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"I live in an environment where I don't feel very happy": voices, representations, and needs in the education of Bangladeshi families living in Venice

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ABSTRACT

Bangladeshi immigration to Italy is a relatively recent phenomenon. While the first Bangladeshis arrived in the 1980s, this increased rapidly in the 1990s and 2000s, when some ethnic enclaves or 'Bangla-towns' started to emerge, especially near the large industrial districts of north-eastern Italy, such as Marghera and Mestre in the province of Venice, the industrial areas in the province of Vicenza, and Monfalcone in the province of Gorizia. This paper focuses on Bangladeshi citizens living in the Venice area, some of them part of transnational families, with relatives both in the UK and Bangladesh. It explores the demands and representations of transnational Bangladeshi families' educational and cultural practices as they claim citizenship and renegotiate these practices within the host society.

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KEYWORDS Bangladeshi diaspora; representations of educational and social practices; migration; social inclusion

1. Introduction

Over the past eight years, social workers in the Municipality of Venice have worked to facilitate the social integration of migrant citizens through services addressing asylum and refugees, disability, housing, families, and minors and adolescents. Attention has been paid to the social and linguistic inclusion of migrant families through projects funded by the European Union and the Italian Ministry of the Interior under the Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund (AMIF). Two projects, AMIF Educittà (2017–2018) and AMIF VOCI (2018–2021), focused on civic and language education and support for vulnerable migrants.

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In this paper, Venice refers not only to the historic centre but also to the mainland areas of Mestre and Marghera, where social vulnerability is particularly evident. Our understanding of vulnerability draws on definitions provided by the Italian Ministry, the Municipality of Venice, and the European Commission, including minors, people with disabilities, pregnant women, single-parent families, victims of human trafficking and violence, and people with serious physical or mental health conditions.

78% of the users of the courses and free activities offered to migrants, through the aforementioned AMIF projects, were people from Bangladesh (Tonioli 2026). In this paper, we intend to give a voice to Bangladeshi citizens living in the Venice area, some of whom belong to transnational families with relatives in the UK and Bangladesh. We focus on exploring their needs and representations of educational and cultural practices in Bangladesh. Our main findings concern demands for civil rights, community interventions for adolescents and the second generation, and reflections on health, socio-health issues, and civil rights.

2. Literature review and theoretical framework

The following sections provide a historical overview of Bangladeshi migration to Italy and examine the empirical context of the Bangladeshi community in Venice. It then presents the theoretical framework guiding the study and describes the methodologies adopted.

2.1. Bangladeshi immigration to Italy: a historical overview

Bangladeshi migration to Italy is a relatively recent phenomenon. The first Bangladeshis arrived in Italy in the 1980s, due to other European countries closing their borders – particularly France, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Switzerland – and the deep economic, social and political transformations underway in Bangladesh at the time. But only in the 1990s did Italy become a significant destination for Bangladeshis: following the 1986 amnesty, only around 100 Bangladeshi citizens were granted a residence permit; following the 1990 amnesty, this figure grew to almost 4,000; and by the early 2000s more than 70,000 had received such a permit. Undocumented Bangladeshi migrants already present in central European countries – which in a few years transformed from easy targets to impenetrable fortresses – were attracted to Italy by the frequent amnesties and legislative measures of regularization, fuelled by a still growing economy and a labour market that required a flexible, blackmailable, and low-cost workforce (Della Puppa 2013; Priori 2012).

Today, the Bangladeshi community is the sixth biggest non-European community of third country nationals in Italy, counting around 130,000

people (Centro Studi e Ricerche IDOS 2022). Until the end of the '90s, Bangladeshi's were concentrated almost exclusively in Rome, where 92% of them lived (Knights 1998; Knights and King 1998). At this time, the settlement of Bangladeshis in the capital – encouraged by effective migration networks connecting the country of origin, various countries in Europe, and Italy – was so rapid that it quickly became one of the largest in Europe, second only to London.

The city of Rome was attractive to migrants both due to the presence of their compatriots, who could strengthen their networks, offering support to newcomers, and the imagery it evoked among the middle-class educated youth of the so called 'Global South'. The first generation of Bangladeshis in Italy belonged to the middle and sometimes upper-middle class in Bangladesh: the educated children of professionals, entrepreneurs, and government executives, who, despite their social position in their country of origin, agreed to downgrade in Italy. They took jobs that they would never have taken back home, but which guaranteed them high wages, the possibility of sending remittances back to Bangladesh, and better prospects in the future (Zeitlyn 2006). This migration was not driven by a need to escape hunger or misery, but by aspirations to improve their social status, which did not seem possible in the political and economic instability of Bangladesh at the time.

