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Invisible youth mobility: the Bangladesh population in Rome

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Introduction

- 1 This essay makes reference to qualitative researches carried out within the EMAHAM¹ project and the YMOBILITY² project. In the EMAHAM project studies were conducted on the admission of Bangladeshi citizens at the A&E units of Rome's 5 largest hospitals. Admissions at A&E units on the part of foreign nationals make it possible to collect statistics on all those immigrants who have not registered with administrative authorities, and who thus cannot request medical assistance from other healthcare facilities. Urgent hospital admissions have been studied in order to ascertain whether Bangladesh youngsters suffer from the early onset of specific pathologies compared with the population of the same age back home (Rahman *et al.*, 2008). The Bangladeshi community is particularly numerous in Rome, indeed the city is the third largest in terms of the number of residing Bangladeshi citizens abroad, behind only Calcutta and London. The community consists of a significant percentage of irregular immigrants, thus a partly invisible community, about which little is known, including its problems and needs. The emigrating sector of the population are chiefly youngsters aged from 17 to 35 years of age.
- 2 Numerous clinical studies highlight the fact that in emigrant Bangladeshi communities youngsters are subject to pathologies that appear in the homeland only at a mature age (Bertazzoni *et al.*, 2016). In order to gain a better understanding of the time lag relating to clinical problems, the findings of the relative quantitative survey were also published

(Bertazzoni *et al.*, 2016). To complete the picture of information needed to understand the problems that affect the health of immigrants, twenty in-depth interviews were conducted in the period April-June 2016 on young people aged from 17 to 35 years of age, ten men and ten women, using the template already tried out for the YMOBILITY project. The topics examined were: (i) the personal and family setting; (ii) eating habits in Bangladesh and in Italy; (iii) the background and motivations behind the migratory experience; (iv) work experiences; (v) satisfaction and quality of life in Italy; (vi) questions of identity; (vii) social inclusion; (viii) travel and human mobility; (ix) future plans.

The Bangladeshi Community in Rome

- 3 In 2015, over seven million Bangladeshi citizens were registered as having emigrated overseas. The outflows from Bangladesh began when the People's Republic of Bangladesh was established (26.03.1971). Knights (1996) split up Bangladeshi emigration into two categories: (i) permanent and semi-permanent emigration zones, namely USA, Canada, Australia, UK; (ii) temporary and unstable emigration zones. Migrants arriving in Rome were largely of the second type, but they were coming not from Bangladesh but from other countries that were not of the first category (King *et al.*, 1994). Changes occurring in the 1990s are to be attributed to the effects of the “regularisation” campaign decreed by the Martelli Law (1990), as a result of which Bangladeshi citizens were granted 4,296 residence permits. The most secure way of entering Italy was via the so-called Flow Decrees which, unlike other countries in Europe, the Italian government issued in the 1990s, with entry quotas set aside for Bangladeshi citizens.
- 4 King *et al.* (1994) identified three types of mobility: (i) family reunification; (ii) opportunistic migration, taking advantage of the “generosity” of the so-called Martelli Law; (iii) “Adam bepari (human traffic business)” initiatives: sponsors of illegal immigration. The so-called Turco-Napolitano Law (1998) allowed everyone to enter the country to seek a job even if no relative requests had been made by an employer. On that occasion many Bangladeshi citizens took a step up the career path, so to speak, going from being unregistered dish-washers and street vendors to self-employed small-scale retail entrepreneurs backed by the help, which might now be called crowdfunding, of several individuals and families (Mannan *et al.*, 2014). After about two decades the situation has changed completely: the number of Bangladeshi citizens residing in Italy was approximately 122,000 in 2017; of these, 33,000 live in the metropolitan area of Rome, especially in the Tor Pignattara district and neighbouring areas, which residents and the media call Italy's most populous Banglatown (Pompeo, 2001).
- 5 In the early periods of immigration the Bangladeshi population was concentrated in the Esquilino district, close to Termini Station, where young Bangladeshi men live in bachelors' houses, with ten to fifteen per apartment. With family reunifications becoming more frequent, families began to move eastwards, to the Tor Pignattara district. The name of the quarter originates from the remains of the Mausoleum of Helena, built in honour of the mother of Emperor Constantine (326-330 A.D.), where to make the dome lighter the tambour was made with terracotta amphorae, which on the streets went by the name of “pignatte”, hollow brick blocks. The quarter had previously been inhabited by Italian migrants from Veneto, Marche, Abruzzo, Puglia and Sardinia. They have mostly been replaced by Bangladeshi immigrants, who pay €800-900 a month in rent for flats

about 60 sq.m in size, in which three to four families live, i.e. about ten persons (Gaetani, 2016).

