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Ambivalences of the emotional logics of migration and family reunification emotions, experiences and aspirations of Bangladeshi husbands and wives in Italy

Francesco Della Puppa

Laboratory for Social research, Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage, Ca' Foscari University, Venice, Italy

ABSTRACT

This article analyses the relational and emotional logics of migration, separation and reunification of Bangladeshi families in Italy. Migrant husbands are separated from their wives, with whom they have had little family life due to their migration, and seek family reunification. Wives' migration due to family reunification, however, means separating them from their familiar environments and social networks. For this reason, some wives press for onward migration to the UK, where they hope that a larger Bangladeshi community and more social and cultural opportunities may provide a more fulfilling life compared to what they experienced in Italy. However, this means uprooting their husbands once again. The article observes the emotionally divergent dimensions among men and women as an element that can transform and redefine biographical projects and the migration trajectories in Europe of Bangladeshi families in Italy.

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KEYWORDS Family reunification; Bangladeshi diaspora; emotional logics of migration; gender conflicts; onward migration; transnational marriage

Introduction

This article aims to analyse the emotional logics of migration (Charsley and Livsage 2013), separation and reunification of Bangladeshi families in Italy. First-migrant husbands are separated from their wives, with whom they have had little family life due to their migration, and seek family reunification. Wives' migration due to family reunification, however, means separating them from their familiar and social networks. From this viewpoint, for the first-migrant husbands, family reunification can act as an antidote to the suffering and loneliness of the migration experience (Della Puppa 2014). For reunited wives, however, it can constitute an imposition (Gardner 2006) as

CONTACT Francesco Della Puppa  francesco.dellapuppa@unive.it

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they are subjected to the downgrading inherent in south–north migration. For this reason, some wives press for onward migration (Ahrens 2013; Ahrens et al. 2014; van Liempt 2011) to the UK, where they hope that a larger Bangladeshi community and more opportunities may provide a more fulfilling life compared to what they experienced in Italy. However, this means uprooting their husbands once again.

The article observes the gap between expectations, experiences and the emotions of Bangladeshi first-migrant husbands and their reunited wives as an element that can transform and redefine biographical projects and the migration trajectories of Bangladeshi families in Italy.

The analysis of the emotional logics of migration proposed herein fits the heterogeneity of women's pre-migration experiences as the wives left-behind wives of migrant men; some of the wives feel oppressed by the position of daughter-in-law in their parents-in-law's households; others – due to holding higher social class positions – remain living with their own parents and enjoying more freedom. On the one hand, this paper takes into account the emancipatory thrust that family reunification effects on many wives who escape the subordination of an unwelcoming family context, which is sometimes imposed on them by virilocality in Bangladesh. On the other hand, it takes into account the suffering experienced by women who are often reunited against their will.

Although issues of emotional work and management have been explored in the sociological literature (Hochschild 1979), only a few studies have focused on the emotional logics of transnational migration (Carling 2008) in relation to the experience of separation and reunification. Starting from this perspective, the present article will take into account the class gap between the country of origin and the country of destination experienced by Bangladeshi migrants, and will view the emotional dimension as a fundamental part of the migratory (Skrbiš 2008) and family reunification experiences.

The emotional dimension of migration has been analysed in contributions focused on transnational kinship (Charsley and Shaw 2006a, 2006b; Skrbiš 2008), transnational parenting (Ambrosini 2014; Baldassar 2010; Bustamante and Alemán 2007; Parreñas 2008) and even in studies of polygamy among Muslim 'minorities' and migrants in Europe (Charsley and Liversage 2013). Concerning the experience of transnational marriage (Charsley and Shaw 2006a) and family reunification, Charsley (2005) analysed the emotion of unhappiness among husbands brought into Europe by their wives of the second and third generations, who had been born in the UK. Others (Baldassar 2010; Brooks and Simpson 2013) have explored how the experience of migration, by causing physical separation and absence, caused migrants – especially women – to feel guilty about their moral obligations towards left-behind ageing parents and/or children. Here,

conversely, the emotion of guilt is experienced by migrant husbands who are brought into the country of destination their wives left behind. Therefore, the ambivalence of emotional logics within family creation, separation and reunification, as well as the emotional gaps between the experiences of husbands and wives and their effects on migration choices and trajectories, will be discussed.