However, the main reasons for their concentration in Rome were the opportunities it offered to work in the informal economy (services, catering, tourism, small businesses, and so on) and the possibility for undocumented migrants to hide within its large Bangladeshi community (Knights 1998; Knights and King 1998; Priori 2012).

After the 1990s, especially those who were finally given a valid residence permit, left Rome and quickly spread to other parts of Italy, particularly the prosperous North-East, where they found more stable and long-term jobs in factories and workshops, as low-wage process workers. They thus created their own national and 'ethnic' enclaves or 'Bangla-towns' (Della Puppa and Gelati 2015) in places such as Mestre and Marghera (Venice), Monfalcone (Gorizia), Alte Ceccato and Montecchio Maggiore (Vicenza).

At first, the Bangladeshi community in Italy was almost exclusively male. However, women and children have become more numerous over time as a result of family-reunification, which were understood exclusively as 'male' reunifications. Usually, the first migrant, after obtaining the necessary conditions (residence permit, job contract, and a place to live), returned to their country of origin to marry – usually via an arranged marriage. Soon after the wedding, the wife was reunited with her husband in Italy (Della Puppa 2014, 2018). Shortly thereafter, there was an increase in the number of Bangladeshi children attending schools in Italy.

Nevertheless, this situation has changed drastically over time. On the one hand, the Italian economic and social context has undergone radical transformations: between the 1990s and the 2000s, the Italian economy and labour market were still relatively inclusive and able to offer workers job stability, today it does not seem to offer many possibilities for upward social mobility (better living conditions and social class positions with respect to previous generations) for the children of the working classes in general, and even less so for young people of migrant origin. This was exacerbated by the 2008 economic crisis, which further limited possibilities for economic and social fulfilment, creating an oppressive suffocating climate. On the other hand, the aspirations of migrant men – coming from the Bangladeshi middle class and, often, the upper-middle class – have also changed in line with their changing families and biographical positioning: they are no longer 'only' migrant children who have to send remittances to their families of origin, but also husbands and fathers, with responsibilities, duties, and expectations for their children. They originally migrated in search of upward social mobility for themselves and, above all, for their future children, but this social and economic improvement, which seemed attainable when they first arrived, now seems impossible due to the structural changes in Italy in the last thirty years. They thus conclude that the only way not to frustrate their aspirations and to continue to make sense of their lives is to leave Italy and migrate again (Della Puppa and King 2019). Coming from the first generation of Bangladeshi migrants, present in Italy for over twenty years, they are able to undertake this second migration because they have acquired Italian citizenship and, with it, a European passport (Della Puppa and Sredanovic 2017).

2.2. *Banglavenice*

The City of Venice has a unique urban configuration. As an administrative unit, it has two distinct urban arrangements: the mainland, with two main areas (Mestre and Marghera), and the old town. The mainland and the old town are connected by a bridge, which metaphorically (and literally) acts as a threshold, not only in terms of the different urban arrangements, but also in terms of the population and cost of living. It is much more expensive to live in the historic centre than on the mainland, especially when it comes to housing costs. Migrants are mainly concentrated on the mainland (almost 80% of Venice's migrant population and over 98% of its Bangladeshi population) where there are more job opportunities and accommodation is cheaper. The placement of migrants follows the geography of local production systems: in the old town the most important work sectors are tourism, the service sector, the unskilled tertiary sector, care-work, and domestic-work, while on the mainland, the most important are shipbuilding, construction, and heavy industry (Fabrucci and Della Puppa 2022).

During the first three decades of the twentieth century, Mestre underwent significant urban and demographic expansion, transforming within a few decades from a small town into a medium-to-large urban and industrial agglomeration, with approximately 90,000 residents and a substantial number of domiciled individuals. This expansion was characterized by rapid unregulated growth driven by real estate speculation, ultimately resulting in a neighbourhood that is overcrowded, spatially fragmented, and aesthetically unappealing. Although there were no major patterns of concentrated development, large-scale social housing complexes were constructed in various areas, many of which are now in a state of structural and social decline (Campomori, Della Puppa, and Storato 2019).