- 6 The entrepreneurial capacity of the Bangladeshi community can be seen by comparing it with other communities from the Asian subcontinent in terms of remittances sent back home from the Metropolitan Area of Rome in the period 2005-2016 (Figure 1). Average annual remittances by resident (in 2016) totalled €4,490 (Sri Lanka), €4,200 (Bangladesh), €3,260 (Pakistan) and €2,821 (India) respectively. In 2017 there was a significant increase in the flow of Bangladeshi citizens into Italy, passing through Libya. In the period January-May 2017 over 6,000 Bangladeshi citizens crossed the Mediterranean Sea, more than any other nation except for Nigeria. In the period January-December 2016 over 8,000 Bangladeshi citizens came over, the ninth largest national contingent to cross the Mediterranean. Partly supported by the disinformation campaign disseminated by government agencies, a growing number of Bangladeshi citizens were helped to cross the Mediterranean. There were two main types: (i) persons that had lived for some time in Libya, or in other Middle-Eastern countries, who did not feel safe and decided to leave the country; (ii) persons arriving by plane at Istanbul or Dubai, before travelling to Tripoli and being assisted by local traffickers, whose organisational set-up was described by Europol as “daily business”. Women on the other hand came directly to Italy after getting married. When they decide to get married, young men return home for a few months and, with the help of family or friends, they find a wife to marry and take back to Europe. Marrying an emigrant, called a “probashi”, is seen as being very positive, because life in Europe is often described as being better than it is in actual fact. This is the “big lie”, in part because the Bangladeshi idea of a patriarchal society based on the authority of the man is, if anything, even more rigorously observed overseas, heavily restricting women’s freedom of movement, a clear example of gendered aspect of mobility differentiation (Uteng & Cresswell, 2016; Silvey, 2006).

Figure 1. Rome metropolitan area: foreign workers remittance, annual flows Euro Millions, by Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, 2005-2016.

SOURCE: BANK OF ITALY, OCTOBER 2017

- 7 Many people in Rome wonder how Bangladeshi citizens have managed to buy so many local stores in the city's neighbourhoods, buying out previous retail activities run by Italians, making sizeable payouts to existing shopkeepers and paying rent going from 2,000 to 4,000 euros a month depending on the location (Angeli & Cappelli, 2016). The first immigrants from Bangladesh were street vendors, then over time they began to make money and hire employees from their own country, paying them a pittance. When they manage to put together a bit of money, these employees in turn ask the community for a loan, in order to set up their own business, exploiting the labour of recently arrived fellow nationals. Having achieved economic success, the next goal is to obtain a residence permit and, if possible, citizenship. UK daily *The Independent* has described the phenomenon of Italo-Bangladeshis, i.e. Bangladeshi citizens who obtain Italian papers and then move to the UK (Clarke, 2015). In the worst years of the global economic crisis (2010-2014), it is estimated that around 4,000 Italo-Bangladeshis emigrated to the UK. The result of the Referendum on 23.06.2016 that will take the UK out of the EU set the alarm bells ringing in the Bangladeshi community in Rome. The possibility of obtaining an Italian document, be it a residence permit or actual citizenship, gives them the chance to move inside the EU, and thus the chance to move to London. The whole Brexit drama has caused them to speed up their plans, in order to take advantage of the transition period. Other Bangladeshi citizens who were still unable to consider moving looked at other EU destinations, or considered not moving but staying in Italy, with the possibility of returning to Bangladesh after they have finished work and retired.