From an analytical point of view, in this instance, emotions are viewed as a social construct that arises from socio-cultural relations (Harre 1986) and that can influence the social trajectories of migrants (Baldassar 2010). Family reunification and marriage migration are viewed as forms of 'transnationalism from below' (Alexander 2013; Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais 2016, Charsley and Shaw 2006a), taking into account that these phenomena serve as important mechanisms for the formation and transformation of transnational networks. At the same time, these practices and family relationships are themselves transformed as a result of the migration (Ibid). Wives left behind play a crucial role in terms of maintaining links between places (Gardner 1995) and this process may imply a shift in the distribution of power between the genders that make up migrant couples (Mooney 2006; Charsley and Shaw 2006a, 2006b) and transnational families, transforming the roles of women in the process (Gardner 1995). This partially characterises Bangladeshi couples who will experience the onward migration from Italy to the UK because of the wives' dissatisfaction with Italian society. Therefore, family reunification and marriage migration are analysed within the context of a transnational social field (Levitt and Glick-Schiller 2004). Consequently, the emotions of migrant husbands and wives are also analysed using this analytical frame (Alexander 2013).

It is the result of a broader research project that included a collection of in-depth interviews among 30 middle-high class Bangladeshi families in Italy and Bangladesh. The interviews involved 25 first-migrant husbands (12 of whom spoke English and eight of whom had family members or friends in the UK) and 25 reunited wives in Italy (seven of whom spoke English and seven of whom had family members or friends in the UK). All the respondents possess medium (high-school diploma) or higher education (master's degree, bachelor's degree, M.Phil.).

1. *Alte Ceccato, from urbanised countryside to hub of the Bangladeshi diaspora*

Bangladeshi migration to Italy is a relatively recent phenomenon. It was not until the 1980s that a large number of Bangladeshis reached the Peninsula, due to the closure of other European countries' borders (Della Puppa 2014) along with deep economic and social transformations and a turbulent political scenario taking shape in Bangladesh. Italy

qualified as an important destination during the 1990s; following the 1986 amnesty for 'irregular' migrants, the number of residence permits issued by the Italian government to Bangladeshis barely exceeded 100 units; however, following the 1990 amnesty, this had increased to almost 4000 and by the early 2000s, more than 70,000. The Bangladeshi community today represents the sixth biggest non-European community, numbering between 130,000 and 150,000.

Bangladeshi migrants were concentrated almost exclusively in Rome (92%) (Knights 1998), which is home to the second largest Bangladeshi community in Europe, after London. However, the 1990s were also characterised by the dispersion of this community across the country. Once in possession of a valid residence permit, they left the capital, the very context that allowed them, as irregular migrants, to blend into a dense community of compatriots. Subsequently, different small Bangladeshi communities came into being in many different areas of the country, as migrants found working and residential stability in local contexts, usually close to major industrial centres in northern regions.

Alte Ceccato is a small town in the Province of Vicenza, an industrialised territory that hosts the most important tannery districts in northeast Italy. The Registry Office reveals that here, non-Italian citizens represent roughly one-third of its 6804 inhabitants, 50% of whom are from Bangladesh (with 38% of them being women). One of the crucial factors for Bangladeshi settlement in Alte was the increasing number of family reunifications.

The first generation of *probashi*¹ who arrived in Italy in the early 1990s was composed almost entirely of men: young bachelors from the urban middle class or from well-off rural families. Therefore, family reunifications in the first phase of the Bangladeshi diaspora in Italy are configured exclusively as 'male' reunifications. Usually, the first-migrant, after setting up the necessary conditions, returned to their country of origin to marry – usually via an arranged marriage (Charsley and Shaw 2006a, 2006b) – a woman who, soon after the wedding, was reunited with her husband in Italy. Rather than a proper family *reunification*, this event represents the *union* of two spouses who inaugurate the experience of co-residence and marriage in the destination country, and who often get to know each other only from this moment forward.

It must be noted that, in accordance with the virilocal rule applicable in Bangladesh (Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais 2016), during the lapse of time between marriage and the actual reunification, it is usually expected that the bride will move into the house of her husband's family, where she will have to take second place to her in-laws, by virtue of the subordinate position resulting from the absence of her husband and her recent entry into the family circle.

