourhood today (Gómez, remain 2012: 3) and, ever since the Spanish Civil War, affected by poor housing (Pérez, 2009), "police hyper-presence," and racialised "preventive IDing" (García-García, 2014: 8). In response to these conflicts, residents have organised themselves into social movements and associations (Rodríguez- Brochado, 2017: 126) focusing on defending the rights of migrants and job security but also against gentrification and real estate speculation, racism or LGBTQfobia. (Méndez, 2019: 5; Salguero, 2018: 126).

## "Banglas" in Lavapiés

Spanish academic literature on the Bangladeshi diaspora among Muslim communities is recent and scarce (Martín- Saiz, 2019; Méndez, 2019; Salguero, 2018, 2019; Salguero and Hejazi, 2020). That is not the case, however, when it comes to other migrants with longer historical presence like Moroccans. In contrast, Bangladeshis, or "*Banglas*" as they call themselves in Lavapiés, have a long history in other European countries and the academic literature is not as limited. That is the case in Italy (Priori, 2010; 2017; Della Puppa, 2014; Morad and Della Puppa, 2018), Portugal (Mapril, 2012; 2014; 2016; 2018) or the UK (Eade, 1996; Eade and Garbin, 2002; 2006; Dench, Gavron and Young, 2006). Comparing Madrid to other cities like Rome, Lisbon and London, some general tendencies can be discerned. Bangladeshi communities tend to locate in multicultural districts, like that of Lavapiés in Madrid. Almost half of the 6,288 registered in the Madrid state census reside in Lavapiés, surpassing other foreign nationals from predominantly Muslim countries. The Moroccan population is the biggest minority in Madrid and Spain and has decreased significantly. This is due to centrifugal forces of gentrification that have moved them away from the metropolitan area and towards southern municipalities in Madrid State—Alcorcón, Móstoles, Fuenlabrada, Getafe, Leganés or Parla (Eguren and Fernández 2011: 236) among them.

The Bangladeshi part of the district mostly consists of young men cohabitating with fellow countrymen, or with young families with children, thus maintaining close transnational relations. Living generally in poor housing conditions, where four or more people cohabitate in only a few square meters, rising rental prices have affected them. The abandoned buildings in which the community lives can generate higher revenue if reconditioned into touristic weekend apartments. As evictions increase, gentrification is the primary concern among neighbourhood associations and other local networks.[10]

Like the London case, Bangladeshis are part of a "precariat" (Harvey, 2012: xiv) workforce. Men are hired to work, "at the margin of the service economy" (Eade and Garbin, 2002: 139), in a variety of grocery and consumer electronics stores, restaurants advertised as "Indian," or street vendors selling drinks (*lateros*) (Salguero, 2018: 127). Most women, however, work at home taking care of their families. Although it does not seem to be a problem in some of the jobs mainly held by men, men and women alike tend to struggle with the Spanish language. The community is thus a migrant precariat similar to the London case (Eade and Garbin, 2002: 139), but especially close to that of other cities such as Rome (Priori, 2010 y 2017; Della Puppa, 2014) and Lisbon (Mapril, 2012; 2016; 2018) because they conform

[10] As a member of Baitul Mukarram explained: "Many Bangla families have left to Alcorcón, Getafe... to San Cristóbal in Villaverde Alto, and many other places. Some have moved to other cities, because finding a job in Madrid is difficult, and rental prices here are the highest" (04/09/2019).

to a model of southern European labour market where migrants carry out similar occupations generally linked to precarity and, sometimes, social exclusion (King, Lazaridis and Tsardanidis, 2000).

Regarding Bangladeshi politics, the main political parties are present: the centre-left Awami League (AL), the centre-right Bangladeshi Nationalist Party (BNP), and the Jatiya Party (JP) which is an alternative conservative party (Camacho, 2013: 11-15).[11] In power since 2009, the Grand Alliance governs Bangladesh as a coalition government between AL and JP (among others parties), thus making the BNP the opposition. Coincidentally, BNP's president in Spain is also the president of the Spanish Baitul Mukarram.[12]