Findings of the qualitative survey

The geographic and family setting

- 8 Ten men and ten women from the Roman community were interviewed, chosen mainly from urban areas, but also from rural areas (Figure 2). Traditionally, Bangladeshis living in Rome originally come from the districts of Dhaka, Foridpur and Noakhali, and to a lesser extent from Comilla, Borishal and Sylhet. Interviewees originating from Dhaka have higher academic qualifications, while those from smaller towns, or from rural areas, have a generally lower level of education. Man (1):
- “I studied in both Bangladesh and India, I am a graduate, and completed a master's degree in Economy & Management at the University of Dhaka, then at Bangalore University in India”.
- 9 Well-educated women also say they have worked in Bangladesh. Woman (3):
- “I was earning enough to support both myself and my mother. Then I met my husband in Foridpur. He is also Bangladeshi. A few months after we got married, he moved to Rome, then later I joined him”.
- 10 For women not in possession of a higher education qualification, the migratory process takes place with the agreement of families in Bangladesh. Woman (5):
- “My parents made me marry my husband, who had returned to Bangladesh from Italy. I was only 16, and my husband was a lot older than me. Three months after the wedding he returned to Italy, and I carried on studying at high school. I had an arranged marriage, I practically didn't know my husband, nor his family. In the end, though, everything worked out well”.
- 11 The women interviewed all said they were housewives, and devoted all their time to the home and the family. Although they live most of their time at home, they are also have

most contact with foreigners from other communities and with Italians, socialising with other mothers when they go to school to pick up their children.

Figure 2. TITLE?

Background and motivations behind the migratory experience

- 12 For the women interviewed the background and motivations behind the migratory experience have always been the same, tied up with the family reunification process.

Woman (5):

"I arrived in Italy when I was 21. My husband had come before me. After getting an open-ended contract to work in a restaurant, he was also granted a residence permit. At that point he was able to send the papers needed to allow me to come to Rome."

- 13 All women came to Rome via a direct flight from Dhaka. They said they suffered from having to undertake such a long journey on their own. Sometimes their husband went to get them, but real stress was limited to having to leave their family and friends. Very little compared with what the men had done to get to Italy. The case of Man (2) is emblematic:

"I moved overseas when I was 21, but I couldn't get to Italy directly, since I had to go through a number of countries and face many difficulties. My family had paid the equivalent of €7,000 for my journey. The first stage was Libya, where they put me with about twenty persons from Pakistan and Libya, all crowded together in a small room, with almost nothing to eat. Then they took us to Hungary, in the meantime the group had grown a lot smaller, and life became increasingly difficult. Then we moved to other European countries, always walking at night. Some of the group had escaped, others had grown ill, but in any case we managed to reach

France, and from there we entered Italy, where I had relatives who were waiting for me.”

14 Man (3):

“With the help of a relative who was already living in Italy I managed to get to Rome with a tourist visa.”

15 Man (7):

“I arrived in France with a tourist visa. To obtain that visa I had to spend a lot of money. I then applied for political asylum. Then I came to Rome by train, thanks to a friend’s help. I was very afraid they would stop me at the border, but everything went well.”

Eating habits in Bangladesh and in Italy

16 There are considerable differences in the eating habits of those living in a family and those living alone, in an all-male community. There were similar differences even before emigrating to Italy. Man (1):

“In Bangladesh I travelled a lot from one city to another, so I didn’t have a balanced diet, I would eat street food, sandwiches, sometimes rice, and wraps.”

17 Man (6):

“In Bangladesh I would eat rice twice a day. Both at lunch and at dinner, almost always with fish or vegetables. In our family we would not eat a lot of meat. I ate a lot of lentils, beans (Bangladeshi beans are a little longer than Italian beans) and legumes.”

18 Women who worked or studied in Dhaka led an emancipated life, which included eating meals outside the home. Woman (7):

“I used to eat a lot of street food, fast food, hamburgers and above all traditional Dhaka food, which was naturally very spicy and greasy. I had breakfast with a wrap and vegetables, with a cup of milky tea (similar to a cappuccino). At lunch I was almost always out, so I would eat meals in different restaurants. For dinner I would have almost always rice and meat, or rice and vegetables. We would use a lot of oil at home too.”

19 The Bangladeshi community in Rome has its own shops and supermarkets, run by Bangladeshi shopkeepers. Food is imported directly from Bangladesh, thus eating habits can be maintained in Rome. Religion also has a say about food customs, thus it is easier to shop at a Bangladeshi store, where food is prepared with respect for religious rules, and where there is no risk of contamination between foodstuffs that are allowed and those that are prohibited by religious norms. So the diet in Rome remains the same as that followed in Bangladesh, or rather it does not have to change. Woman (1):

“When I was at home with my parents, mum would put a lot of spices in our food. Here in Rome they can easily be procured, especially because I live with my husband in the Tor Pignattara district, which is full of Bangladeshi shops that import all types of spices from Bangladesh, as well as almost all types of fish (frozen) and vegetables (fresh and frozen).”