2. The suffering of the 'lonely' probashi and the ambivalent conditions of reunited wives: conflicts and gaps between the emotional logics of migrant men and women

One of the main drivers of reunification is the men's need for 'emotional stability': their willingness to create and foster a family, which happens to be in Italy. Their inclusion in the society remains substantially confined to the working environment: relations with the natives are subject to working contingencies, contact with the local society is limited and not very well developed and, in the long term, relationships with their fellow countrymen become unsatisfactory. Reduced to the status of being a mere labour force, migrants begin to feel the weight of the lack of a family *routine*, of the emotional loneliness they experience:

I was alone here. When your family is far from you, in another country... I cannot speak with my wife, I cannot see her... it isn't good for human being. I was always unhappy, I had mental frustration: 'When she will come here? When she will come?' [...] So many tensions created in my mind. (Mukul, first-migrant husband)

My wife was in Bangladesh and I was alone here... In one year, I only went to my country for one month. What kind of life is this!? My wife and my son are in Bangladesh, I never see them [...] I always send them money, for nice clothes, good food, they are living well and I'm here... this isn't life! [...] Now that I'm here with my wife... I'm satisfied, because they're always in front of me, I can see them... mental satisfaction, it makes the difference. Before I was always in tension. (Hassan, first-migrant husband)

Reunification also allows the men to break with sexual and emotional loneliness, to regain possession of the bodily and emotional sphere, as described by some authors (Ali Nobil 2009) and explained by some respondents:

We're human beings. We need a lot of things, not only of the mind, but also of the body, a physical relationship. (Azam, first-migrant husband)

This isn't life, with the husband here, always working, sending money and doing this [mimes the act of male masturbation] and his wife with their son in Bangladesh: this isn't life! (Hassan, first-migrant husband)

The migrants interviewed remembered everyday life before reunification as irregular and compromised by a sense of temporariness and insecurity related to the impossibility of establishing a *routine* marked by timetables and family responsibilities. On the one hand, they start to adopt a new lifestyle expressed in the public sphere; on the other hand, light is shed on the disorganisation of the domestic sphere that characterises their housing situation and that contributes to the intensification of their emotion of existential loneliness:

My life changed: before I went home at one, two, three, always out with friends. Now I must arrive home soon because she is waiting for me. Days working, evenings going out with her, together. Before I was eating eight, nine, ten, eleven pm o'clock. Now, twelve o'clock lunch, eight o'clock dinner. Regular. Settled. (Rahaman, first-migrant husband)

Life needs stability, I need a calm life. Before I didn't have my house, I don't like to be with other people. Not regular. I like regular life but I lived with other people. Like in one room, four or five people, me and my friends. I don't like that life. Life with mess is not good for me, now it's OK. (Hassan, first-migrant husband)

The wife's proximity instils an effective discipline into the behaviour of the husband, bringing order to his life, giving meaning to his days. The domestic sphere finally becomes the space for relaxing and recreation. The time outside working hours allows for moments of uncommon 'normality', and reuniting husbands begin to feel 'at home' even in *Alte Ceccato*.

The migration of a woman following her husband, possibly through the institution of family reunification, can be understood as a continuation, in a transnational space (Gopalkrishnan and Babacan 2007), of her transition from the family group of her father to that of her husband, as enshrined in a marriage accomplished in accordance with the rules of virilocality (Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais 2016). This interfamilial shift allows the construction of new families using 'small pieces' of the previous ones, which therefore have to be broken (Lévi-Strauss 2007). Family reunification reproduces the methods of the construction of new families across the continents, despite the husband's migration. The wife, after undergoing the experience of migration from her family context, has to face the experience of migration for reunification purposes. Women are brought up to expect that they will 'adapt' to the projects of their in-laws' homes as a result of marriage (Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais 2016; Charsley 2005; Fruzzetti 1982), but they may become emotionally destabilised after their arrival in *Alte*, as both wives and husbands admit:

On 26 August 2009 I arrived in Italy. That day was very sad for me: I had to leave my father, mother, sister, brother, grandparents, cousins, all the things that I liked. I never wanted to stay in Italy too long a time. First few months were spent always at home, because for me Italian was a new language, Italy is a new country, without my friends, I've never been with my husband for more than a month. I always wanted to go back to Bangladesh. When I came to Italy, I realized that my life had changed too much. (Rokeya, reunited wife)

When she came, for the first two years she didn't want to stay here, she used to tell me: 'Send me to Bangladesh, send me back!' I was trying to make her understand: 'If I need money to live, I have to work here. So, if I have to work and to live here, you will stay here'. After that, little by little, she understood. She missed Bangladesh too much; I think more than me. (Jahan, first-migrant husband)

