

Making a “Bangladeshi diaspora”: Migration, group formation and emplacement between Portugal and Bangladesh

José Mapril¹

Abstract

In 1996, Appadurai argued that imagination is an essential element in the creation of cross-border political forms. Electronic media, for example, establishes links across national boundaries, linking those who move and those who stay. In his argument, these diasporic public spheres were examples of post-national political worlds and revealed the erosion of the nation-state in the face of globalisation and modernity. In this paper, I draw inspiration on this concept of diasporic public sphere but to show how these imaginaries are intimately tied to forms of group making and emplacement in several contexts. This argument is based on an ethnographic research about the creation of a transnational federation of Bangladeshi associations – the All European Bangladeshi Association (AEBA) – in the past decade, its main objectives and activities. Through the analysis of an AEBA event that took place in Lisbon, I want to show the productive dialectic between diasporic imaginaries, group formation and emplacement processes between Portugal and Bangladesh.

Keywords: Diaspora; group formation; emplacement; Bangladeshi migration; Portugal

Introduction

In the past decades, Bangladeshis in Portugal have created a *transnational habitus* (Vertovec, 2009) based on *homeland politics* (Vertovec, 2009) and *long-distance nationalism* (Anderson, 1998), a gift economy based on kinship relations and relatedness (Carsten, 2000) and, finally, on the activities of regional based associations and circuits of religious knowledge and specialists.

In recent years, however, these transnational dynamics have assumed new forms and moulds. This article addresses one of these new forms and how it produces imaginaries and discourse on experiences of diaspora (Werbner, 2002) and emplacement. In this process, some groups seek to establish a dialogue between Bangladesh and Europe, creating what Appadurai (1996) names a “diasporic public space”.

Inspired by the work of Benedict Anderson (1983) on imagined communities (within the discussions about nationalism), Appadurai argued that imagination is an essential element in the creation of cross-border political forms. Electronic media establish links across national boundaries, linking those who move and those who stay. In his argument, these diasporic public spheres were examples of post-national political worlds and revealed the erosion of the nation-state in the face of globalisation and modernity. In this article, I draw inspiration on this concept of diasporic public sphere, namely the role of imagination to analyse forms of political action that transcend the boundaries of nation-states, in order to show how the imagination of a transborder common condition is intimately tied to forms of emplacement in several contexts. This case reveals the productive dialectic between transnationalism and

¹ José Mapril, Universidade Nova de Lisboa, Lisbon. E-mail: jmapril@gmail.com.



forms of emplacement. These dynamics, I will argue, become visible through the ways our interlocutors mobilise the term diaspora itself to claim a place and rights for Bangladeshis living in several parts of the world and reinforce (political and economic) relations with Bangladesh. Diaspora here is an emic term (see Brubaker, 2005) that reveals meanings, ideas and lead to action in multiple locations.

By way of example, I will discuss the creation of a transnational federation of Bangladeshi associations – the All European Bangladeshi Association (AEBA) – which has emerged in recent years. This federation has two main objectives: firstly, to represent a “*probashir* community”, that is, a “community of expatriate Bangladeshis”, across Europe, exerting pressure on their behalf. Its second major objective is to undertake initiatives for development and economic lobbying in Bangladesh in order to include non-residents.

One of the most significant aspects of this federation is the mobilisation of the idea of a “non-partisan” project. This is a segmented migratory/transnational context based on affiliations and informal political party support in Bangladesh – a dynamic which can be recognised from the United Kingdom to Italy (Eade, 1989; Eade and Garbin, 2006; Alexander, 2013; Mantovan, 2007; Priori, 2010, 2012; Morad and Della Puppa, 2018; *inter alia*) – and Portugal is no different (Mapril, 2014, 2016). It is in this larger context, that this federation affirms itself as a non-political or apolitical institution, a position, I will argue, produced as a way to legitimise its action both in Europe and in Bangladesh, since it is perceived as unproblematic when compared to the latter.