The socio-economic trajectory of Mestre, and even more so of Marghera, is intrinsically linked to the industrial hub of Marghera, particularly the petrochemical sector and the Fincantieri shipyards. The latter represents one of the most significant shipbuilding and naval engineering complexes in the world, with an annual turnover of €2.4 billion. Only about 10,000 workers are directly employed by Fincantieri. They are predominantly Italian natives and constitute merely 10% of the total workforce engaged in the shipyards. The remaining 90% – who are mostly migrants – are employed through subcontracted cooperatives, contracted out by the main company. As a result, Marghera has evolved into a working-class district, affected by severe environmental pollution, which has historically been neglected in urban and industrial planning (*Ibidem*).

Mestre and Marghera have a high proportion of foreign-born residents, accounting for approximately 20% of their total population. This proportion is higher still in the 'Cita' area of Marghera, where 33% of the population are migrant residents, the overwhelming majority of whom are of Bangladeshi origin. The Bangladeshi community in the Municipality of Venice – almost entirely concentrated in Mestre and, in even greater numbers, Marghera – is made up of approximately 9,000 individuals. The City of Venice, and specifically the areas of Mestre and Marghera, host the third-largest Bangladeshi community in Italy after Rome and Milan.

Today, the Bangladeshi community is the largest foreign community in the Venice area, with around 10,000 official residents, of whom 2,000 are minors aged between 1 and 18, with another 1,000 children born between June and September 2024 who are still waiting for their nationality to be assigned. If 33% of those born in Mestre hospital at the end of 2023 were granted Bangladeshi citizenship, the percentages are easy to calculate. However, thanks to information provided by social workers from the Municipality of Venice, it is estimated that the number of Bangladeshi citizens could in fact be as high as 20,000 when taking into account those who do not appear in official records as having a registered address but live in other areas, people who live in nearby towns but travel to Venice to work, Bangladeshi citizens

who have already obtained Italian citizenship, and people without an official residence permit.

The Bangladeshi community has the most family reunifications of the various migrant communities in Venice, with men and children arriving constantly. In the cities where they live, as will be explained in points 2 and 3 of our work, Bangladeshi families are usually made up of two members, a mother and a father, and several children. As Bangladeshi migration is relatively recent, mainly starting in the 1990s, we still find nuclear families, unlike other communities with different migration histories (Della Puppa and Morad 2019).

The Bangladeshi population is characterized by low levels of previous education, with most women unable to speak Italian, and they experience situations of loneliness, vulnerability and social isolation, which are consequently also experienced by their own children. Furthermore, the lack of opportunities to meet other family members means that they do not have access to the same family and social support networks that they would in Bangladesh.

2.3. Theoretical framework

This study draws on an interdisciplinary theoretical framework combining research on language socialization, transnational families, family language policies and migrant identities. These perspectives provide the conceptual basis for understanding how migration reshapes family relationships, parenting practices and children's linguistic and educational experiences. In particular, the study considers language learning as a socially and culturally situated process, shaped by everyday interactions within families and wider social environments. It also examines how transnational family arrangements, changing gender roles and the absence or transformation of extended family support networks influence parents' educational choices and expectations. Finally, attention is paid to the ways in which Bangladeshi families negotiate cultural continuity and social change in the Italian context, particularly in relation to children's education, language development and social inclusion.

Previous studies conducted in Venice (Tonioli 2022, 2026) have highlighted the isolation experienced by many Bangladeshi mothers and children. Despite living in shared accommodation, children often have limited opportunities to play with other children or members of the same household, resulting in feelings of loneliness. The lack of opportunities for play also affects language development, as children have fewer chances to experiment with language, develop new vocabulary and syntactic structures, and express themselves as active agents in society. Limited play experiences can therefore restrict the development of both their mother tongue and their second language, Italian. Bangladeshi mothers involved in the research describe

approaches to early childhood education and understandings of children's autonomy and development that differ from those commonly found in Western educational contexts (Schieffelin and Ochs 2012). As highlighted by Schieffelin and Ochs, educational practices are deeply rooted in specific cultural contexts and may vary considerably across societies. Their research in Papua New Guinea, for instance, illustrates how storytelling and reading are not necessarily central to children's learning, while older siblings often play an important role in guiding and correcting younger children. Ochs' study on Language Socialization shows the extent to which learning, including language learning, is a culturally and socially connoted process for it is culture that organizes and gives meaning to interaction (Ochs and Schieffelin 1984). In line with this perspective, Goodwin (2018) explains that learning processes are collaborative, demonstrating how essential it is that children have social interaction, as this allows them to acquire language, and become familiar with social, cultural and behavioural norms (for further reflections on this topic, see Anatoli 2025). However, in contexts of migration it is crucial to also understand the cultural, generational, and social dynamics that determine the choice of new practices within transnational families (Baldassar, Vellekoop, and Wilding 2007).