If, for husbands, the reunification implies the reconstruction of an emotionally and bodily satisfying everyday life, and their emotions being expressed through the feeling of regaining and achieving (of an orderly and reassuring daily life, of conjugal sexuality, of support in reproductive and care work) (Della Puppa 2014), for some reunited wives, this experience will conversely result in an unsatisfactory and alienating routine; they describe their emotions by especially emphasising a feeling of loss:

To cook, to clean, to wash, to pray, to watch television, to talk with your husband, to eat, to sleep, to wake up. I miss my family, my country, my village, my road, my office, my school, my college, my university... I miss my life. (Begum, reunited wife)

To fully understand the emotions of the reunited wives at Alte, it is necessary to linger over some aspects of their experience. As has been mentioned, for men, the house becomes the centre of their emotional life after reunification; it is the space where they can be with their families after work. For their wives, the perimeters of the houses can *partially* turn out to be 'prisons'. In the country of origin, the wives were spending their days within the relational context of the extended family of the absent husband. As stated, this may lead to their subordination to the power of the mothers-in-law and, more generally, the other family members. However, a woman's husband's family can provide the bride with a dense relational network that is not necessarily a segregating one: the women of the household may be bound by ties of trust and complicity. The rigid hierarchy among members of the husband's family of origin – the control and oppression to which the young daughter-in-law would be subjected – can coexist with and become reconciled by solidarity, warmth and protection. Furthermore, it should be emphasised that the migration of husbands and the marriage dynamics in the diaspora can also lead to a reconsideration of virilocality or a consolidation of a 'new tradition' related to the residency of women married to emigrated men. In fact, the wives of *probashi*² often remain within the house of their *own* family, in order to stay close to the university they are attending or to their workplace. Sometimes, such positions are kept with obstinacy despite the opposition of the husband's family:

In 2004, I finished university then I couldn't do anything because I had problems with my mother-in-law: she doesn't like that I work, so I had to stay at home. It was a bad time. I studied, I wanted to work, but they didn't want me to, so I worked but I was hiding that I was working. I was working as a salesperson in a pharmacy, but I never said to my mother-in-law that I was working. The mother-in-law lived in the countryside, I live in the city: also after the wedding, I always lived with my parents. My parents-in-law said they don't like that a married girl works. But I'm a bit different, I studied, so I worked. My parents knew, they were agree. (Monira, reunited wife)

This shift in forms of housing – especially among the urban, upper-middle-class educated families – not only highlights the ability of wives to escape and change the power of the husband's family circle, but also helps us understand their suffering at the time of emigration for reunification and shows they possess some bargaining power within the family.³

3. The disillusionment of family reunification

The English term *household* finds its counterpart in the Bengali term *khana*, which refers to 'the people who eat food prepared in the same fire' or even to 'a united group where members work and live together, according to a division of roles and authorities'. It forms the basis of every form of relationship of production and reproduction, and the unity of kinship, especially in rural areas (Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais 2016). Various *khana* are interconnected by family ties forming a *bari*, and various *bari* constitute a *para* (or *gusthi*). Various *para* then form a village (*gram*), which is the socio-economic unit and political-administrative reference point of the residents. In addition, and especially in rural areas – without denying the changes that have occurred within the Bangladeshi society – the practice of *purdah* is being performed and reproduced. The expression, which literally means 'veil' or 'curtain', refers to a set of embedded practices that contribute to the construction of 'modesty', 'honour' and 'shame', and which preserve the symbolic or material separation of the genders and spheres of activities gendered through clothing, daily practices, the structuring of domestic environments and physical segregation (Gardner 1995). The *purdah* refers to the exclusion of women from the public sphere, represents the limitation of female social activity and can lead to isolation within the house's walls. However, by virtue of the household organisation and the family structure described above, the left-behind wives in Bangladesh, while respecting the rules of *purdah*, have the chance to enjoy dense relational and kinship ties.

The moment they are reunited, the desire to maintain internalised social norms related to transit in the extra-domestic spaces or to the use of domestic ones, may end up with the women identifying their social space with the house space, or with its limited proportions. The vivacity of family ties and the familiarity of the environment of origin give way to a thinning out of social networks and the solitude of a dilapidated apartment where young brides suddenly have to live with a husband with whom there was no way and no time to build any intimacy.