Through this process, the main representatives of this federation not only affirm themselves as the main spokespersons for Bangladeshis living in several parts of Europe, but they are also engaged in a specific form of group making (Latour 2005), in this case transnational, that begins with a clear delineation and distancing from other groupings that are considered more limited and problematic – in this case, Bangladeshi political party allegiances and regional or religious associations/institutions (even if, in some cases, and in other contexts, some of these same spokespersons are also engaged in group formations along these lines and defining different limits and boundaries). My argument, thus, is that these forms of transnational group making are intimately articulated with forms of emplacement in the several contexts they are living, either to make claims in relation to immigration regimes (at a city, national and European levels) but also in relation to Bangladesh.

To address some of these issues, I will first explain the complex history of migration between Portugal and Bangladesh. Secondly, I will recount the history of this federation, its objectives and its main activities, and in the third and final section, I will delve into a conference held by this federation in Lisbon. Finally, I will provide some closing comments.

Migration between Portugal and Bangladesh

Migration between Portugal and Bangladesh began in the late 1980s, although its most substantive growth only occurred between 1995 and 2003. In this period, the number of Bangladeshis registered with the Foreigners and Borders Service (Serviço de Estrangeiros e Fronteiras – SEF) – in addition to the more than four thousand registrations at the Bangladesh consulate general in Porto – went from forty-seven to two thousand, two hundred and forty-three. In 2019, Bangladeshi citizens registered with SEF numbered around seven thousand.



As in the case of Spain and Italy, the majority are from middle social strata, what in Bangladesh has come to be classified as the new and affluent "middle class", consisting of urbanites with a high level of education. For these social strata, coming to Europe entails a vast range of expectations and aspirations in relation to social mobility, consumption and life-course (Mapril, 2007, 2014b).

The chain migration which is the backbone of these flows is directly related to the search for employment and citizenship. Many were already in Europe and only came to Portugal looking for several opportunities. Most followed social networks that were established here (Germany, France, Italy and Spain) in recent decades. Since the beginning of the 1980s, applications for asylum in countries such as Germany and France have become commonplace (Knights, 1996; Knights and King, 1998). In addition, substantial changes in the social and economic situation of the countries of southern Europe due to membership in the European community space led to improved living standards and have changed the position of these countries vis-à-vis the international division of labour (Malheiros, 1996; Baganha et al., 1999; King et al., 2000). These changes slowed intra-European migration and, in the short term, led to new immigrants arriving who were not from the old colonial territories. Mirroring the Italian case (Knights, 1996; Knights and King 1998), many Bangladeshis moved to Portugal as part of the regularisation processes implemented by the Portuguese authorities in the past decades, and/or to join their friends and family. After this initial step, some returned to Bangladesh, where they raised enough capital through investments in various areas to make new investments in Portugal. Others decided to stay in Portugal, capitalising on the commerce undertaken by Bangladeshis in order to enter the labour market, or else chose to join sectors such as civil construction. Finally, others decided to move again to other European countries in order to continue the work they were doing there or to join family members living there.

Initially, many started working in the most disregarded sectors of the Portuguese economy, such as civil construction, cleaning services and itinerant sales. Once they had gained the opportunity, however, they created their own businesses and thus discarded manual labour that they considered stigmatising or shameful (*lajja*). In this setting, being your own boss is often seen as a sign of success. Among the many business activities engaged in are wholesale ready-made clothing, grocery stores, halal butchers, restaurants (Indian, Bangladeshi, donner kebabs), kiosks and tourist shops.

Although the majority arrived alone, many had started the process of reuniting their family. Most returned to Bangladesh to get married and in the following years, their wives and their children joined them in Lisbon.

These differences between Bangladeshis in terms of processes of family reunion and business ownership reveal the segmentation of the population. On the one hand, we have the pioneers – arriving in the late eighties and early nineties – who now own various businesses. They established their family units and are examples of success and achievement; a model for many newcomers. The newcomers, on the other hand, work in the most precarious sectors of the labour market, sometimes working for the pioneers, and are mostly single.

Over the course of these four decades, this migration gave rise to a transnational social field, a *transnational habitus* (Vertovec 2009), between Portugal and Bangladesh which was consolidated through gift economies (van Dyik, 2014), within family units and multi-territorial kinship groups, but also by means of regional associations (which have become established as

support structures for their members for investments, repatriation of bodies, among other means of support) and Bangladeshi party political activism, engaged in several *long-distance nationalism* projects (Anderson, 1990) and lobbying, in competition with each other (Mapril, 2011, 2014a).