As far as political activism goes, the association *Valiente Bangla*, Spanish for "Brave Bangla," was created to defend migrant rights and is currently ran by a dozen members. Led by its charismatic president, Muhammad Fazle Elahi, and keeping in mind the importance of the Bangladeshi community in Lavapiés, a state-owned space in Provisiones Street was rented close to the mosque and inaugurated in November 2017.[13] Councillor Garcia-Castaño and Carmen Cepeda, head of Social Services in Madrid's central district, were at the event. Despite its secular character, many members also participate in the Baitul Mukarram's congregational events, occasionally helping to organise religious activities (Salguero, 2018: 125), to the point that "the boundaries between them [from secularists to Islamists] are less rigid" (Eade and Garbin, 2006: 190). The case of Bangladeshis in Lavapiés brings into question the tendency to link Muslims "with structural struggles centred almost entirely around identity rights based on Muslimness" when, in fact, "the subaltern conscience is not only centred around an unaccepted religious identity but, also, and most of all, around the economy and precarity still persistent in Muslim populations" (Mijares and Lems, 2018: 126). To protect the interests of the business class, the Bangladesh Business Association (BBA) represents "all the businesses in the country, although most of them are in the area [of Lavapiés]" (Camacho, 2013: 9).[14]

[11] Coming from the Barisal, Chittagong, Dhaka or Sylhet Divisions, Bangladeshis are not a homogenous cultural group, and are divided into informal associations that compete with each other based on regional origins like those in Italy (Morad and Della Puppa, 2018). Indeed, as local sources have indicated, there are "different ethnicities and dialects in Bengali" (Camacho, 2013: 5-6) and that is a further indication of the diversity of populations and places of origin found in Lavapiés.

[12] All of them, as well as the Bangladeshis living throughout Spain, are represented by the *Asociación Bangladés en España*, the Bangladeshi Association of Spain (BAS), which is based in Lavapiés. Although this association claims to be politically neutral, "there is a constant struggle for the presidency of this religious entity due to the social relevance and prestige it carries in the community" (Camacho, 2013: 9).

[13] But even paying for public housing is a struggle. As a member of *Valiente Bangla* explained:

> We work like most people but… we even struggle to pay the rent because we don't have money […]. Five or six people are working [at the association] every day. But one moved away from Madrid, and another one has also left Madrid [...] We are constantly asking for help to the Bangladeshi embassy, but they don't do anything (04/09/2019).

[14] The Association of Progressive Women of Bangladesh (*Bangladesh Progotishil Mohila Songstha*), also located in Lavapiés Street, is an organisation ran by wives of the BBA managers that focuses on the integration of Bangladeshi women who generally do not speak Spanish, are unemployed, and uneducated.

## Muslim diversity

Although evangelical Christianity slightly surpasses Islam in the number of places of worship in the district, the number of Muslims attending religious events is larger.[15] Muslim communities in Lavapiés exemplify the district's "Muslimization of the urban space," as the cases in southern Europe (Blanes and Mapril 2013) and the southeast of the UK (Baker, 2017) do. By September 2019, a total of eight Muslim religious entities were registered in the districtof Lavapiés. Out of the eight entities five were active in the area: the al-Huda mosque; the Pakistani Religious Center of Spain; Baitul Mukarram; the Senegalese al-Taqwa Mosque; and Path to Peace Islamic Community.[16] There is also a sixth, the Bangladeshi Hazrat Shahjalal Latifia Cultural Centre, but it is not officially registered as a religious entity at the Spanish Ministry of Justice. In recent years, surpassing the number of Moroccans in the district, these places of worship are classified by national criteria and illustrate the growing presence of South Asian Muslims. Whereas Moroccans (who have the eldest mosque in the district), Pakistanis and Senegalese have only one mosque each, Bangladeshis have three.[17]

The oldest Bangladeshi mosque of the Muslim community is Baitul Mukarram in Provisiones Street.[18] This congregation, as well as other associations, like the above mentioned BAS which is the counterpart of the Bangladeshi-Portuguese Association in Lisbon (Mapril, 2014: 6), emerged in the past decade through Bangladeshi Muslim migrants residing in Lavapiés. It was founded as a cultural association in 2003 and opened its first mosque in Peña de Francia Street.[19] In 2009, "*Comunidad Musulmana de Madrid Baitul Muqarram*" was formally established and registered as a religious entity in the Spanish Ministry of Justice. Popularly called the "Bangladeshi mosque" it was inaugurated in 2008. It is so far the largest mosque in the area.

