



# Bodies at Work, Work on Bodies: Migrant Bodies, Wage Labour, and Family Reunification in Italy

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## Abstract

The article focuses on the experience of the family reunification process through which Bangladeshi migrant men bring their wives and children to Italy, analysing the links between this experience and the everyday lives and bodies of the applicants, which are shaped by their work as wage labourers. From a collection of in-depth interviews among 30 middle to upper middle-class Bangladeshi migrant men, the article explores the meanings assumed by work before and after family reunification and the impact this has on the disciplining of migrant bodies and the organization of the everyday life of applicant migrant men, the manner in which their bodies are put to work and the impact this has on their health and the symbolic meanings of entrance into industrial factory work in Italy.

**Keywords** Bangladeshi migrants · Family reunification · Migrant body · Broken bodies · Wage labour

## Introduction

This article focuses on the experience of the family reunification process through which Bangladeshi migrant men bring their family members to Italy, analysing the links between this experience and the daily life and the body of the applicants,<sup>1</sup> which are shaped by their work as wage labourers.

In the context of ethnic and migration studies, migrant family reunification has progressively assumed more and more importance (Ambrosini et al. 2014; Bailey and Boyle 2004; Kofman 2004; Morris 2015; Paparusso et al. 2017; Ramirez et al. 2007). It constitutes a migratory and familial strategy within the wider social circle (Mooney 2006) as well as one of the main channels adopted by migrants for rebuilding part of their familial and emotional life (Della Puppa 2014; Shaw and Charsley 2006).

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This process should be defined as a gendered experience, as it would seem to be processed differently both emotionally and practically by men and women (Charsley 2005; Della Puppa 2014; Skrbiš 2008), in accordance with gendered normative social constructions that assign different roles and identities on the basis of gender.

It should be emphasized that despite the official rhetoric that gives priority to economic migration, the largest migratory category in the vast majority of European countries continues to be that of family reunification (Castles and Miller 2009). But, at the same time, it should be also emphasized that labour migration and family-related migration are closely interlinked, especially due to the policies that regulate this process, which subordinate family reunification to the work of the first-migrant (Bonizzoni 2009; Morris 2015). This link, obviously, has strong repercussions on the organization of the everyday life of first-migrants who apply for reunification, on the meaning attributed to their wage labour, on the social construction of their corporeality and their relationships with their bodies.

Reflection on the body and embedded identity has traditionally taken a central position in social theory (Cregan 2006; Freund 1988; Schilling 1993; Turner 1984). The body can also be seen as a site of gendered experiences, and consequently feminist theorists have identified the body as a battlefield of emotions and social representations (Grosz 1994; Martin 1987).

The body is and has been an area of interest for migration studies. In fact, the body could be seen as a mutable site for negotiating and articulating the transnational experience of mobility (Bond 2018; Brown 2016) in the same way that migration mobility could be read as a bodily experience of travel (Ahmad 2009) or, on the other hand, as an attachment to the place of residence in the country of destination (Bjerke 2017). In Sayad's work (1999), the migrant's body is considered by the state, the social security and the biopolitical power of medicine in the context of immigration as a mere productive tool; for the migrant worker, on the other hand, the body is the means to be present in the physical and social world as well as to itself. Therefore, illness would deprive the migrant of his status and his reason for existing and staying in the context of immigration. For this reason, the migrant is unable to reconcile himself to illness and he obsessively seeks advice from the medical authorities in the hope that they can restore the lost social balance. Illness and the "broken" body of the migrant can be read as the consequence of social hierarchies and the level of subjugation of migrants in the labour market (Holmes 2013) as well as during the encounter between asylum officers and asylum applicant (Puumala and Kynsilehto 2016) or as a sort of stigma, a real sign of his social subalternity (Sanò 2018). In order words, they adapt and retrain their bodies, often under great pressure, to meet the demands of social institutions in the country of destination (Brown 2016).

Furthermore, the migrant body is also stigmatized because of its somatic markers (Ahmed 2007) and, in particular, the body of the elderly migrant constitutes the locus of a double stigma: both because of the already mentioned somatic markers and because of the fact that they are frail elderly people (Gunaratnam 2013; Raghuram et al. 2011). This stigmatization takes place in public spaces (Puwar 2004) and workplaces (Branker 2017; Kosny et al. 2017), especially in the health and care professions (Birdsell Bauer and Cranford 2016; Della Puppa 2012; Gunaratnam 2013; Smith 1980; Rivett 1998). Within these areas of the labour market, the body could be conceptualized as 'an assemblage with many

elements, some of which are stigmatized but which can nevertheless be recuperated' (Raghuram et al. 2011: (1). This 'recuperation' (Batnitzky and McDowell 2013) does not seem to happen in other areas of the labour market, e.g. in the secondary sector (Ajslev et al. 2016) as will be considered in this article. A further aspect that is rarely addressed in literature and that this article deals with is the link between the migrant's body at work and the experience of family reunification.