The creation of a federation of associations such as AEBA seems to place another institutional structure on this transnational social field and it has a reach beyond regional and party political ties (which are often seen as divisive), as we will see in the next sections.

A “Bangladeshi diaspora and community”

The All European Bangladesh Association (AEBA) is a federation of associations which presents itself as representing “expatriate Bangladeshis” in 30 countries, with headquarters divided between Paris and Dhaka. It includes commercial associations as well as others focused on community and cultural activities and, according to its officials, represents more than one million Bangladeshi citizens living in Europe. It was created in Athens in 2012 and was announced at the Jatyia National Press Club in Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, in October 2012. Its intention was to create the federation “in our beloved homeland”.

The first convention, held in Athens on 1 and 2 December 2012, clearly listed its objectives: “to organise activities to fight discrimination and prejudice against Bangladeshi people in Europe and simultaneously strengthen links between Europe and Bangladesh”. AEBA has thus established itself as an interlocutor with the various organisations created by the multiple Bangladeshi “communities” in Europe and, at the same time, as a promoter of Bangladeshi culture in “multi-ethnic European” (sic) societies. The organisation also encourages the training of future leaders to participate in social, cultural and scientific activities in Europe and in Bangladesh. It further aims to bring media attention to the various communities across Europe and its activists in areas as diverse as education, research and politics. AEBA also promotes activities such as conferences and workshops on business development, a directory of business contacts and the creation of business initiatives.

In order to achieve these objectives, AEBA holds annual conventions in various European countries and arranges institutional visits to Bangladesh. To date, conventions have been held in Athens, Hamburg, Lisbon, Rome, Paris, Warsaw and Kuala Lumpur. The aim of the “Bangladesh Global Summit” in Kuala Lumpur was both to consolidate the relationship between the “Bangladeshis living in the diaspora” and to encourage investments of non-resident Bangladeshis (NRB) and people of Bangladeshi origin (PBO) in Bangladesh. A further objective was to discuss the status of Bangladeshis in the diaspora and investment opportunities in Bangladesh and abroad.

In addition to these annual conventions, AEBA also organises visits to Bangladesh on key occasions. For example, in February 2015 and 2017, the federation organised a visit by members of the executive committee to participate in the celebrations of *Shabeed Dibosh*, or Bengali language day (February 21), and in the month of *Ekushey* (for the literature and Bengali culture fair that marks the annual celebrations). The choice of this date – a central symbol of Bengali nationalism – was the focus of extensive media coverage and some members of the executive committee, such as the Portuguese representative, made efforts to explain this in interviews with various media outlets. On this occasion they were received by the president of the People's Republic of Bangladesh in an event that was widely shared on social networks.



In 2016, AEBA representatives also held a meeting at the Jatya Press Club in Dhaka to discuss issues related to Bangladeshi migration. It was attended by ministers of the incumbent government, various non-governmental organisations and the press.

AEBA activities are not limited to its relations with Bangladesh, however. Labour/legal issues in Europe have also been a constant concern. In 2013, for example, after an incident with farm workers in Greece – a joint action calling for the payment of wages which was answered by gunfire from the farm owner – the president of AEBA came out in defence of workers in various media outlets (see also Fratsea and Papadopolous this special issue). In 2015, the AEBA executive committee travelled to Portugal where they met with the minister of internal administration to discuss the issue of illegal Bangladeshi migrants in Portugal. That year, several immigrant associations had denounced the way in which Portuguese authorities blocked the regularisation processes of thousands of immigrants in Portugal (see Mapril, 2019). To this end, AEBA used its resources to pressure the authorities on behalf of the thousands of Bangladeshis who had had their situation suspended in Portugal.

Finally, a third area of activity of this association is that of cultural activities which aim to present Bengali culture and language in Europe and also support the education of younger generations. For example, AEBA annually grants a scholarship to young European-Bangladeshis.