Other studies have also explored how, in situations of migration, many families experience a double vulnerability: firstly, the complexity of facing migration in a new country, with a different language and a different socio-sanitary, socio-linguistic, and cultural system; and secondly, the need to integrate into the social fabric without their family support network. This can lead to a change in the way many families communicate with their children, especially mothers, and in their choice of parenting practices, which can have both positive and negative consequences. For example, Moro, Neuman, and Réal (2008) studied how mothers in vulnerable situations during migration communicated less with their children because they were used to letting them interact with each other in their communities, playing and interacting freely with their peers. When they found themselves in a different situation, they had no tools to deal with it, in some sense concluding that there were no words, and thus they needed to reinvent new social, educational and linguistic practices and methods. Again, as Moro points out, migrant women often experience motherhood in 'exile' – in a host country that is socially and culturally different – and are forced to reinvent or abandon traditional childcare practices and begin to feel that they are not good mothers or to feel judged by society, for example at school, at hospital check-ups, or by social workers.

Furthermore, in recent studies on care in transnational families, Mazzucato and Dito (2018) suggest that attention should also be paid to the role of fathers in the education of their children. As in the study by Caarls et al. (2018) cited by Mazzucato and Dito, in African families it

is fathers with higher education who play the role of educators. Thus, gender can also have an impact on how parenthood is managed in transnational families in the host country. In Mexican families, for example, older siblings often play a fundamental role in the education of younger children. This aspect is also relevant to the broader discussion of educational expectations in migrant families. Noack (2021) and Barglowski (2021) have explored differences between families who migrate and those who remain in their country of origin. In a case study reported in their book, families who had migrated placed greater emphasis on school performance, success and social advancement, including shared responsibility among siblings in learning and thus an intragenerational model of education. By contrast, among Turkish families who had not emigrated, expectations were more closely related to religious education, with greater responsibility assigned to adult family members. For more information on educational and social roles and how family roles can change in the country of origin and the country of migration, see Kwak (2003).

Another important aspect worth considering is that educational and linguistic practices often change during migration. Scholars often focus on practices in the country of origin to understand educational and linguistic practices in the host country. Recent studies (for more on this topic, see Higgins 2018; Lanza and Wei 2016) have shown how migration itself has a decisive impact on the negotiation of new practices and new social models. Likewise, the linguistic policies of families – which language to use with their children, and what language to use to educate them – the policies of schools, and the socio-economic and social conditions of families can have an impact on family choices and educational decisions. As Lanza and Wei (2016, 163) point out 'family language policy is, moreover, formed and implemented in interaction with wider political, social, and economic forces'.

There is extensive literature on the importance of investing in children from an early age and on the need to consider different care practices in transnational contexts. A 2023 report by WHO and UNICEF provides specific guidance on early childhood development, highlighting the need for early learning opportunities and responsive interactions that are emotionally supportive and developmentally stimulating. It also recognizes the fundamental role of parents and other caregivers in providing nurturing care, as well as the importance of communities, services and policies in supporting families with young children.

However, access to supportive social conditions and networks may become more difficult in migration contexts, particularly when families are separated from their extended family and familiar social environments. Previous research on Bangladeshi families in Venice (Tonioli 2026) highlights the difficulties parents face in supporting their children's education in an

unfamiliar context, especially when they do not speak the language of the host country and cannot rely on the family networks available in their country of origin. These circumstances also affect the relationship between families and educational institutions.

Tonioli (2026) further explores the different perspectives of Bangladeshi parents and preschool teachers concerning children's development, language acquisition and autonomy. Teachers involved in the research pointed out difficulties in children's verbal expression, which they associated with limited communication and opportunities to play with their peers. Although both families and teachers were concerned with children's development and education, their expectations were not always aligned. Several parents referred to the idea that children become autonomous at the age of seven. This highlights differences in cultural understandings of childhood, autonomy and educational practices between Bangladeshi families and Italian educational institutions.

These differences can also be understood in relation to the broader social and family structures that shape educational responsibilities and the upbringing of children in Bangladeshi society. A study by Del Franco (2012) highlights the structure of Bangladeshi society and identifies the role not only of the nuclear family, but also of the *bari*, the extended family, and the *samaj*, the civil and moral society. Within this social structure, the so-called *morubbi* play an important role. These figures are responsible for maintaining dignity and respect for social rules and advising individuals on how to behave in ways that do not bring shame upon their families of origin. In Venetian Banglatown, however, the role of the *morubbi* appears to take different forms. Sometimes they are identified in the interviewees'stories as the imams from the prayer centres, sometimes as the fathers of the family.