20 In the area of food too the role of women is important in attempting to merge tradition and innovation. In order to buy some items, women have to go to non-Bangladeshi shops, then try to learn to cook food that is made in Italy and part of the Mediterranean diet. In order to know how to cook new dishes, information comes from the mothers of their children’s school friends. Comparisons and assessments are made about the quality of the diet and the health of their children. Woman (2):

"We love pasta in our family. Our son for instance does not eat Bangladeshi food, but prefers pasta in sauce or with tuna. At home we eat both rice and pasta, and we avoid eating frozen Bangladeshi fish, due to the fact it is not safe. We think it is dangerous due to the chemicals they add to preserve it. So we prefer to eat Italian food, like pasta, bread, beef steaks, pizza, Italian fish (seabass, sea bream, salmon), Italian fruit and vegetables."

21 Woman (6):

"In Dhaka it is not possible to buy food directly from farmers. As a result, you are forced to eat fish or vegetables that are not always fresh. Unfortunately, formaldehyde-based products are used to preserve them. Although these substances are harmful, they continue to be eaten. Because of these substances, and air and water pollution, diseases have appeared in Bangladesh that nobody knew about 10 years ago."

22 New food customs are transmitted from women to the rest of the family. Man (3):

"I come from a poor family, very often we couldn't afford to eat meat, accordingly we only ate rice, fish and vegetables grown by us. When I went back to Bangladesh, I didn't like the local food any more, it seemed like the flavours had changed. I think that the earth has been poisoned in Bangladesh. You can never be sure about your health when you're eating food that is full of pesticides and formaldehyde by-products."

23 The situation is different for men living on their own. Man (7):

"At home there are eight of us, and we all work. There is somebody who cooks, and we pay €30 each for shopping and cooking. We always eat Bangladeshi food. Outside I only have breakfast, which consists of a croissant and a cappuccino."

Pathologies and hospital admissions

24 Many of the interviewees spoke about family members who suffered from diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases. Woman (2):

"My mother and father both have diabetes and high blood pressure. Having these two diseases has now become commonplace in Bangladesh. I think that the reasons for these diseases are not just poisoned food, but unfortunately also what we breathe, all the smog and the dust."

25 Man (2):

"My father, mother and brothers suffer from diabetes. I have not yet contracted the disease, and I am careful about what I eat."

26 Man (6):

"I have diabetes and high cholesterol. My wife also has high blood pressure, and has to have a check-up every three months, have a blood test and check her medicine dosage. My wife takes insulin twice a day. At the moment I'm just taking tablets, and I haven't had to start with insulin."

27 Man (5):

"My parents both suffer from diabetes. My mother also has high blood pressure, and my father has high cholesterol. I have to be careful about what I eat, but that's not always possible, since I have fixed working hours, from 10 o'clock in the morning to 10 o'clock at night, with just two hours' break for lunch."

28 Man (4):

"I went to Umberto 1° Hospital three years ago for a kidney complaint. I was thirty years old. I have suffered a lot from this disease. I have had several operations, then they told me they couldn't do anything more, and I would probably die. Then with the financial help of some of my fellow countrymen, I went to a hospital in

Germany, where they treated me and solved all my problems. Doctors prescribed a diet with healthy food and drinking a lot of water.”

- 29 Just as for other non-EU communities, women in the Bangladeshi community, due to their age, frequent the hospital for the delivery of their children. Woman (7):

“I was taken to A&E to have my two children. I had a positive experience. On the first occasion I couldn’t speak Italian at all, but hospital staff helped me, saying a few words in English. When my second child was born I had learned some Italian. In both cases they were natural births, with no complications. My children are both fine.”

- 30 In a few cases the onset of maternity has caused a general worsening of health. Woman (5):

“I already had diabetes, which then got much worse with my pregnancy, as well as high blood pressure. I have been taken several times to Umberto 1° Hospital A&E due to my high-risk pregnancy. Perhaps the troubles during my pregnancy were due to the fact that my papers say I’m 36 years old. I’m actually three years younger, perhaps the doctors were treating me according to my official age, and not my actual age.”