This article focuses on the Bangladeshi community residing in Alte Ceccato, a small town in the Province of Vicenza, next to one of the most important tannery districts in Europe. This industrial district attracted large sections of the workforce from all over the country and abroad. The area is characterized by a high percentage of migrant residents (20%), and in Alte, non-Italian citizens represent about one-third of its 6804 inhabitants, 50% of whom are from Bangladesh (and 38% of whom are women). Two points must be emphasized: first, a crucial factor for Bangladeshi settlement was the increasing number of family reunifications; second, as the first generation of *probashi*<sup>1</sup> in Italy was composed almost entirely of men (King and Knights 1994), in this phase, family reunifications are configured exclusively as 'male' reunifications (Della Puppa 2014).

Taking this region as a case study, the article has three areas of inquiry. First, it investigates the meanings assumed by work before and after the reunification of migrant families and the impact of work on the disciplining of migrant bodies and the organization of the daily life of applicant migrant men. Second, it explores the manner in which putting applicant migrant bodies to work affects their health. Third, the article observes the symbolic meanings of entrance into industrial factory work and wage labour in Italy.

After a section on fieldwork methods and a necessary analytical overview of Italian legislation on family reunification, five main sections will follow. These sections present the empirical findings, corresponding to the sequence of research questions posed above.

## Methods

This article is the result of wider research aimed at deepening understanding of the social construction of masculinity during the migration experience and family reunification from Bangladesh to Italy. The empirical material consists of 40 in-depth interviews with Bangladeshi migrant men who have completed their family reunification in Italy. The sampling carried out was not a statistical one, rather a collection of qualitative interviews as it was considered that this could better explore the meanings that the interviewees attribute to their experiences in relation to their social background in the country of origin and reconstruction of migration path, the family reunification process in Italy, their work and family life in Italy, and their concerns and plans for the future. The in-depth interview was chosen over other methodological tools because it was considered a more suitable way to create the confidence and privacy necessary to build a relationship of trust and for collecting sensitive representations and experiences related to personal life.

<sup>1</sup> In Bangla, 'external inhabitants' or 'those who went abroad', 'emigrants'.

All interviews were conducted with male household heads aged from their 30s to 50s, and who remain in low-status jobs in Italy, despite their mainly urban educated middle to upper middle-class origins in Bangladesh. In fact, the work they do in Italy is something ‘they would never dream of doing in their home country’ (Zeitlyn 2006, 32). This is consistent with the social background of the Bangladeshis who arrived in Italy between the 1990s and the 2000s, as well as with the stratification processes of Bangladesh migration throughout the world, in which the lower classes migrate to the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait) and the middle classes invested their capital in the bid to reach Europe (Della Puppa 2014; King and Knights 1994; Zeitlyn 2006).

I collected the interviews of Bangladeshi men both because I was interested in exploring the ‘male’ point of view on migration and the experience of family reunification and because I was interested in the experiences of the first-migrant applicants as the gender that characterizes Bangladeshi migration to Southern Europe is, in most cases, a man (Della Puppa 2014). I recognise that adopting this generational and gender perspective has limitations and that reunited women’s and children’s “voices” could have been under-represented; however, this does not imply gender blindness (any more than focusing only on women would do), and I remain sensitive to gender and generational dynamics in my following analysis.

The interviews were collected in Alte Ceccato at the home of respondents or in public establishments (bars and cafes) and conducted in English and Italian, according to the interviewees’ wishes. The words of the interviewees have been reported as faithfully as possible, taking into account, *in any case*, a profound work of interpretation and sometimes rewriting (Bourdieu 1993). Any grammatical inaccuracies are due to the interview being reported verbatim.

I use the term ‘applicant’ (e.g. ‘applicant husband’) to identify the family member who brought his family members to Italy through family reunification, the term ‘reunited family member’ (e.g. ‘reunited wife’) to identify those arrived in Italy, the term ‘first-migrant’ to identify the family member who first migrated, opening the family ‘migration chain’ (often coinciding with the applicant family member). Interviewees’ names are fictitious.