As *morubbi*, guardians of order and *purdah* (codes of moral behaviour), they are given roles that they would not have in their country of origin. They are also responsible for their children's education, as they are often the only family members able to communicate with teachers in Italian. Mothers who wish to be more involved in their children's education often lack sufficient knowledge of Italian to support them. Moreover, school subjects are taught differently from the way they were in Bangladesh, further complicating their involvement. These difficulties are compounded by children's experiences of isolation and by the differences between family educational practices and the expectations of Italian schools. Furthermore, despite the size of the Bangladeshi community in Venice, mutual support networks remain limited, with families often relying primarily on their own members. Economic insecurity further contributes to these conditions of social vulnerability.

Previous studies on Bangladeshi migration and transnational families (Della Puppa and King 2019; Morshed 2018; Zeitlyn 2015) also provide important insights into how migrant families negotiate cultural

identities, educational practices and aspirations for social mobility. Many parents seek to offer their children a better future through migration, developing educational strategies that respect their cultural background while responding to the expectations of the host society. This process takes place in the absence of traditional family support figures, such as aunts and sisters-in-law, and within a context where families seek greater social equality, civic rights and recognition of fundamental rights.

These perspectives provide an important basis for analysing the experiences and narratives collected in our research. As will be discussed in the following sections, some members of the Bangladeshi diaspora in Venice are organizing themselves into associations and cultural groups to demand social assistance, homework support and opportunities for active citizenship. They are also identifying new community reference figures and promoting educational initiatives, including after-school programmes and Italian and Bangla language courses. These forms of community mobilization can also be understood in relation to families' aspirations for social mobility, including the possibility of further migration to the UK (Della Puppa and King 2019). Taken together, these theoretical perspectives guide the analysis of how Bangladeshi families in Venice negotiate educational practices, language socialization, family relationships and cultural identities, while responding to the challenges of migration and social inclusion.

3. Methods

Data collection was carried out using a qualitative approach (Bryman 2012), through informal conversations, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and participation in public events open to all citizens, such as the Iftar organized by the Association of Bangla Schools in Venice held on 6 April during the month of Ramadan. In cases where the people contacted did not speak Italian, interviews, conversations and focus groups were conducted with the help of linguistic-cultural mediators from the Municipality of Venice. Some interviews were recorded after interviewees gave their formal consent, with the mediators translating for those who did not understand Italian. Where interviewees did not consent to be recorded, we took notes in a field diary. In total, 20 Bangladeshi family members were interviewed.

Interviews and notes were transcribed verbatim, then analysed in order to identify the main themes emerging from them. Those themes were later categorized into the three main topics discussed below. The names of interviewees have been changed.

4. Civic rights

In relation to the first of the three main themes, that of civic rights, the interviews revealed the need for families to understand the way in which social services and anti-trafficking services can support them. Indeed, in the interviewees' narratives, social services were often seen as 'those who come to take children away', on a par with the police. During an interview in one of the mosques in Mestre, an imam told us that:

> We usually try to solve problems within the family, then we ask the religious community for help and, only as a last resort, if no solutions are found, we ask the social services for help. (Imam of a prayer room)

Meanwhile, Taslia told us that:

> Families have negative opinions about the municipality, and they think that if we go and ask them for help, they will take their child away, so they think it's better not to go. There are many groups on Facebook and on other online social networks, and I read people's opinions [. . .] this message is mainly spread through online social networks. There are also children who blackmail their parents, if something goes wrong or they set limits or punishments, they blackmail their parents and say: if you do this, we will go to the community. (Taslia)

Also, on the subject of civic rights, the interviewees called for respect for alternative religious education in Italian schools. Both state and private schools in Italy have one hour per week of Catholic Christian religious education, which families can decide to opt out of. Some Muslim Bangladeshi parents at a school in Venice whose children have opted out of those lessons have asked the headteacher if they can give their children the Koran to read as an alternative to Catholic religious education. Samir, a Bangladeshi father and member of the parents' committee at a school in Venice, told us that he had received permission to do this from the head-master. He considered this to be an important first step towards justice and social recognition. He also told us that religious education in Bangladesh includes all faiths, for example, Islam, Hinduism, etc. For some Bangladeshi families it is thus particularly surprising that this is not the case in Italy.