Madrid City Hall during *Ahora Madrid*'s government (2015-2019), a left political party, recently recognised the Bangladeshi community and, as a result, Bangladeshis have been more active and visible in the public space (Salguero, 2018: 135). In general, two parallel strategies have enabled the community to boost inclusion and create networks based on denominational and ethnic groups. First, interacting closely with governmental institutions and civil society; and second, organising public secular events informing and destigmatising Islam from possible

[15] The Friday prayer (*salāt al-Jumu'ah*) at al-Huda mosque gathers more than a hundred people while the Pakistani Religious Centre and Baitul Mukarram five hundred each. The number of Muslims is, therefore, more significant than that of the most popular Pentecostal churches in the city—the Philadelphia Church in Rodrigo de Guevara Street—which generally gathers the Roma population.

[16] Comunidad Islámica Mezquita Al-Huda de Madrid; Centro Religioso de Pakistaníes de España; Baitul Muqarram; Comunidad Musulmana Senegalesa de Lavapiés "Mezquita de Al Taqua"; and Comunidad Islámica Camino de la Paz, respectively, in Spanish.

[17] Relations between Muslim congregations, other denominations, public officials, and local associations vary on the community. Religious entities like al-Huda, whose members are mostly of Moroccan origin, or the Bangladeshi Baitul Mukarram, show a clear interest in being included in the public life of the district:

> We are in good terms with the Catholic priest, whose name is Santos. Also with the Catholic charter school at the end of Mesón de Paredes Street, where we once celebrated the end of Ramadan (the imam of al-Huda, 25/10/2016).
>
> Moreover,
>
> If we open our doors, people will know we are Muslims and what we are like. We must share things too. If I go to a house in Bangladesh, they'll invite me in to drink or eat something, and that must also be done in Spain. We must be more open (interview with a member of Baitul Mukarram, 4/4/2017).

[18] It is named after the most important mosque in the capital of Bangladesh, Dhaka. Baitul Mukarram, meaning "Holy House" in Arabic, was conceived as a "migrant religious community" (Salguero, 2019: 67-68).

[19] Namely, the "Centro Cultural Islámico de Bangladesh en Madrid."

lingering suspicions and mistrust by the general public and the public sphere (Salguero, 2019: 75).[20]

Named after a fourteenth-century Sufi saint that brought Islam to Bengal region, the second much smaller Bangladeshi mosque is the Hazrat Shahjalal Lotifia Cultural Centre, on Calatrava Street. It is not as representative as the Baitul Mukarram congregation and does not contribute much to the community's visibility. Interactions between these two religious entities are rare, however. This second mosque is part of the *Anjumane al-Islah*, an unregistered international organisation in Spain that is usually found wherever there are large Bangladeshi communities. Like the one in Barcelona's Raval district, where the Islamic Cultural Center Latifia Fultali is located (Martín-Saiz, 2019: 122; Salguero, 2018: 126; 2019: 68), both communities are part of the Barelvi movement of the Hanafi jurisprudential school (*maḏhab*).

The third and last Bangladeshi mosque is a ground-floor rental inaugurated in the spring of 2019 at Oso Street. Coinciding with the arrival of another wave of Bangladeshis to Lavapiés, the *Camino de la Paz* congregation took over a mosque that, since 1997, was a landmark to Moroccan Muslims, namely, the al-Huda mosque (Salguero, 201 8: 126; 2019: 65). Al-Huda is still in Lavapiés, but in Magdalena Street, a busier part of the district. This change of location is not due to a confrontation between Moroccan and Bangladeshi communities. Far from it, as official records show, these changes were made in collaboration. Two Bangladeshis were registered as legal representatives, and the contact information is the email address of the former Moroccan imam, Mohammad Ajana, who is now secretary of the *Comisión Islámica de España* (CIE). This official organisation represents all Muslim communities in Spain.

Seventy male members form Camino de la Paz. It is convened under the Islamic Forum Madrid (IFM) which, in turn, is a branch of the transnational Islamic Forum Europe (IFE). The latter, founded in 1988 by Bangladeshi Muslim migrants, has offices in different European cities.[21] Although members of the IFM used to pray at Baitul Mukarram, this association recently inaugurated its first mosque in Madrid. Camino de la Paz's arrival in Lavapiés has led to no incidents even though the headquarters is located in front of Baitul Mukarram where workshops and teaching activities are organised around religious topics and Bangladeshi culture (Camacho, 2013: 33).