The members of AEBA are all entrepreneurs in sectors such as catering, import-export and trade, among others, and are successful figures in their respective areas. The Portuguese delegation, for example, is represented by three prominent businessmen who have been in Portugal for more than thirty years, and who are seen as successful figures in *bidesh* (the Bengali term for foreign lands). As we will see later, the vice president of this association is one of the main spokesperson for Bangladeshis in the Portuguese public space, one of the pioneers in Portugal and, in addition to this position, belongs to and participates in other associations and a political party in Portugal. This profile is by no means unique. Most AEBA members hold multiple positions and competences and seek to assert themselves as interlocutors between the European and Bangladeshi authorities and their “communities”.

One of the most interesting aspects of AEBA is that it has been constructed as a federate project with a sphere of action beyond the party rifts and factions often found in Bangladeshi migration. As one of my interlocutors pointed out:

“AEBA is an association which goes beyond the League (Awami) or the BNP (Bangladesh Nationalist Party). We are all Bangladeshis here and we all have a green passport. The (Bangladeshi) parties are not important here”.

Field notes, January 2015

This idea of transnational political activism, regardless of support or party affiliations in Bangladesh, has been a constant concern. The interlocutor who pointed out the non-partisan nature of this federation was also the one who in 2011 sought to form an association and be elected as its president – the *probashir* community Portugal or expat community in Portugal – based on the idea of creating an institution that represented all *probashis* (expatriates/migrants in Bengali), regardless of their regional or party membership. The association was in fact created, after a very competitive electoral process, but it never functioned. According to some, the main reasons for its failure are related, on the one hand, to personal enmity among some

of its members and, on the other, to the fact that the majority of the members of the executive committee are supporters of the same party in Bangladesh, and as such its representativeness was seen as rather limited.

Regardless, at a transnational level, AEBA employs that same idea in search of legitimacy in a diasporic social field. In the process, it uses a set of ideas about “diaspora” and “community” as its main instruments of action and lobbying, both in Bangladesh and in several parts Europe.

To illustrate this, let us look at a specific case: the Lisbon convention that took place in 2013.

“Bangladeshis and Europeans”: the Lisbon convention

On 14th September 2013, the 3rd convention of the All European Bangladeshi Association (AEBA) was held at the Sana Hotel in Lisbon, with the motto "safe migration and humanity". The proceedings took place in three languages, Bengali, English and Portuguese, and lasted for two days – the second day being devoted to a trip to the Algarve.

Several entities and institutions were invited, among whom the Bangladesh Ambassador to Portugal, a member of the Assembly of the Republic of the parliamentary group of the Socialist party and a candidate for the parish council of Santa Maria Maior (which includes the neighbourhood of Mouraria and is a place of residence for many of my Bangladeshi interlocutors), the president of a local association (Renovar a Mouraria – an association linked to the transformation of the Mouraria area in Lisbon), academics and representatives of Bangladeshi associations from Greece, Italy, France, Spain, Portugal and the United Kingdom.

Over the course of the day, two themes were repeatedly addressed. The first was related to the processes of integration for this “community” in the various European countries. The case of Bangladeshi migration in Greece has been the subject of particular scrutiny in view of the various cases of racism and xenophobia against them in various sectors of the labour market. The second theme was the importance of remittances and investments of Bangladeshis who were not resident in Bangladesh itself.

Mr. R, vice president of AEBA and representative of Portugal, as well as chairman of the Mouraria Mosque committee and member of the Socialist Party, expressed his concern in his inaugural speeches with the dynamics of integration and the fight against racism, and stressed the need of this federation to:

“fight forms of racism targeted at Bangladeshis in Europe, contribute to multiculturalism in Europe and greater involvement in European policies in the face of migration, create leadership for the future, and foster relations and investments between Europe and Bangladesh”.

Field notes, September 14, 2013

In the same vein, the secretary general of AEBA, president of the France-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce, also took the floor and drew attention to the importance of creating this association for “the daily life of the Bangladesh community in Europe”:

“With the help of our European friends, AEBA has an obligation to foster cultural, social, political and economic relations between Bangladesh and Europe. Integration



is our main objective – cultural, social and economic integration – and we know our duties but also our rights. (...) Our goal is to work together to create better living conditions for Bangladeshis and Europeans”.