Many local schools have been asked to encourage teaching Italian as a second language and to promote after-school activities for Bangladeshi children who do not yet speak the language. We asked the imam of the mosque whether this is a subject that is discussed among the fathers who come to the prayer centre. The imam explained that he usually suggests that families prioritize their children's homework and Italian language learning:

> There is no compulsory age for learning the Koran. If the children are still young or if it is too demanding for them to do their homework and go to Koranic

> school, I usually advise them to prioritise the child's well-being. (Imam of a prayer room)

The theme of civic rights in religion also emerged in some interviews in the form of a request by some interviewees for more space to bury bodies in the city cemetery. Yassin told us that in one of the many cemeteries for Muslims:

> In April 2023, there were only two plots left for men, and we think there's a need to create plots for other people as well. (Yassin)

As regards the demand for social dignity, the interviewees told us that they had problems finding accommodation. They often live in precarious conditions, without heating, hot water or washing machines, in rooms also rented by their compatriots. Samira told us that:

> Without a house to live in and the peace of a place where you feel safe and protected, your mind is constantly preoccupied with these concerns and there is no room to think about other things, no room to help your children, to learn the language, to get around the city. The house is our first priority and then there's everything else. (Samira)

The demand for security and civic rights is also linked to the diverse cultural and social organizations of Bangladeshi citizens, who have divided themselves into social groups. However, according to some mothers, instead of facilitating integration into the social fabric and rebuilding support networks, these groups create further divisions and splits. This encourages citizens to seek a better future for their children by moving to other cities in Italy or to London. In this regard, the following conversation between two 29-year-old mothers, both with two daughters, during the Bangladeshi *Pitha* Festival, held in Mestre on 16 February 2024, is particularly illustrative:

> Rumana: I used to live in Bologna, and I was shocked when I arrived here. I found myself among millions of Bangladeshis who know everything about you, who control you, who judge you. In Bologna, there are fewer Bangladeshis, and they live in different parts of the city, so when you meet and organize an event, it's nice to find yourself in one place in the city. Here you have to decide where to go, which event to attend.
>
> Farjana: But it wasn't like that here, you know, at the beginning there were only a few of us and we had only one party, one New Year's Eve, but now politics, associations, and social affiliations divide us. Even among mothers, we are divided according to how we see the education of our children. I have a Montessori home, but some mothers criticize me because they say I should be at home with my daughter while I study for my driving licence.
>
> Rumana: Yes, there are social roles to be respected. I wanted to get my driving licence before my husband, I could have done it, but I waited for him to get his first because otherwise it wouldn't have been accepted in the family.

The above conversation illustrates the many divisions and fractures between ambitions, desires, and family expectations, and how society organizes and reorganizes itself around different social groups. The following photo shows a stall organized by a family that has set up its own business selling different types of *pitha*, butter, *ghee* and other sweets from Bangladesh, as well as clothes and costume jewellery. Many families and associations in Venice organize the sale of food, sometimes in homes and sometimes through catering services, as well as the tailoring of clothes or the buying and selling of clothes and other objects from India, Bangladesh and Pakistan, as a woman from Old Dhaka told us while managing her stall.

Finally, as Khan told us:

> People demand dignity, we can't pray or have an after-school party in a garage, and [we also demand] more social security. (Khan)

5. Adolescents and 'second generations'

The second theme to emerge from the interviews was young people and the so-called second generation. The gap between the various associations present in the area has become apparent, as well as the wishes of the family. In some cases, for example, there is a clash between parent's desire for their adult children to have arranged marriages, and the desires of those children. Some mothers have also asked for a space where they can meet to discuss issues related to their growth, any doubts they have about childcare, issues of sexual and reproductive health, and above all mutual support in particularly difficult situations, including 'help with badly behaved teenagers' or for teenagers who 'use drugs or other substances'.

Jahid, a father of two children aged 13 and 16, told us that he was very worried about the increasing availability of cheap drugs at his children's school.