## **Family Reunification Policies in Italy: Between Socio-Working Discipline and Civic Stratification and ‘Forced Nuclearization’**

In Italy, the legislation relating to family reunification is Law 189 of 2002, which requires an income and accommodation adequate to meet the legal requirements for the reunification of the family members listed in the application, and sets out requirements concerning the people with whom the applicant can ask for reunification (Paparusso et al. 2017).

With regard to the economic requirements, this law refers to ‘a minimum annual income from legitimate sources not less than the annual social allowance increased by half of its amount for each family member to be reunited’. With regard to the housing requirements, it refers to ‘an accommodation which assures the minimum standards provided by regional law for social housing’. Family members eligible for reunification are identified as those who are ‘not legally separated and no [spouses] younger than 18

years [old]; underage children [...]; adult dependent children, if it can be clearly and objectively shown that they cannot provide by their own [efforts] for their essential needs of life because of a medical condition that causes total disability; dependent parents, if they have no other children in the country of origin, or [parents] over 60, if other children are unable to support them for documented serious health reasons’.

Through these parameters, a device for socio-working disciplining of migrants is constructed. It is intended to promote the production and working capacity of the migrant applicant, who, *de facto*, plays the role of ‘sponsor’ for reunited relatives (Strasser et al. 2009). At the same time, it contributes to creating a real ‘obsession’ for paperwork amongst applicants or, rather, an ‘obsession’ for the requirements needed for the paperwork: an appropriate residence permit and, as mentioned, an employment contract that can guarantee an adequate income and the availability of a sufficient standard of accommodation. The intersections of these parameters and the ‘ethno-national’ segmentation of labour (Fullin and Reyneri 2011) and housing market structure the right to family life along national, ethnic, gender, and class lines. Lydia Morris (2003) and other authors (Bertolani et al. 2013; Bonizzoni 2012; Kraler 2010; Schweitzer 2015) use the lens of civic stratification (Lockwood 1996) to study reunited migrant families and the family reunification process. In fact, the different types of applicant’s residence permit (for family reasons, for waged work, for self-employment, for seasonal work, for study, for political asylum or the EC residence permit for long-term residents) and the different periods for which they are valid (from some months to indefinite leave to remain) contribute to the heterogeneous systems of opportunity for family reunification. It should be added the stratification is due to the different types of citizenship, that is, to the fact that the applicant has national citizenship, European citizenship or is a ‘Third Country National’ (TCN). What has rarely been considered is that, even among the TCN, there is stratification between those who come from a central nation of the ‘World system’—such as Switzerland or the USA—for whom there are no particular legislative restrictions, or from a ‘periphery’—like Bangladesh—for whom an entry visa is issued after great difficulty (Della Puppa 2015; 2018a). Finally, it should be also underlined, that the Italian labour market is characterized by an ‘ethnic’ and gender segmentation that segregates migrants into specific niches, the so-called ‘3 D Jobs’, and channels migrant women into specific sectors, especially care work and work in the low-skilled tertiary sector (Fullin and Reyneri 2011). This involves a high level of job insecurity and a very low salary which, therefore, further stratifies their trajectories of family reunification (Della Puppa 2015; 2018a).

Furthermore, Italian legislation identifies a spouse and minor children as the only ‘legitimate’ family members eligible for reunification, while the possibility of reuniting with elderly parents is severely limited and those with other relatives are not included. Therefore, these policies produce a process that could be defined as a ‘forced nuclearisation’ of the migrant family (Della Puppa 2018a; see also Bragg and Wong 2016). In so doing, they considerably limit the field of ‘legitimate’ dependencies and forms of solidarity within the migrant family (Bonizzoni 2012). The imposition of the ‘nuclear family paradigm’ (Mustasaari 2015) in the country of destination makes reunited families more vulnerable, for example, with regard to the lack of extended family support in terms of economic backing, co-habitation, and the sharing of care responsibilities. This may imply the emergence of new mobilities, further separations, and transnationalisation. ‘Transnational families’, family units whose members live in