Husbands themselves describe the disillusionment that results from the high expectations that their wives had of migration. In fact, these women may have only a few moments in the company of the spouse who comes home exhausted after his endless work shifts:

In Bangladesh she lived one type of life, but in Italy she has to live another one: husband works all day, in the evening he comes back home and he's too tired, after dinner he goes to bed and the woman feels a little frustrated. Frustration, because her time is just passing: all day at home alone, it is a problem for her to pass her time until night when her husband come home, they spend only one hour together, then the husband goes to bed and the woman has nothing to do. (Reevu, first-migrant husband)

The realisation of his wife's disillusionment leads a husband to suspect that her love is maternal but not conjugal. His dream of a nuclear, 'modern' and happy family, pursued by reunification, shatters under the blows that he inflicts through the reunification process itself:

I like it here, I don't want to leave my children and my wife there. My heart isn't good without them. I can't live without them. I can't live without sun as I cannot live without them, me. My wife can do. Because I have two things: children and wife. My wife, instead, doesn't think about me, she thinks only about them. I have two things: them and her. But she loves just them. She wants to stay in Bangladesh, she says it's better. (Islam, first-migrant husband)

Alte Ceccato – an orthogonal grid of streets in which loom large apartment buildings that are scarred by the ravages of time and that form a dormitory appendix of Italy's largest tannery district – certainly does not correspond to the ideal of cosmopolitan Europe, as described by migrants returning to Bangladesh or represented by images of the UK satellite channels that refer to the more famous location of Brick Lane and Tower Hamlets. This neighbourhood, located in East London, is the symbol of the oldest *probashi* community in the world and the largest one in Europe, thus representing the 'migration dream' of generations of Bangladeshis.

Therefore, the reunited women are forced to confront the real face of migration and unveil the lies, omissions and ostentatious exaggerations that reproduce illusions about Europe in the country of origin (Sayad 1999). This disillusionment concerns the physical and social context of the integration of migrants, the downgrading of social status, the exclusion from work and the difficult material conditions experienced:

Before coming here, I didn't think that life here wasn't easy, I thought it would be different. I heard my cousins who work in America and London, they work in the office because they have studied, good work can be found there while in Italy it isn't so. Although I studied, it isn't easy here. It is difficult for someone who gives me work in an office, even though I speak English very well. Because I'm a foreigner and, therefore, no one will give me work as a shop assistant or in an office. When I think that my job is to clean, I feel bad because in Bangladesh, I would never have to do this job, never, never... I didn't expect this life. (Rebeka, reunited wife)

The family migration transfers to the wives the same bitter disappointment that their husbands experienced on their arrival. From educated daughters

of the Bangladeshi upper-middle class, used to comfortable lives and the prestige of their social positions, they suddenly become the wives of unskilled workers, confined in cold apartments in a neighbourhood among factories. As transnational marriage can serve as a way of creating status (Mand 2002), it must be stressed that these wives sometimes even have superior class status to that of their husbands and that some of these first-migrant men manage to marry a woman superior in social status because they were represented as 'successful migrants'. Therefore, a woman's marriage to a *probashi*, and, above all, family reunification in Italy, leaves unfulfilled her social-class and social-status expectations. This disillusionment, together with their educational achievements, leads them to refuse performing the norm of '*sabar*' (patience or silent forbearance) (Qureshi 2013), such as characterises the experiences of first-generation South Asian women of working-class backgrounds in the UK (Ibid). Added to the downgrading and loneliness (Alexander 2013) are new tasks arising from the condition of being a housewife. In Bangladesh, household chores are off-loaded onto paid personnel in the service of the domestic unit or divided among the many female presences of *khana*, while all the responsibilities of reproductive work fall on wives within the reunited family (Gardner 2006):

The women that come here never imagine... When my wife arrived, she saw everything was different. She had higher expectations. She thought in Europe the life was beautiful, but then she came here and saw that it was hard. In Bangladesh, people that have money don't work. Not for everybody, but for those coming here, for many families, for women, the life in Bangladesh isn't bad, they aren't poor. When they were there, for all the household work there was one person that was helping, like a housekeeper. While here, to afford a housekeeper is hard and expensive. When women came here, they saw it is hard, that they must do the household work alone. Then little by little they also understand the truth. (Tanvir, first-migrant husband)

When I was in Bangladesh, there was no need to do the household work. [...] Now, I have a lot of things to do at home. I'm very sorry. I'm housewife. I follow my husband, for him I have to cook, clean the house... (Samira, reunited wife)

The reunification process enforces a 'nuclearisation' of the migrant family, both under the regulations governing this process – that identify members admitted to the reunification process as belonging strictly within the circle of first-degree relatives – and as a result of the objective impossibility of a 'full family' migration. Thus, the husbands feel emotionally guilty because they perceive they have imposed on their wives a loneliness, isolation and exclusion from the parental and family circle:

Here my family is only three persons: me, my wife and my son. But family doesn't mean only three persons. In Italy it is like this, but in our country, family is a big thing: with cousins, uncles, aunts, grandfathers, grandmothers,

all together. My wife doesn't see her dad, mum, I don't see my mum, brother. We are alone, we feel loneliness. (Reevu, first-migrant husband)

These narratives, therefore, highlight significant divergences between the expectations, the aspirations and the emotions of men and women. Such gaps can lead to conflicts between different emotional logics and can imply the reshaping and transforming of the migratory trajectories of Bangladeshi migrant families in Italy, as will be addressed below.