Field notes, 14 September, 2013

The deputy of the Assembly of the Republic and member of the parliamentary group of the Socialist Party, and at that time candidate for the parish council of Santa Maria Maior (in the municipal elections that were then approaching), then took the floor. He drew attention to the importance of the Bangladeshi community in Lisbon in transforming the Mouraria and Martim Moniz area (in the city centre), an important factor that fosters a need for close collaboration. In his own words:

“You are a community with its own culture, but fully integrated in our own culture, and you are an example for our city. For that reason, Mr. R is on my party's electoral lists” [applause].

Field notes, 14 September, 2013

He also evoked the connection that the then mayor of Lisbon and future prime minister, António Costa, has through family ties to the Indian subcontinent, to show how this man, as well as the Socialist Party as a whole, has a very present need to build bridges and work with all to define successful local policies for integration. Miguel Coelho also took this opportunity to mention a future project to build a mosque that will be carried out by an executive committee led by Mr. R, with a view to:

“better integration for all and a multicultural city. Multicultural cities are certainly stronger. (...) In the future, Mr. R, if you need anything, come and talk to me directly so that we can solve problems together” [applause].

Field notes, 14 September, 2013

The Ambassador of Bangladesh to Portugal also took the floor and called on AEBA and its members to continue their efforts towards economic investment and cultural exchange between Bangladesh and Europe. He spoke about the Bangladeshi economy, its 6% annual growth and the fact that Bangladesh has become a source of global quality goods, ranging from ready-made clothing to pharmaceuticals (applause). He called it a “frontier economy”. It was in this context that he stressed the importance of attracting investment from *probashis* as well as Portuguese entrepreneurs.

Summing up the various concerns discussed throughout the day, Mr. AS, AEBA adviser and a businessman of more than 50 years’ standing in the United Kingdom, stressed:

“Bangladeshis in Europe have many problems. Compared to the UK, migration from Bangladesh has very specific and more recent problems, ranging from unemployment to legal status. The problem of integration is perhaps the most serious. Not being integrated means not being able to be a citizen and the greater the ease of integration, the greater the benefits for the host country in terms of business opportunities. Furthermore, Bangladesh, as a young country, needs *probashi* remittances, as they are a huge source of foreign exchange, and at the same time, a market with enormous potential”.

Field notes, 14 September, 2013

Integration, citizenship and development

In the previous sections, I have tried to show how the All European Bangladesh Association produces an imaginary that could be described as a *diasporic public space* (Appadurai, 1996; Werbner, 2002). In this context, AEBA employs a discourse on a "Bangladeshi diaspora and community" to reflect, on the one hand, on the dynamics of "integration" within European societies and, on the other hand, on (economic and political) relations with Bangladesh itself.

As regards issues of integration and citizenship, and showing a certain similarity to other migratory contexts, this federation is seen as a means of recognition in the various national spheres and immigration regimes. The Lisbon meeting is an example of this. When the Portuguese representative of AEBA and its vice president is presented as one of the candidates for municipal elections for one of the largest Portuguese parties, the Socialist Party, and is greeted by a round of applause, it highlights his exemplary conduct in Portuguese society. In a way, my interlocutor emerges as a model as regards integration in present-day Europe. This idea of a model was emphasised by the member of parliament invited to the meeting, but in terms of the contribution of Bangladeshi migrants to the transformation of the city of Lisbon. AEBA brings together multiple successful figures, *boromanuch* (big men in Bengali), figures who seek to project themselves in a *diasporic public space*. There is a clear parallel here with the work of Pnina Werbner (2003) on successful and influential figures in the diasporas of Manchester Muslims.

Additionally, AEBA members seek to pressure European authorities on the legal and labour issues of the thousands of Bangladeshi citizens who are present in various European countries today. In this context, an idea of Bangladeshi "community" in Europe is deployed, "community" here being a symbolic (Cohen, 1985) and political (Calhoun, 1980) construction that arises from the European immigration regimes themselves. As Latour (2005) would argue this is an example of a process of group formation, by specific spokespersons, that mobilise certain boundaries and limits. A "Bangladeshi community" here is not a thing in itself but a process carried out by certain figures, with certain aims and objectives.

In a way, it is AEBA's intention to act based on a *politics of recognition* (Taylor, 1992) and to create subjectivities associated with the construction processes of model/exemplary minorities in contemporary Europe.