different countries, is an emerging aspect of migration dynamics (Baldassar and Merla 2014; Parreñas 2005; Ryan 2011). As attention is particularly focused on the transnational distance between adult parents and children, the literature has largely analysed distance parenting and care (Ambrosini 2014; Bonizzoni and Boccagni 2013; Carling et al. 2012; Kilkey and Merla 2014), with an emphasis on the implications of the mother-child relationship (Avila and Hondagneu Sotelo 1997; Fresnoza-Flot 2009). As Parreñas (2001) argues, the ‘pain of transnational parenthood’ is a constituent element of migrant women’s identities. Within the analysis of transnational families, migrant women have been observed as mothers, transnational carers and, at the same time, breadwinners for their family members. However, migrant fathers, despite the distance from their family contexts, have only rarely been identified for their transnational family experience and their role as distance carers. In this regard, some important contributions, looking at male migration as an experience that redefines the identities of men and their relations with the families left behind, must be mentioned. Parreñas (2008), for example, by observing the family through an ‘emotional lens’ and the intersections between genders and generations, analyses the suffering and embarrassment associated with the loss of confidence between fathers and children. In contrast, Bustamante and Alemán (2007) point out that fathers succeed in preserving their close relationship with their children and overcoming their physical distance to some extent through transnational caring practices similar to those of migrant mothers. The ‘pain of transnational parenthood’ and caring at a distance involves men even more in relation to forced ‘re-transnationalised’ families (Della Puppa 2018a). This often happens with many reunited families in Mediterranean Europe who face new separations, as a result of further migration to Northern Europe. Therefore, especially in the context of the economic crisis, family ‘nuclearisation’ as a result of reunification policies may make reunited families more vulnerable and ready to separate and transnationalise once more (Ibidem). Therefore, within this further experience of mobility, as we will see below, the body will become the migrant’s real homeland.

## **Work for a House, for Reunification and after Reunification**

If sociological research on family reunification in Italy has shown that, generally, the most difficult requirements in achieving reunification are both the working and housing requirements (Bertolani et al. 2013; Bonizzoni 2009), the specific context of Alte Ceccato, in the wider productive framework of the Vicenza tannery district, deserves special clarification.

The massive presence of migrant workers in the town, in fact, is directly connected to the wide availability of employment that the industrial district was able to guarantee between the late 1980s and the mid-2000s. The possession of a valid employment contract, at that time, was never an obstacle for respondents; their presence in Vicenza was due precisely to the possibility of easy entrance into the local labour market. On the contrary, it was the housing market that was not then ready to receive these pioneers of immigration into the district. In fact, Italy had recently transformed from a country of emigration to a country of immigration and, especially in the small local areas, outside large urban centers, the native population, unprepared for a multicultural society, displayed feelings of hostility,

and underlying racism towards the migrants, especially if their somatic characteristics made their ‘otherness’ unequivocal compared to the native Italian population. The situation will change partially in the following years, with the quantitative increase and the qualitative rooting of immigration, through the process of family reunification as well as the birth and socialization of the second generations. But, during those years, landlords in the area were still reluctant to rent an apartment to migrant workers, who then turned to the partially abandoned town of Alte Ceccato where there were many old and empty houses available to purchase. The main obstacle to reunification was in fact accommodation. Overcoming this hurdle involves optimizing the productive capacities of applicants in order to meet the levels of income and standard of accommodation required by the policies:

They want income, with few income you can not [...]. When I asked to the people of the Prefecture how to do the family reunification, they told me: ‘Keep on working and bring here three payslips for next month, then the next month, and again the next month. Three payslips. At least 900 euro every payslip. If so, you will be able to apply’. But my payslip depends on how much work the cooperative where I work give me to do. Then I went to my cooperative, I explained my problem and said: ‘Give me a lot of work or I will not be able to bring my wife’... So they sent me, there, there to work a lot... they make me work a lot and prepared three payslips with more than 900 Euros. [...] It takes me four years. Four years of suffering. (Rana)

If for Rana, and many like him, the time away from his wife and the arduous process that led to family reunification are described as ‘years of suffering’, for many others; the same legislative barriers are not perceived as an institutional violence and are not described as being accompanied by the same suffering that, for example, is associated with the stories of humiliation experienced in the workplace, as will be shown below. In fact, Italian migration policies between the 1990s and 2000s, although becoming increasingly restrictive, had not yet reached the rigidities of the following decade. Moreover, at the beginning of the 2000s, a gradual reversal took place in the productive and housing trends in the tannery district that influenced *probashi* family reunification. Distrust of migrants had been tempered, and therefore access to housing became easier. On the other hand, opportunities for employment and obtaining a permanent contract begin to decline because of the economic crisis (Bonifazi and Marini 2014).