4. *From Alte Ceccato to Londoni*

The representatives of the first generation of Bangladeshi migrants in Italy, who reached Alte between the 1990s and the 2000s, have by now fulfilled the necessary requirements for acquiring citizenship.⁴ If the possession of an Italian passport symbolises, for some, the ultimate goal of a stabilisation process, representing their setting down roots in the country, for others it is a strategic reactivation of a never-fulfilled migratory mobility (Skulte-Ouaiss 2013). By acquiring nationality of one member state, they acquire the ability to move and live within the territory of the EU and, thus, the possibility of reactivating a geographical mobility that is almost always oriented towards the UK⁵ (Zeitlyn 2013). The phenomenon of onward migration is relatively new, but it is also a hot topic and an urgent question within the EU, as the referendum on 'Brexit' has shown. In general, the socio-anthropological literature has addressed such topics, calling it 'twice migration', in reference to the transcontinental migration of some Sikh communities from India to Africa, and from Africa to the UK, between the 1960s and the 1980s (Bhachu 1985), or talking about 'serial migrants' (Ossman 2013). A few contributions focus on the links between crises, the policies of austerity and the migratory and coping strategies of Third Country Nationals 'naturalised' immigrants in the EU (Ahrens 2013; Ahrens *et al.* 2014). Similarly, as for the *probashi* interviewed in Alte, the new migration is encouraged by different factors such as the occupational segregation that, in Italy, channels the migrants into specific work sectors; the desire to offer future generations a school and university education in English, which is considered more adequate; the British welfare system, which is considered more inclusive than the 'Mediterranean' system; and the representation of the British context as 'culturally' more similar to the Bangladeshi one. In addition, one of the drivers for reactivating the migration process is the condition of the reunited wives: for women, these projects represent an escape from the dissatisfaction, loneliness and emotional frustration experienced in Alte. Unlike other migrant communities (van Liempt 2011), the onward migration of the families interviewed has not been the continuation of an earlier movement that was interrupted along the way, but a migratory mobility reactivated

despite the original intention (of the men) to settle in Italy. In fact, considering the size of the Bangladeshi community in the UK, London would offer women more employment opportunities, greater possibilities for participation in intra-community life and, often, for finding their relatives or friends living there. Perhaps these are only idealised representations, used to justify and support the aspirations of reunited wives; however, they nonetheless have a practical effect on the trajectories of Bangladeshi families, such as cross-referencing the municipal registry data with the date of the Registry of Italian Citizens Residing Abroad, which also refers to Bangladeshi migrants who have obtained Italian citizenship. From this comparison, it arises that between January 2010 and June 2014, 287 citizens of Bangladeshi origin left the town and Italy and moved to London.⁶

It is, indeed, necessary to emphasise two aspects that define the lives of the Bangladeshi women in Alte. The first aspect is the strong limitations placed on the wives' socio-relational space and lives as a result of the reunification. Unlike the first-migrant husbands – who enjoy more actively the extra-domestic sphere in Alte through political and associative participation, and formal and informal gathering in public or religious spaces – reunited wives (and perhaps not even all of them), in a small and relatively 'new' context of settlement of migrant population, may become part of community life only through attending Italian language courses, participating in the school lives of their children or during community gatherings organised (by men) to commemorate the civil and religious anniversaries celebrated in their motherland, although in such cases women play the role of 'spectators'. This is accompanied by visits among families of compatriots, an important form of aggregation, even if (before the economic crisis) it was subject to the availability of first-migrant husbands, whose free time was limited to Sundays, and (after the crisis) is adapted to the cost-saving needs of reunited families. However, the possibility of participation in the social and public life of reunited Bangladeshi women is generally deeply conditioned by the heterogeneity of the male provisions and postures of their reuniting husbands.