Moreover, AEBA's current structure appears to be directly linked to the importance of migration in present-day Bangladesh. *Probashis*, migrants/expatriates/non-residents, are often seen as central players in the development and growth of the Bangladeshi economy. For example, some political representatives have compared *probashis* and their remittances to jute, which was once the main driver of the Bangladeshi economy (Siddiqui, 2002).

As several authors have shown, remittances in Bangladesh account for a significant proportion of foreign exchange and an indispensable instrument for balancing the economy. According to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), in 2015 they represented close to 12% of GDP (BBS, 2015) – in 1995 they represented only 3% while in 2009 this had already reached 9.5% (Lewis, 2011). These data are only related to remittances sent through formal channels and it is therefore estimated that they are undervalued when accounting for systems based on intermediaries and in trust-honour based relationships. It is precisely with these



remittances in mind that state authorities and private groups have developed programmes which are specifically aimed at these population segments. They include auctions and programmes intended for the purchase of properties and apartments, and investment opportunities in infrastructure and in the textile industry. Non-resident Bangladeshis are often recognised for their entrepreneurial role and as such as catalysts for economic development (including their role as intermediaries for foreign investors).

This importance of *probashis* is clear also in the political panorama. One example of this is the tours carried out by the main political forces in the host countries of these emigrants. As *probashis* enjoy enormous prestige in the country of origin, their activity is considered essential in mustering party and government support. In the past decades, various programmes and institutions foster the welfare of expatriates, promote employment abroad and encourage the sending of remittances, among these being the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment (MEWOE).

This emphasis on the prominence of *probashis* is related to the historical role of migration in Bangladesh and to what Massey et al. (1993) calls a *migratory culture*. As various authors have pointed out (Van Schendel, 2009; Lewis, 2011; Gohathkurta and Van Schendel, 2013), migration has always been part of this region's history. It can be recalled that at the end of the 19th century, many Sylhetis (from Sylhet, in the north-east of the country) started settling in London, and later, in the post-2nd World War period, they were essential in reinforcing this migratory movement. Today, these *londinis*, as they are called, maintain close relations between Bangladesh and the United Kingdom (Gardner, 1993, 1995, 2002; *inter alia*).

Migration has always been an option for the middle classes and the elite, first from East Pakistan and then from Bangladesh, especially with the goal of studying at foreign universities. In these social strata, student migrations have always been part of the family plan and carry the objective of maintaining status or upward social mobility (Van Schendel, 2009).

After the 1973 oil crisis, a new migratory pattern emerged for industrialising countries, oil-rich economies in particular. Many of the Gulf Cooperation Council (G.C.C.) countries embarked on ambitious development projects, for which there was no sufficient local workforce (Knerr, 1990). Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar and Libya turned to South Asia in the mid-seventies. In the following years, this migration grew steadily through worker recruitment programmes, similar to the Bracero Program in the USA (Massey et al. 1998) and *Gastarbeiter* in the German Federal Republic (Castles and Kosack, 1973), with India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (Vera, 2013). This sector came to be seen as an opportunity to deploy thousands of workers and, as such, to foster the economic development of Bangladeshi society (through remittances) and came under a regulatory system. The institutionalisation of this infrastructure and market sector, both public and private, has led to an extremely important migration of workers to different destinations over the last four decades: from oil-producing countries to Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Japan, among many others (Mahmood, 1994; Mahmood, 1996; Hossain, 2000). These workers move to new countries with pre-existing, temporary contracts, to work, frequently, in blue collar jobs.

In the 1990s, with Southern European countries repositioning themselves in the face of global migration (King et al., 2000), *probashis* settled in countries such as Italy, Spain, Portugal, Malta and Greece, taking jobs in various sectors of the economy (from construction and agricultural

work to varied commercial activities) and reuniting their families. Thus, in the last four decades, migrations to continental Europe related to intermediate social strata in Bangladesh (Mapril, 2014b) have gained momentum.

In short, this reconfiguration of migration from Bangladesh has reinforced a *migratory culture* that, the Sylheti model notwithstanding, has been updated to include other scenarios, destinations and profiles. Thus, the figure of the *probashi*, the expatriate and non-resident, is today a part of everyday life and the social landscape of multiple social strata in present-day Bangladesh.