Sharif, who has delayed his family reunification, lived through the transition from having ‘a job without a house’ to having ‘a house without a job’ exactly at the time when he was trying to be reunited with his wife and son, which put the whole project at risk:

Seven years ago this crisis began. I could not find work, always working through agencies: three months, two months, every now and then I returned to Bangladesh for another two or three months and then again in Italy and my wife always angry: ‘When you take me to Italy? When you bring me there?’ Then, I finally found a permanent job in a factory and I thought that finally I could take my wife, I thought: ‘I do not spend money to go to Bangladesh for holidays, but I will save money for a big house here, for rent’. She said: ‘Okay, do not come now’ because

I need the money here, Italy. [...] When they made me a permanent contract I immediately phoned my wife! Then, in the factory I heard that there was an empty flat. Before there was another family, but left it, so I entered. This house is enough big for reunification. (Sharif)

Family reunification, in addition to having induced Sharif to act in a manner that has already been called the ‘self-discipline of the migrant worker’, also necessitated a narrowing of his social life in order to accumulate the necessary resources for family life in Italy:

Just before the reunification, I had gone out a bit less, because I rented the house, I cannot always go out to meet my friends and sharing a coffee, I had to save money for my family to make them to come here. I did not go to Bangladesh because it would have meant expending money and I want my wife to come here with my child. [...] I did not go out so much with my friends. (Sharif)

However, in the framework of migratory policies that closely link the residence permit of migrants with their job contracts, work constitutes the central element in the legitimate presence of migrants and their families. Migrants fulfil the conditions for reunification through work in the factory, day after day, shift after shift, overtime after overtime and, once reunited with their partners and their children, are the only ones responsible for the material conditions of the nuclear family:

I am a foreigner. Me, my family, we are foreigners, and it all depends on my work. If something happens or something go bad... where do we go? What do we do? Then we will not be neither here [in Italy], nor there [in Bangladesh]. So I am so worry. For example, if I lose my job or I get seriously ill, all family is in the middle of the road. (Shantu)

The work of the migrant, therefore, constitutes the premise of his family’s life in Italy, and the presence of his family in Italy is, in fact, an effect of his body at work. However, the realization of family reunification transforms the relationship between the migrant and his work. Before bringing his wife to Italy, he is ‘dominated’ by the ‘obsession’ with meeting the material requirements for reunification, hence with the accumulation of financial resources and finding suitable accommodation. Most of his daily life is devoted to work; in fact, his time is transformed into working time and his capital—his body—is invested solely in production (Wacquant 2007). After reunification, however, among his family responsibilities, there is also the sharing of emotions with his wife and children. Thus, the *probashi* still continues to support the family with his salary, but he is not just mere labour and a temporary guest worker anymore. Listening to his own needs for ‘emotional stabilization’, he tries to devote more time to his family life (Ahmad 2009):

I work in tannery for more than ten years. I work from six in the morning to seven and a half, eight, even nine in the evening. I told him [to the supervisor]: ‘Look, I cannot stay up to eight and a half, nine, I have a family, I have children, I can finish at six, twelve hours’. (Shoeeb)

The working dimension of the life of migrants also changes because of new family responsibilities, imposing on them a greater economic stability, which puts an end to the intense horizontal mobility that until the 2000s characterized their working careers.

### **Some Order in their Life**

Many interviewees describe their daily life before reunification as irregular and chaotic, provisional and precarious, because of the absence of an emotional point of reference, a routine marked by constraints, family timetables and responsibilities, and often comfortable home. On the one hand, in fact, in the lives of the first-generation migrants without a family, there is an anomie linked to the lack of marital bonds and parental responsibilities, an anomie which is expressed in public through a social behaviour perceived as disordered and inadequate. On the other hand, there is disorganization in the domestic sphere that characterizes their living conditions and increases their sense of uncertainty. Before the arrival of his wife, the *probashi* lives with other compatriots more as a matter of economic convenience than from a desire for company. Therefore, his roommates may not be people he likes. The shared accommodation often has insufficient space compared to the high number of tenants, resulting in a forced intimacy and limited privacy:

Before, my life changed a lot: first went home one, two, three: always out with friends. Now I have to get home early because she alone, she's waiting for me, I have to go back. Day I work, evening we go out together. Before I ate at eight, 10, 11. Now at 12 I eat lunch, at eight I eat dinner. Settled. Regular. [...] Another thing when there is family I think. 'This month I pay that bill, then I save money, for the future, when the problem comes I have to [find] solution for family'. [Instead] When you're single you do not care. (Kazi)

Life needs stability. If I live with friends in their home, that's not good, that's not okay, I do not like it. I had no house, now I have the house and I live alone, but before I did not have my home I do not like to be with other people. Not regular. I like regular life but I lived with other people. Like in one room two or three people, me and my friend. I do not like this life. [...] Life with mess is not good for me, now it's OK. (Sharif)