Even moments of shopping are generally constructed as family socialisation moments and, for this reason, bound by the presence of a male and children. These outings generally take place on Saturday afternoons. Furthermore, in Alte, women's networks of exchange and mutual assistance have not been developed, likely due to the strong social control of the Bangladeshi community in a town of such small size, to the recent arrival of reunified women in Alte, to the social embodiment of gender norms and practices and to the class and cultural *habitus* developed by Bangladeshi women.

The second aspect that should be noted is the difficulty with which the reunited wives (even those who are allowed by their husbands to work outside their home) manage to fit into the local work market. This depends,

in part, on the type of professions most frequently available in the tannery district, ones that penalise the female labour force and, in part, on their limited knowledge of the Italian language in comparison with men, due to their more recent arrival to Italy and their relative lack of opportunities to mix with the native population. The size and density of Bangladeshi communities in London would, instead, provide more employment opportunities for women, who could fit into the service sector and the community's businesses.

The first-migrant husband must now assume responsibility for the family's migration and its consequences; he must 'pay the price' of reunification and include among his priorities his reunited wife's needs. 'Friends, husband and wife, three months [ago] went to London and she [the wife] asked me if we go as well. I've got a lot of friends, here. This is my home. After thirty years in Italy, to leave this place means to start everything all over again. I feel Italy is my country' confesses Zaeed, who had spent most of his life in Alte but was pushed to leave by his wife, whose decision does not seem to have left room for negotiation:

There everybody works like officer, in the offices. Families, children, wives live well, you speak Bangla, you speak English... for us English is very important: I want my daughters to speak English. My cousin, my sister-in-law, everybody in London, there it is much better for Bangladeshis. We decided: we go to London and not a small village like Alte! (Rupa, reunited wife)

Reunited wives – far from being powerless victims – explicitly urge their husbands as Rupa or by using silent tactics such as denied smiles, long silences and continuous ostentation of their emotional dissatisfaction. Emotions are used both as a stake and as a means aimed at onward migration to the UK.

For many husbands, another departure means saying another goodbye to the 'home' context, leaving a circle of friends, questioning an established *routine*, giving up the identity of the successful Italian '*probashi*' and its role in the community of Alte:

I want to stay here but she says I have to go there with all the family. I have a job now, serenity, everything, but there... now, if I go... I don't know what I have to do. Everybody knows me well, here, I'm well known in my community, but there, is a new place for me. (Tanvir, first-migrant husband)

The new migration reveals a gender conflict, a power negotiation and an emotional gap between husband and wives, a break that started to take shape at the point at which the marriage was defined. This break was strengthened through the reunification process and it emerges with the new departure as a family. The migrant husbands must now put aside their own social and emotional priorities to satisfy the social and emotional wishes of their wives who, after many years since the reunification, 'present

the bill' for their own dissatisfaction. Husbands, overwhelmed by the fear of being held responsible by their partners for their misery, can only glance across the Channel without taking into account their own nostalgia. Thus, the correspondence between the life project of the first-migrant husband and that of his reunited wife enters a crisis.

This dynamic shows that 'marriage' and 'transnational family' can be interpreted as social fields that are themselves formed and transformed through the process of migration and family reunification (Alexander 2013; Charsley 2005; Gardner 2006). Additionally, as the expectations and emotions surrounding these concepts are shaped and reshaped, the power distribution among genders is renegotiated. This highlights the role of women as transformative agents for transnational trajectories, processes of movement and settlement and gender relationships (Alexander 2013), and in particular the role of emotional gaps in onward migration to the UK on the part of Italian-Bangladeshi families.

Conclusions

Transnational marriage and family reunification are configured as a prism expressing different meanings depending on different gender positions, thus highlighting the gap between the emotions, the experiences and the aspirations of men and women. Migrant husbands who manage to complete the family reunification thus rediscover their human dimension and their need for emotional stability. For reunited wives, it can represent a form of emancipation from the domination exerted in Bangladesh by the family of her in-laws or the imposition of an unwanted migration and unsatisfactory existence with its difficult emotional burden. So, while for the migrant husband this institution functions as an antidote to the suffering and loneliness of migration, for the reunited wives, it can be configured as an imposition that forces them to abandon their own emotional and relational networks and, sometimes, even those of their own husbands who are held responsible for this frustration.