This historical background has institutionalised diaspora linkages, as Tasneem Siddiqui argued (2004), that seems to have created a diasporic public sphere, with diverse rules of legitimacy and discursive formations on group making and diaspora, that are not only directed at Bangladesh itself but has also become essential in claiming rights in several receiving contexts. It is in this scenario, therefore, that we must interpret the actions of AEBA. In a sense, it seeks to establish itself as an intermediary institution between a “Bangladeshi diaspora and community” and Europe and Bangladesh.

Some closing notes

Over the course of this article, I have tried to show how the creation of a federation of Bangladeshi associations in Europe – the All European Bangladesh Association – is related to the creation of a diasporic public space (Appadurai, 1996; Werbner, 2002). I have attempted to trace the history of the federation, its objectives and its main players and to illustrate this process with the example of a convention organised by AEBA in Lisbon in 2013.

My argument is that this diasporic public space is related, on the one hand, to the creation of diasporic subjectivities in relation to Bangladesh through political and economic investments and responding to discursive formations about migrants/expatriates in present-day Bangladeshi society. On the other hand, this public space relies on deploying AEBA members in European countries to foment discussion and pressure the authorities concerning issues associated with the integration of *probashis* and their citizenship rights. The way of doing this is to establish itself as a group of spokespersons that are engaged in forms of group making and continuously create boundaries and limits. The “apolitical” argument is precisely one of these boundary-making device, especially in relation to other forms of group making based on party politics and regionally based associations. One of the interesting elements in these discourses on diaspora and group formation is the ways they are dialectically entangled in forms of emplacement in several contexts (mobilising ideas about integration, citizenship, nation and development) while simultaneously contributing to the emergence of key figures in a transnational social space.

References

- Alexander, C. (2013). “Contested Memories: The Shahid Minar and the Struggle for Diasporic Space.”. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 36 (4): 590-610
- Anderson, B. (1983). *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. London: Verso
- Anderson, B. (1998). *The Spectre of Comparisons: Nationalism, Southeast Asia and the World*. London: Verso.
- Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press