Work experiences in Rome

- 31 Women did not have any work experience. The reasons for this depend on the fact that once they arrived in Italy they began to set up a family, thus their main activity has been looking after the children. Even women that had a good education have not managed to find a job, as their academic qualifications have not been recognised. There are also cultural and religious reasons. This is more evident for those coming from rural areas. Woman (9):

“My father never allowed me to work, so I have never had a job. My husband thinks the same way as my father: women have to look after the family, and men have to work. And I agree with this idea.”

- 32 The situation is slightly more complex for men. No one is able to do the work they used to do back home, where in urban areas in particular persons with good academic qualifications were employed in the public sector, or were professionals. The men interviewed work in retail trade; depending on their financial situation, this may be a store, which they may own, or they may be street vendors, using trolleys and stalls. They also work in catering, as assistant chefs or pizza makers. Upon their arrival in the new country they work to survive, beginning by selling umbrellas or other small items. In restaurants they start out as dish-washers, or waiters. The lucky ones manage to rise up the career path, and earn good money. Man (10):

“I work in my own tailor’s shop. I used to wash dishes, then do the cleaning. After that I went to work in a tailor’s, and finally I opened my own tailoring business.”

- 33 Man (9):

“When I arrived in Italy I worked on a market stall, then for a time in a shop selling Bangladeshi food items. I had to work 12 hours a day, from 8 a.m. to 10 p.m., and I would make €700 a month. Then I decided to sell some land I had in Bangladesh, had the money sent to Rome, and opened a shop of my own. Today I’m doing very well, thank God!”

Satisfaction with living in Rome

- 34 Satisfaction is measured in relation to one's studies, activities performed in Bangladesh before leaving, the expectations one had before coming and the reality of life in Rome. The women are generally happy, as they have managed to join up with their husbands, or to get married and come to Italy, they have had children, and live a tranquil life. Woman (1):

"Here in Rome I'm very satisfied. I have two wonderful children, and I live the life I have always aspired to with my husband."

- 35 There is certainly some disappointment about the difficulty in finding a job that comes up to expectations in terms of their education and training. Woman (6):

"I am not very satisfied with my life in Rome. I don't have my own home, and I don't have a regular job, occasionally I do some cleaning work in people's homes, but nothing serious."

- 36 The most common expectations relate to the experience of emigrants in the UK and USA, where the academic qualifications of Bangladeshis are recognised, unlike in Italy. Woman (7):

"If I am honest, I am not very satisfied with my life in Rome, my husband is always out at work and I am always at home, alone with my daughter. I feel like I'm in a straightjacket at home, I need to find a job and be economically more independent. I am looking for a job, like care work, or domestic work. My university degree is not taken into consideration in Italy. I didn't expect the Italian educational system to be so different from that in Asia. I have a relative who emigrated to America and studied in Dhaka like me. Now he is doing a job commensurate with the qualifications obtained in Bangladesh."

- 37 Men on the other hand gauge satisfaction according to the work they do and the money they manage to earn. Man (1):

"I had a more tranquil life in Bangladesh. I was an office worker, with a steady job and a monthly wage. In Rome I don't have a fixed job, and I have stand up at a market stall from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. to earn €900 a month. Everything I earn goes with the rent or buying food. We are not managing to put anything aside for the future."

- 38 Man (3):

"In Bangladesh I was a computer engineer, and was earning the equivalent of €1,000 a month. This allowed me to lead a decent life. Here I have done a lot of jobs, now I'm washing dishes."

Questions of identity

- 39 There is a substantial difference between men and women regarding how they look at the question of identity. For women the concept of identity is important, but that of "feeling at home" is equally important. Women living in the Tor Pignattara community basically maintain their religious and culinary traditions, they dress as they used to in Bangladesh and go shopping in shops run by Bangladeshis. In these conditions, especially when they have not learned to speak Italian, they spend their lives in their own home, and have contacts only with other Bangladeshi women. They also say their husbands order them to lead a secluded life, and not to have contacts with the local population, be they Italian or other nationalities. These women have remained 100% Bangladeshi, and try to preserve for their children a Bangladeshi identity, even though they say they are not thinking about returning to Bangladesh, but consider Rome as their home, somewhere they will

stay for the rest of their lives. Women living in Rome are the result of family reunifications, they are recently married and have small children. These children now go to nursery and infant schools. If they want they can have contact with the mothers of other children. Those are the times (woman 1):

“When I go to pick up my daughter at school, and it is there that we exchange a lot of information regarding both the children and us adults.”