In this context of national, ethnic and religious diversity, the Municipal District Board has carried out cultural events, like *Noches de Ramadán* (Nights of Ramadan), which includes the Lavapiés area. In collaboration with Casa Árabe, a public inter-administrative state entity fostering Spain's relations with the Arab world, these events were promoted by Madrid City Hall, dedicating 150,000 euros of the city budget to celebrate the month of Ramadan in 2016 (Salguero 2018: 126-127). Another meaningful event took place in May 2017, when Javier Barbero, a public official of the City Council's Health, Safety and Emergencies Department,

[20] According to a testimony by a member of Baitul Mukarram: "I have lived here since 2004, and I have relations with all the communities, with the African, Moroccan, Pakistani, Bangla… We are trying to change things from Provisiones Street. The mosque must be left open to the whole neighbourhood (04/07/2019)."

[21] In the past, IFE has been connected to the *Jamaat-e-Islami*, a political organisation in Bangladesh, that originated out of the Deobandi revivalist movement. Like their Barelvi counterparts, they also have similar associations in Barcelona, like the one inaugurated in 2018, the Darul Amaal mosque in Vistalegre Street (Martín-Saiz, 2019: 22).

declared the central district "free of Islamophobia" and endowed local Police with a Diversity Management Unit that registers citizens who have been victims of Islamophobia.[22]

In contrast to mosque opponents in Premià de Mar and Singuerlín in Santa Coloma de Gramanet (Moreras, 2008), or in Los Bermejales in Seville (Tarrés and Salguero, 2010), Lavapiés has been more accommodating due to official recognition under the progressive government of Ahora Madrid. As a result of the last elections, since June 2019, Madrid City Hall is under a conservative coalition led by the now city mayor José Luis Martínez-Almeida (from the conservative Popular Party), Ciudadanos (the liberals party) and the far-right (Vox).[23]

## Baitul Mukarram in the public space

It is not surprising, therefore, that there is a growing presence of the Bangladeshi community in the public spaces of Lavapiés. As this community has grown over time, so too its consolidation into a migrant community active not only with local institutions but also with other social, political and economic associations. Baitul Mukarram is a religious entity regularly involved in daily local activities—and its visibility too.

Like the Italian case, where the organisation of festivals maintain "transnational forms of membership" by commemorating national days and the celebration of religious rituals (Mohad and Della Puppa, 2018), migrant Bangladeshi organisations in Lavapiés use visibility strategies, so their difference is recognised. In Madrid, Baitul Mukarram has strategically launched religious and cultural activities giving it more visibility. Celebrating the Eids (Eid al- Fitr and Eid al- Adha), and turning Casino de la Reina into a public outdoor congregation that accommodates six thousand people in an improvised praying space or musalla (Salguero, 2018: 132-133), is a case in point. Other rituals, like the breaking of the fast (*iftar*) during the month of Ramadan, are celebrated in what may be called "temporary public spaces" where government officials and residents are invited.[24]

By highlighting ethnoreligious differences, these events acknowledge and celebrate diversity. In showing publicly different religious beliefs, practices and customs, even the iftar menus provide information about the ethnic and national congregation to outsiders. In a laid-back setting where food is shared, and the congregation gathers, the semiotics equating Islam with violence is dismantled and, through a mix of modernity and transparency, community and

[22] According to a member of Baitul Mukarram: "Manuela Carmena [Madrid's mayor at the time], of *Ahora Madrid*, is more approachable. [...] the previous city official would not even say hi. Now, when I need something, I get an "OK, maybe." [The government] is more approachable now (04/04/2017)."

[23] As a member of Baitul Mukarram said:

We've never had so many problems hosting the Feast of the Sacrifice [*Eid al-Adha*]. Not even the previous government of the Popular Party gave us so much trouble, but this year things have changed, and we received a permit to host the feast with only a week's notice (04.09.2019).