Sahira, the sister of a boy who uses drugs and lives in a children's home, told us of her concerns in relation to this topic. She stressed a need to inform the Bangladeshi community that there are addiction services available to young people where they can detox and get free support:

> My advice is to organise courses with mothers on how to educate or help teenagers. Now in Mestre and Marghera it is mostly Bengali teenagers aged 13/14 years old who go down the wrong path, like drugs, they start to make trouble, to steal things, they join baby gangs. I have never seen them, but there are many families who are suffering because of it, their children are going down the wrong path, and they don't know what to do. Like in Bangladesh, when you take drugs there is a centre and the person is sent there for treatment. They don't know that there is also a centre here, SERT. We have to find a way to explain to them what it is. (Sahira)

A second sub-theme emerged in relation to young people, which was the maintenance of their mother tongue. Parents are torn between giving priority to Italian and favouring the teaching of English as a language that allows for different social exchanges in different parts of the world. People regularly pointed out in the interviews that 'English is spoken everywhere, not like Italian, which is only spoken here'. While Bangla is often forgotten because it does not promote social integration in the area, some argued it should be maintained because it is the language of family, of grandparents, and of social contacts if they want to return to their country of origin, as Tamina told us:

> It was also very important for us to work with the Bengali language to connect with our roots. I took my daughter to Bangladesh when she was two years old, but living here she had no idea of the Bangla language. Living there with other people, she understood it. It is important for children to keep a tradition and be connected to their roots. They have inheritances there, relatives. If something happens, they should be able to speak. (Tamina)

Other parents, such as Sabera, argued that since many families in Bangladesh now speak English, 'perhaps it would be better to teach only English and not Bangla, as even the grandparents definitely know how to speak English' (Sabera).

With regard to the role of parents, and in particular the lack of social support for helping adolescents in their personal and educational development, some mothers expressed concern that they could not help their children with their homework. In addition to their limited knowledge of the Italian language, they said there were differences between Italy and Bangladesh in the teaching methodologies and tools used, such as the use of a diary. Epa, who is mother to two teenagers, told us:

> What I learned in Bangladesh doesn't matter so much here. I try to help my son with his homework, but he says I have a different accent [when she speaks Italian to her son to help him with his primary school homework]. So, I try to help but it's difficult. For children it's easier to learn, they learn Italian at school, they go to school. For us mothers it's not, we stay at home and there is no training. We would like to have more courses. You never finish learning the language.

In addition to the diary, the electronic register and notices are other tools that are unfamiliar to the parents:

> We don't know about notices and homework. Mothers don't look at the diary at home. This is something we have to change, but we didn't know we had to look at the agenda. (Meri)

On the question of which language Bangladeshi mothers should use when raising bilingual children in Venice, including in families with disabilities, we refer to other studies by Tonioli (2020a).

We conclude this empirical section by highlighting the request of some families for more social support in after-school programmes organized ad hoc for secondary school students and after-school programmes and homework clubs organized by the many Bangladeshi communities in the area. According to statistics provided to us by the Municipality of Venice, 98% of the students attending the Save The Children homework centre in Marghera and 99% of the students attending the after-school centre run by a parish of volunteers in Mestre are Bangladeshi. Some mothers complained that their children are taught according to what they called 'Western methodologies', which is the reason that they need after-school programmes or extra support for their studies. Sending children to after-school clubs are especially widespread among the middle classes in Bangladesh, often acting as a status symbol. Because after-school programmes are often full, many parents send their children to informally organized homework clubs in garages or less 'dignified' spaces.

6. Social and health issues

The first point we would like to address is that of disability, which has been discussed in previous research in the city of Venice (Tonioli 2020b) and is still very much felt by families with children with disabilities. On the one hand, they express the desire to be able to feel more carefree and experience moments of happiness in Italian courses aimed at parents with children with disabilities, such as art therapy courses, or in self-help groups where they can meet for coffee, as Amina and Sonali told us:

> I was able to laugh freely, which is not always possible for us. I live in an environment where I don't feel so happy, and I have few opportunities to find a place where I can feel free and have fun. For other mothers this is also an important point, to be free and carefree and to laugh. (Amina)

> We are mothers with disabled children, and we can't relate to other mothers, and we are afraid that someone will say something about our child, and it might not be nice. When we are with a group of mothers with disabilities, we feel freer. Our child is special and so are we. (Sonali)

As we know from the participants in the research, there is still a strong social taboo around the issue of disability. It is often considered to be the mother's fault, a divine punishment or her being tested against the divine commandments. Despite the medical explanations and awareness-raising activities carried out in the Venice area, with ad hoc courses, theatrical performances and meetings in schools on the subject, many families with disabled children tell us that they feel doubly vulnerable: they have to move to a new area, where they have to learn the language and the social and health system; and

they are excluded from social life, from renting from their compatriots, and from their children playing with other children of the same age. One father told us:

> We are different, on Sundays we leave [the city]. I take my children to Lake Garda, to the mountains, to Jesolo, but I don't stay here with my community. My son has a slight mental handicap, but he is not accepted. People look at his mother with disapproval; we find it difficult to share accommodation and many people still believe that disability is contagious. (Md, father of 2 children)

Often the wishes and aspirations of parents with children with disabilities are divided between feelings of guilt, the desire to return to their country of origin, the fear of being excluded from the country and their families, and the hope of a better future in Italy, despite the difficulties they encounter in relation to social inclusion even in the many Bangladeshi communities. Some families seem to have created a self-supporting sub-community of Bangladeshi people with children with disabilities.