- 40 They feel Italian, with the pride of a Bangladeshi national identity. Bangladesh is a country that has existed for less than half a century, the result of sometimes violent clashes. It is therefore natural that the national identity is felt more keenly. For men the question of identity is an important value, to be shared with their wives and handed down to their children. Man (8):

“I feel proud to be Bangladeshi. I am proud of my traditions. I am certain that it is right not to let my wife work, and not to let her go to a school to learn Italian. I am always with her, so she does not need to go out.”

- 41 Man (6):

“I work in the evening, from 5 p.m. to 1 a.m. In the morning I sleep, then I go to pray at the Mosque at about 1 p.m., after which I return home. My social life therefore revolves around the mosque, with fellow countrymen who come to pray. My cultural values have thus remained the same. My values, and thus the respect for my country of origin and fear of Allah, have thus intensified in the time that has elapsed since I left my country.”

Contacts and social relations

- 42 To begin with, all the women had serious problems relating to other inhabitants of the neighbourhood they live in. The lack of knowledge of the language, the different culture, religion, different food customs and the use of traditional clothes all went to put up a barrier that is difficult to overcome. Woman (1):

“In the beginning it was very difficult for me to adapt to life in Italy. As I didn’t know anybody, it was difficult to meet new people, and make new friends. At the beginning I closed myself inside my home, and I only had my husband to interact with.”

- 43 Women expecting children have to go for check-ups in healthcare facilities, so they have to go out, leave the local neighbourhood and begin to learn Italian. Woman (1):

“Then when I was expecting my first child, I began to go for check-ups at different medical structures. It was there that I began to socialise with others. After that I attended courses to learn Italian. Due to the fact that I wear a hijab and dress in a certain way, there is always someone ready to judge me unfairly. That annoys me a lot.”

- 44 Once the initial period is over, the situation changes completely. While for some families not a lot changes, for others women begin to go to school to learn Italian, then to talk to other women attending the courses and afterwards to the mothers of their children’s school friends. Woman (3):

“I benefited from having been born in Dhaka and having been to India many times. I believe other people think that I am polite and kind, but also modern. In addition to wearing traditional clothes, I also put on jeans and a t-shirt.”

- 45 As far as the men are concerned, the problem is almost the opposite. Unlike the women, they do not have to frequent schools and the parents of other children, and as they do not get pregnant they do not have to use healthcare services. In order to work they do not

have to know Italian, and they do not usually need to be in contact with persons outside the Bangladeshi community. Their priority is to find a job, and to send money home, partly to give back the money received for the initial journey. Man (2):

“It was very difficult to adapt to living in Italy after the trauma of the journey to get here. I couldn’t afford to have a decent social life, because I always had to think about earning enough money to repay my debts.”

46 Man (4):

“I found it extremely difficult to adapt to life in Italy. I didn’t know anyone in Rome, I had to just get by and eat with the money I had brought from Bangladesh. Then I found a job, I moved to a house where other fellow countrymen were living, and I began to live in Rome.”

47 The situation is different for those working alongside Italians. Man (5):

“I work in a restaurant with people I am always in contact with. They do not see me as a foreigner, they say I’m more Roman than they are. Most of my contacts are with Italians, so I live a different life from that of other Bangladeshis. In the places I frequent there are never any other Bangladeshis.”

48 Man (6):

“I work in a pizzeria in the centre of Rome, with an open-ended contract. All things considered, I’m quite happy. I am a Muslim, and very religious. I had grown my beard out of respect for our Prophet Mohammad Sollellahu Alyhi Ossalam, and fear of Allah. The owners of the pizzeria were not happy about this, and they made me understand that if I wanted to work with them I would have to cut off my beard. In order to continue supporting my family, I did what they asked me to do, but I didn’t like the way they acted.”