Concurrently, family reunification and the emotional logics that such an experience conveys constitute an analytical lens that allows for identifying some patterns regarding reunited wives. Among them are the profile of women who take on the subaltern daughter-in-law role and who, for this reason, are pleased to migrate but disappointed once in Italy; the profile of women who take on the daughter-in-law role, finding a friendly and welcoming environment in their in-laws' family and therefore do not want to migrate at all; the profile of women who work, liberated by the absence of their husbands and never wanted to migrate in the first place. Clearly, these patterns do not sharply differ among them and are not mutually exclusive; rather, they interpenetrate and blend into one another on a line of

continuity. However, it should be stressed that the desire for onward migration to London bind all of the patterns involved, as all reunited wives interviewed seemed to believe that the UK would be better than Italy.

Despite the fact that they have accepted the migration to Europe at the behest of their husbands, they can then exert a crucial influence over the family's future, as some women then push for an onward migration as a family. Thus, the substantial power asymmetries within the migrant family are reversed, and the husbands are now the ones who face the loss of networks and their relational conditions in Europe (Charsley 2005). So, women have been central to the success of migrant households (Gardner 2006; Mooney 2006) and far from being silent objects and passive victims, they are active agents in their own lives, subjects expressing dissent, imposing prospects, contributing to social and cultural change, enhancing their own status to the point of redefining migration trajectories, working methods and settlement strategies of first-migrant husbands and the reunited families to which they belong (Alexander 2013; Alexander, Chatterji, and Jalais 2016; Gardner 2006). In fact, onward migration indicates that the imposition of family reunification and transnational marriage migration does not entail a complete emotional and cognitive adhesion to the will of migrant husbands, but includes and expresses both explicit and latent forms of resistance and conflict. This can be manifested in daily life, for example, through the management of facial expression and the ostentation of certain emotions such as loneliness and dissatisfaction by migrant wives; through the rejection of enthusiastically sharing the life project chosen for them by their husbands; through a lack of adherence to this perspective 'as if one wanted to do it'; through 'emotional work' (Hochschild 1979) that leads women to become – and indicate themselves to be – fully devoted to their children, but not to their husband. As a result, husbands, driven by ambivalent emotions, guilt and the non-sustainability of their own dream of having a reunited and happy family, begin to question their own stabilisation in Italy in a bid to 'start everything all over again'.

From this point of view, it is possible to propose further and final considerations on the emotional logics of migration (Charsley and Liversage 2013), separation and reunification from the perspectives of Bangladeshi migrant families in Italy. On the one hand, it can be pointed out that emotions are employed both as *stakes* in the strategies of migrant couples and wives, and the *means* by which these strategies are put in place by migrant wives as a means of reacting to an unsatisfactory life context. Showing and expressing specific emotions, migrant wives provoke suffering and ambivalent feelings in their husbands, push them into feeling a sense of guilt for the migration they have imposed, make them feel inadequate in terms of managing the emotional effects and to accept onward migration. On the other hand, it must be emphasised that the emotions and aspirations

of migrant husbands and wives take shape within a transnational social space (Alexander 2013), modelled by the intersection of the individual migration experience and the individual life-course, socially constructed and reproduced on the basis of the intersection of gender and class identities, social and cultural capital, and the family *habitus* of the subjects in the field. Finally, it must be emphasised that gender conflicts within an emotional dimension and the emotional gap between first-migrant husbands and their reunited wives are able to push Bangladeshi migrant families into reshaping and renegotiating their migration and settlement projects, so that the ambivalences of the emotional logics of migration and family reunification can be viewed as an important factor for fully understanding the onward migration phenomenon.

Notes

1. In Bangladesh, the emigrants are called *londoni* or *probashi*. The first term derives from one of the first great destinations in the history of migration from Bangladesh – London – and, by extension, the whole of the UK. The second term means ‘external inhabitants’ or ‘those who went abroad’.
2. Five women in the sample (30 families) had this experience.
3. This is partially in line with the results of other researchers of other Indian subcontinent migrant communities (Gulati 1993) that show the increased mobility outside the homes and the greater financial autonomy of left-behind wives, albeit with some contradictions.
4. In this context, it will simply be pointed out that, in Italy, citizenship can be obtained after 10 years of regular and continuous residence in the country. It is then transferred to children and spouses.
5. This article was written before the 2016 referendum on UK membership in the EU.
6. This onward migration could meet the expectations of reunified women or, on the contrary, lead to further disappointment. Unfortunately there is no scientific research on recently arrived Italian-Bangladeshi migrants to London, which might cast light on their situation. On the Italian-Bangladeshi families in London, it has been published just a journalistic investigation (*The Independent* 29 November).

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