[24] As a member of the Baitul Mukarram explained:

For the first time, two city councillors have entered the mosque and dined with us. I have asked the president of the mosque why we do not invite the councillor to our prayer so that he sees that there are a lot of people praying (…) The secretary of the City Council and the Head of Social Services should be invited too so that they can get to know the Muslim community. We've asked the district councillor for speakers […] because every *Eid* we end up spending 750 euros in audio equipment, and he said that next year they will lend them to us (04/04/2017).

society are united. The transparency of performativity through outdoor congregational prayers is a message: "We are praying and we have nothing to hide."[25]

Visibility in public spaces is also achieved by organising secular events. The aforementioned public act that declared Madrid "free of Islamophobia" in May 2017, marching against the Barcelona and Cambrils attacks in September 2017, or commemorating in February 2019 the 1952 Dhaka University students who, protesting as part of the Bengali Language Movement, died victims of police brutality, are some examples. All these three events took place in the central square of Lavapiés, the heart and soul of community life (Salguero, 2018: 122). Even though some were widely publicised because the City Hall organised them, these events were minor when compared with the celebration of the *Eids*. Although there are other active communities in the district, Baitul Mukarram is the one actively participating in the *Eids*, which end with the *iftar* before a large number of government officials (a symbol of rapprochement between government and community).

## Conclusions

The case of Bangladeshi Muslims in Lavapiés shares similarities with those of other European cities, especially with those in the south like Rome and Lisbon. These similarities can be seen in both the migrant and religious communities. As a migrant community, it is characterised by a generalised precarity organised around different associations with different conceptions of what migration entails. In contrast, religious communities or congregations cater to a variety of diverse devotional traditions and beliefs as well as different ways of relating to each other, institutions, or society as a whole.

Baitul Mukarram shows how the strategies of institutionalisation are employed in one of the most consolidated Muslim communities. Although Ahora Madrid's progressive politics and management of City Hall was decisive in recognising it (Salguero, 2018:135; 2019: 75), Baitul Mukarram's visibility and public participation in local life are due to its specific historical situation, and the large numbers of Bangladeshis concentrated in Lavapiés. The new political cycle under a coalition of conservative parties, however, may change this relationship between the City Hall and the community.

The Bangladeshi neighbourhood is an essential part of the multicultural district. Recovered and rebranded, Lavapiés hopes to bring tourists and investments by showing its multicultural and exotic aspects while also providing endless entertainment. Amid an apparently friendly context, it is also full of challenges, such as increasing difficulties in affordable housing. The religious community of Baitul Mukarram has played, and continuous to play, an important role in the social life of the Bangladeshi community, however. It has helped forge relational networks based on confessional and ethnic belongings, and the inclusion of its cultural identity by working with institutions and civil society. A series of secular initiatives

[25] As another member of Baitul Mukarram put it:

Our goal is to show people what Islam is, because the Qur'an says nothing about killing people or terrorism. Jesus talks about sharing bread, and our Prophet also talks about the importance of sharing [...] People must know what the Qur'an says, what our Prophet Muhammad says. It doesn't matter if they are not religious. That doesn't matter. I want us to be open, to be friends, to be part of the same society. That is my dream for Lavapiés (04/04/2017).

for social change, often related to the migrant community of believers, is developing in the community too.

Baitul Mukarram understands that equal access and visibility in the public space, be it for religious or civil associations, is a right, a "right to the city," to evoke Lefebvre's influential work—characteristic of plural societies. It is public space as space of otherness that religious diversity is expressed and socially identified (Salguero, 2018: 135); and which materialises in real and effective community participation—amid local affairs of social and political life in collaboration with governmental institutions and civil society.

The full exercise of this right sometimes requires further efforts on the part of migrant communities. To overcome these challenges and fully obtain this right, the community employs strategies of visibility in different public spaces (e.g. the district's central square or the outdoor community centre) and, creating "temporarily public" spaces, opens the doors of its mosque to everyone in the area. These events are part of a "modern inventory" through with local life and politics and the community align. On the one hand, the community organises public secular events that showcase religious, ethnic and national particularisms. On the other, through frequent local destigmatising social gestures of transparency to residents and local officials, it dispels Islamophobic suspicions that continue to animate sectors of Spanish society.

There remain important issues regarding the gentrification affecting the Bangladeshi community, as many of them are beginning to leave the district. While big corporations may continue to satisfy the demand of affluent newcomers, we do not know what will happen to the current places of worship. As members of the community continue to leave, however, new spaces for congregations will be needed elsewhere.

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