Travel and human mobility

49 Apart from the possibility of travelling back to Bangladesh to meet friends and relatives, contacts with the country of origin are intense and frequent by means of ICT tools. The women are very active on social networks: facebook, whatsapp, viber and IMO. Woman (3):

“Now I don’t feel so far away from my loved ones. We speak to one another several times a day via the Internet.”

50 Experiences reported from trips back home are not overly positive. Woman (5):

“I and my husband decided that our son should study in Bangladesh, so I returned to Dhaka. Then I came back to Italy to renew my residence permit, and went back again to Dhaka. From all these journeys I realised that Italy is the better place to live, because in Dhaka life is hard. The food is poisonous, the institutions are corrupt, and the administrative red tape is stifling. Safety is also a concern. While I was in Dhaka I was robbed three times, so I returned to Italy, where I feel safer.”

51 Woman (3):

“I manage to return to Bangladesh every two years. When I am at home I spend time with my family, eating and chatting. I undoubtedly eat poorly over there, because Dhaka is famous above all for its street food. My two daughters eat like me when we are over there. But I am aware of the risks I am running for my health.”

52 The women interviewed always leave open the possibility of returning home and embracing friends and relatives, while interviews with the men do not give the same impression. Some men said they didn’t want to use the Internet to contact relatives, but preferred to talk on the cell phone. Many clearly stated that now they are in Italy, with wife and family, they are not so interested in returning to Bangladesh. Man (1):

“One of the main reasons why I have not returned to Bangladesh is economic. If I go back to Bangladesh today I have many relatives to buy at least a present for, and the air ticket costs a lot.”

Future plans

- 53 The dream for those leaving Bangladesh is always London. Not all of them manage to reach the promised land, and so some stop at Rome, perhaps hoping one day to go on to London, after having obtained an Italian residence permit or, in some cases, Italian citizenship. There are those however who manage to find a satisfactory job in Rome, fit in to Roman society and decide to forget their past dreams. Woman (1):

“In the short term I would like to open a business of my own, in the tailoring business. I learned the trade when I was in Bangladesh. To do that, I need financial help from a credit institute. I need money to rent out a shop and buy the materials. I do not intend to go back and live in Bangladesh. I would like to stay in Rome, and I’d like my children to grow up here. I like the climate, and my husband has a good job. All things considered, I quite like the social setting too.”

- 54 Woman (4):

“I would like to stay in Italy and open my own business, but my husband has decided that we will go back to Bangladesh. It all depends on what my husband decides, as he doesn’t want me to work. And in the society I live in women cannot decide for themselves.”

- 55 For men too the problem is economic in nature. Man (7):

“I like living in Italy, so in the future I see myself still living in Rome. I would like to open a stall and work for myself. But to open a stall you need a lot of money. It will take me a long time to put some money away.”

- 56 Then there is always the idea of London. Man (2):

“I like Italy, where I came to after a lot of suffering and hard effort. But here I don’t see a better future for my children, so I’m thinking of moving on. Like most Bangladeshis, I am thinking of going to London, where my two sisters and their families have already gone. I am waiting for my Italian citizenship application to come through. When it does, if the economic situation improves in Rome I’ll stay, otherwise I will go somewhere else. If I cannot go to London, I will return to Bangladesh where, with the savings put by over the past few years, I have bought a small supermarket in Noakhali, my home town. There I will finally be able to have a less stressful and more decent life.”

Conclusions

- 57 There may have been considerable qualitative differences in the migratory experience, yet the differences are small in terms of the expectations, intentions and results of the mobility of youngsters moving around within the EU and of those entering the EU, with great difficulty, as registered or unregistered immigrants, from a non-EU country. By cross-referencing quantitative and qualitative analyses, we have been able to bring to light a migratory phenomenon that would otherwise be hidden from the rest of Roman society, lived inside homes, in a small quarter in the suburbs of Rome. In actual fact, this is not a traditional type of migration as we have known it in past decades. It is rather a human mobility phenomenon, as those under the umbrella of the mobility turn defended among others by Urry (2000), Sheller (2011), Kellerman (2006), Williams (2012) and Montanari & Staniscia (2016). In this process, men can enter the country in many ways,

even by means of a tourist visa, while women all take the same route, arriving in Rome after a wedding arranged by friends and relatives, and after applying for family reunification.