Another issue that arose in the interviews, was how important some women felt it was to learn more about, and thus become more familiar with, some topics that they described as 'taboo', such as menstruation, conception, childbirth, and infertility. Some women told us that they had attended Italian courses where midwives explained issues such as contraceptive methods, but also how and when to have intimate relations with their husbands, and that they had benefited from this and had afterwards enjoyed their intimate relations more.

> I had no idea how everything worked, especially pregnancy, I didn't know how a baby was born. It is very helpful for new mothers to know things [. . .]. Talking about intimate things, feeling ashamed, is a cultural thing for Bangladeshis. There is no way to overcome [shame], but by attending these classes they get used to expressing and coping well with these issues. (Fany, mother of 1 girl)

> One message that I really liked was that in this course the midwives explained the importance of giving information before menstruation, because it doesn't happen to them. Girls know that they are going to get it, but they don't know what happens and what to do. As it is something intimate, mothers are shy to talk to girls, sometimes they leave it to older sisters or grandparents, but here they said that the mother can do it, I liked that idea. (Sumaira, mother of 2 girl)

Other women told us that some of the messages given by social workers or midwives were too 'strong' for them. Nesa told us:

> We are here to serve our husbands' dinner when they come home from work. We came to Italy to support them. I agree to listen to what you have to say but then bear in mind that I will choose how to reinterpret the messages that I find too Western. Other women may not be able to do that, and some families could be ruined as a result.

This section ends by examining the different educational practices and expectations of schools and families regarding the development and care of children aged 0–6. Loneliness felt by mothers often has an impact on their children's development, including their language development, peer relationships, and play. For this reason, various initiatives are being developed in Venice in collaboration with Bangladeshi associations, schools and Bangladeshi YouTubers. These initiatives aim to disseminate culturally sensitive messages, provide guidance on multilingual education and parenting in migration contexts, and highlight the importance of creating opportunities for dialogue, peer interaction and play among children.

Many parents are aware of the differences in social and cultural expectations, particularly regarding children's autonomy, as Rokaya's account illustrates.

> We realised that the children here have to learn to be independent, for example to put on their jackets and shoes by themselves, but they're not used to it [. . .] At home they want to be fed and when they eat by themselves it takes them a long time to finish their meal. Sometimes when I put the plate of rice on the bed and tell her to eat by herself, my daughter screams and throws the plate at me. But then I know she eats by herself at school. I know they have to learn to do it themselves, but I know I'm a good mother and I have to help her. (Rokaya, mother of a young girl)

The social work that takes place between families and schools is geared towards the well-being of children. It is therefore explained that there is an awareness of the different educational practices between school and family and an attempt is made to compromise, such as eating with your hands at school from time to time and eating alone at home from time to time.

7. Conclusion

As we have seen, the Bangladeshi diaspora in Italy, and in particular in Venice, is characterized by an attempt to overcome situations of marginalization and isolation, bridge divisions between cultures, and to find a new social and global dimension. In order to define this dimension, it is necessary to reclaim concepts such as social inequalities, social justice, civil rights, and to negotiate new educational practices in migration that lead to a global respect for the multiple identities of global citizens. According to UNESCO (2018), we could orient our final reflection towards pathways of education for global citizenship. Therefore, by making a positive contribution to it, we can also influence change at regional, national and local levels.

Global citizenship education programmes can promote a sense of belonging to global citizenship through school, in the community, at the level of social policies and also in extracurricular activities for minors, such as afterschool programmes. Active mutual listening is necessary to find solutions

that are shared by all citizens and that promote harmony and social balance in the well-being of minors, especially the most vulnerable in society.

In an interconnected world, it is essential that different traditions listen to each other and seek common solutions that can meet the needs of all citizens, respecting diversity while seeking a balance that promotes interrelations, interactions, social harmony, and the common good. As Hall (1992) affirmed and Zeitlyn (2015) subsequently elaborated on, citizens' identities are complex interactions of 'contingent factors that vary across space and time. Intersections between the global and the local, physical and social space and time, create a complex web of influences' and can affect the definition and formation of plural and transnational identities in a global society.

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