- Baganha, M., Malheiros, J. and Ferrão, J. (1999). “Os imigrantes e o mercado de trabalho: o caso português”. *Análise Social*, 150: 147-173.
- Brubaker, R. (2005). “The ‘diaspora’ diaspora”. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28 (1): 1-19
- Calhoun, C. (1980). “Community: Towards a variable conceptualisation for comparative research”, *Social History*, 5(1): 105-129
- Carsten, J. (2000). *Cultures of Relatedness: New Approaches to the Study of Kinship*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Castles, S. and Kosack, G. (1973). *Immigrant Workers and Class Structure in Western Europe*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Cohen, A. (1985). *The Symbolic Construction of Community*. London, Routledge
- Eade, J. (1989). *The Politics of Community: The Bangladeshi Community in East London*. Avebury: Aldershot.
- Eade, J., Garbin, D. (2006). “Competing Visions of Identity and Space: Bangladeshi Muslims in Britain”. *Contemporary South Asia*, 15 (2): 181-193.
- Gardner, K. (1993). “Desh Bidesh: Sylheti Images of Home and Away”. *Man*, 28 (1): 1-15.
- Gardner, K., (1995). *Global Migrants, Local Lives: Travel and Transformation in Rural Bangladesh*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Gardner, K., (2002). *Age, Narrative and Migration: The Life Course and Life Histories of Bengali Elders in London*. London: Berg Publishers.
- Gohathkurta, M. and Van Schendel, W. (2013). *The Bangladesh Reader: History, Culture, Politics*. Durham, Duke
- Hossain, M. (2000). “Condition of Bangladeshi workers in Malaysia”. In: C. Abrar (ed.) *On the Margin: Refugees, Migrants and Minorities*. Dhaka: UPL, pp. 103-112
- King, R. Lazaridis, G. and Tsardanidis, C (eds.) (2000). *Eldorado or Fortress? Migration in Southern Europe*. London: Palgrave.
- Knerr, B. (1990). “South Asian countries as competitors on the world labour market”. In: C. Clarke, C. Peach and S. Vertovec (eds.) *South Asians Overseas: Migration and Ethnicity*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 173-196.
- Knights, M. (1996). “Bangladeshi Immigrants in Italy: From Geopolitics to Micropolitics”. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 21 (1): 105-123.
- Knights, M. King, R. (1998). “The geography of Bangladeshi Migration to Rome”, *International Journal of Population Geography*, 4 (4): 299-321
- Latour, B. (2005). *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor Network Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lewis, D. (2011). *Bangladesh: Politics, Economy and Civil Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mahmood, R. (1994). “Adaptation to a new world: Experience of Bangladeshi in Japan”. *International Migration*, 32(4): 513-533.
- Mahmood, R. (1996). Labour crunch, foreign workers and policy responses: The experience of Japan. *International Migration*, 34(1): 97-116.
- Malheiros, J. (1996), *Imigrantes na Região de Lisboa. Os Anos da Mudança*, Lisboa, Edições Colibri.
- Mantovan, C. (2007), *Immigrazione e cittadinanza: auto-organizzazione e partecipazione dei migranti in Italia*. Roma: Franco Angeli
- Mapril (2007) “Os ‘novos’ sul asiáticos: a economia política das migrações entre o Bangladesh e Portugal”. *Revista Oriente*, 17: 81-99
- Mapril, J. (2011). “The Patron and the Madman: Migration, Success and the (In)visibility of Failure Among Bangladeshis in Portugal”. *Social Anthropology*, 19 (3): 288-296
- Mapril, J. (2014a). “A Shahid Minar in Lisbon: Long distance nationalism, politics of memory and community among Luso-Bangladeshis”. *South Asia Multidisciplinary Academic Journal (SAMAJ)*, 9, pp. 2-17
- Mapril, J. (2014b). “The Dreams of Middle Class: consumption, life-course and migration between Bangladesh and Portugal”, *Modern Asian Studies*, 48 (3), pp. 693-719
- Mapril, J. (2016) “A past that still hurts: Long distance nationalism, place and memoro-politics between Bangladesh and Portugal”. In: Tosic, J. and Palmberger, M. (eds.). *Contested Histories on the Move. London, Palgrave*, pp. 247-270
- Mapril, J. (2019). Waiting for a future in Lisbon: borders, migrations and biographies. *International Journal of Migration and Border Studies*, 5(4), 324-338.

24 Making a “Bangladeshi diaspora”

- Massey, D., Arango, J., et al. (1993). “Theories of International Migration: A Review and Appraisal”. *Population and Development Review*, 19 (3): 431-466.
- Massey, D., et al. (1998). *Worlds in Motion: Understanding International Migration at the end of the Millenium*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Morad, M., and Della Puppa, F. (2018). “Bangladeshi migrant associations in Italy: transnational engagement, community formation and regional unity”. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 42(10): 1788-1807
- Priori, A. (2010) “Vita segreta delle ‘etnie’: politica e stratificazione sociale a Banglatown”. *Zapruder: Rivista di storia della conflittualita sociale*. 22: 38-54
- Priori, A. (2012) *Romer probashira: Reti sociali e itinerari transnazionali bangladesi a Roma*. Roma: Meti Edizioni
- Siddiqui, T. (2004). *Institutionalising Diaspora Linkage: The Emigrant Bangladeshi in UK and USA*. Dhaka: I.O.M.
- Taylor, C. (1992). *Multiculturalism and the Politics of Recognition*. Princeton: Princeton University Press
- Van Dijk, R. (2013). “Cities and the social construction of hot spots”. In: Schiller, N., Çağlar, A. (eds.), *Locating Migration: Rescuing Cities and Migrants*, New York, Cornell University Press, pp. 104-122
- Van Schendel, W. (2009). *A History of Bangladesh*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vertovec, S. (2009). *Transnationalism*. London: Routledge.
- Vora, N. (2013). *Impossible Citizens: Dubai’s Indian Diaspora*. Durham: Duke
- Werbner, P. (2002). *Imagined Diasporas among Manchester Muslims*. Oxford: James Currey.
- Werbner, P. (2003). *Pilgrims of love: The anthropology of a global Sufi Cult*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.