- 58 The qualitative analysis highlights the stress suffered by women, who are forced to live a solitary life in their own flat, and have contact with other residents in the neighbourhood only through maternity, which represents the main form of emancipation for them, allowing them to use medical services when they are pregnant and to socialise with other mothers when their children are growing up. Stress can be measured by the distance between the more emancipated life of women especially in urban areas of Bangladesh and the life they are forced to lead in Rome. For men, stress comes in the work environment, since in Rome they are unable to make use of the academic qualifications and work experiences acquired back at home. Under such conditions, men work in settings in which there are only fellow countrymen, thus it is not possible to learn the language or to experience even the most elementary forms of integration. We may thus venture the hypothesis that it is stress, and not eating habits or the risky migratory journeys, that is the most important factor for immigrants in Italy behind the onset of diseases such as diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular pathologies. These disorders may be a direct consequence of stress or an indirect cause, when stress leads to excessive smoking and drinking, and thus to the onset of relative pathologies. For religious reasons Bangladeshi citizens do not drink alcohol, but in the shops where they work, outside their own community, unseen and perhaps vulnerable, they have easy access to alcohol, a behaviour derived from their in-between position in front of the Bangladeshi community and the host society.

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NOTES

1. EMAHAM, Emergency Department as epidemiological observatory of Human Mobility. The case of Rome Metropolitan Area.
2. YMOBILITY, Maximising opportunities for individuals, labour market and regions in Europe.

ABSTRACTS

The Bangladeshi community in Rome has grown considerably in recent years, due chiefly to the increasing difficulty in reaching Germany and the UK. To arrive in Italy Bangladeshi citizens have to cross the Mediterranean, with all the inherent risks and difficulties, and pay huge sums of money to human traffickers. Once they are settled in Italy, and have obtained a residence permit or even Italian citizenship, Bangladeshi men return home for a period of time to find a wife, before returning to Italy and setting up a family. The intended final destination of this

human mobility is however London, which hosts the biggest Bangladeshi community, with mosques for their children to study religion and schools for them to study in English. Unmarried men in Rome live together in flats in the Esquilino quarter, those with wives and children live in the Tor Pignattara district. Despite the colourful clothes worn by Bangladeshi women, this community is practically invisible, since it cannot be measured using the normal instruments of official statistics. This essay uses the instruments of quantitative and qualitative analysis to contribute towards increasing our level of knowledge about the actual dimension, customs, needs and expectations of the Bangladeshi Community in Rome.

Die Gemeinde Bangladeschs in Rom ist in den letzten Jahren erheblich gewachsen, hauptsächlich aufgrund der zunehmenden Schwierigkeiten, Deutschland und Großbritannien zu erreichen. Um nach Italien zu kommen, müssen die Bürger Bangladeschs mit allen Risiken und Schwierigkeiten das Mittelmeer überqueren und den Menschenhändlern riesige Geldsummen zahlen. Sobald sie in Italien leben und eine Aufenthaltserlaubnis oder sogar die italienische Staatsbürgerschaft erhalten haben, kehren die Männer aus Bangladesch für eine gewisse Zeit nach Hause zurück, um eine Frau zu finden, bevor sie nach Italien zurückkehren und eine Familie gründen. Das beabsichtigte Endziel dieser menschlichen Mobilität ist jedoch London, das die größte Gemeinschaft in Bangladesch beherbergt, mit Moscheen für ihre Kinder, um Religion und Schulen zu studieren, damit sie Englisch lernen können. Unverheiratete Männer leben in Rom im Esquilino-Viertel zusammen, mit Frauen und Kindern leben im Stadtteil Tor Pignattara. Trotz der bunten Kleidung, die von bangladeschischen Frauen getragen wird, ist diese Gemeinschaft praktisch unsichtbar, da sie nicht mit den üblichen Instrumenten der amtlichen Statistik gemessen werden kann. Dieser Beitrag nutzt die Instrumente der quantitativen und qualitativen Analyse, um dazu beizutragen, unser Wissen über die tatsächliche Dimension, Bräuche, Bedürfnisse und Erwartungen der Gemeinschaft von Bangladesch in Rom zu erweitern.

INDEX

Keywords: Rome, Bangladesh, identity, social integration, expectations

Schlüsselwörter: Rom, Bangladesch, Identität, soziale Integration, Erwartungen

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