Existential solitude and suffering from a lack of affection can lead migrants to deviant behaviours and practices in relation to religious and community norms, including behaviours and practices they stigmatize themselves, such as the use of alcohol:

Before to bring here my wife I passed my time, with other friends, at that time I was often drunk, drinking beer or hard drinks in the weekend. But after bring my wife I don't drink anymore. I'm living another life. Before, in weekend, I had nothing to do, just pass my time in bar drinking; now I spend the time with her, in another environment. Before I was bored and lonely. Everybody change like me. (Tanvir)

Family reunification, the proximity of the wife and the presence of the children provide an effective discipline on the husband (Wolkowitz 2002), as they bring some order into his life and give meaning to his work and his days.

The desire to reunite also arises from the necessity of daily organization and conciliation between productive and reproductive working time, from the push towards an adaptation of the daily routine to an ideal model of family and conjugal planning, and also economic and work-related planning. This is often a model based on the fact that the migrant has to assume the responsibility of being the main family wage earner through factory work, while the reunited wives have to take care of the house and other ‘feminine’ things (Donaldson et al. 2009; Riach and Cutcher 2014).

The unequal distribution of household activities along gender lines does not seem to be something worth preserving in itself or a strategy to maintain a supposed ‘cultural identity’, but instead it is the tangible proof of the positive success of the migratory and reunification process, a way to prove themselves to be ‘a family like the others’, a family that adapts itself to a nuclear model in a new life setting. Sometimes, however, the sharing of domestic duties also becomes, in its ‘normal banality’, a pleasant conjugal moment in an orderly and structured life routine:

Morning at five I have the alarm clock. Because now I start working the morning at six o'clock. Half an hour to prepare myself, drink coffee, my wife prepares something, at five and a half I leave home, at six I start working, I come back home at six in the evening, eat something, then with children or with my wife somewhere or sometime we like to watch television. As an example I tell you yesterday: yesterday [Saturday] I come home we do the cleaning, everything, then go market, bought something, after we went to the square. (Rahaman)

As already pointed out, the first generation of probashi in Italy belonged to the middle and upper middle class in Bangladesh, as did their wives, who they married through the homogamic system of arranged marriages. Therefore, in Bangladesh, for middle-class women, exemption from waged work constitutes a status symbol and this class distinction is thus reproduced in the context of immigration and reunification. In addition, as in other Mediterranean European countries, Italy has no welfare and childcare provision to help families reconcile work-family time. At the same time, it has already been explained that migrant families do not have extended family circles, because reunification policy forcibly ‘nuclearises’ the reunited family. Consequently, in Italy, reunited women have to take care of their children, of school age or pre-school age, while their applicant husbands and ‘sponsors’ are busy in the factories.<sup>2</sup>

Family reunification, therefore, leads to a widening of the social network outside the workplace and the circle of their fellow countrymen. In fact, after reunification, the migrant must meet not ‘just’ his own material and emotional needs but also those of a family unit—in which there is also his wife and, sometimes, his children. This means a greater interaction with public offices and

<sup>2</sup> It should also be mentioned that field work allowed to record cases of working women.

services, doctors and the NHS, schools, teachers, and native families, and shops run by natives, as well as presumably a change of house and new relations with new neighbours. In Shafiur words:

When she arrived everything changed: I have to think a lot of things, many many things, bought a bigger house with a mortgage, after work I do food shopping, stay with her, accompany her to the doctor, many things... meetings at school with the teacher, bring children to play soccer, school party... because I am part of an intercultural association at school... everything changed, a different life. (Shafi)

At the same time, the home sphere eventually becomes a space in which to relax and regenerate, the time when he is not working becomes a time of normality in which the migrant can feel like himself, the family now represents a new 'haven in a heartless world' (Lasch 1977) and migrants begin to feel at home in Alte Ceccato.

If, as mentioned, with reunification the house becomes the centre of affection for men, the place where the family is found after work; for the wives, however, the walls of the house can turn out to be a more or less golden cage. In fact, it must be emphasized that the experience of reunification also involves contradictory and ambivalent dimensions, problematic and distressing aspects that cross the life of the reunited couple along gender lines. In fact, the migration of wives as a result of family reunification means separating them from their family and social networks in the country of origin. From this viewpoint, for the first-migrant husbands, family reunification can act as an antidote to the suffering and loneliness of the migration experience. For reunited wives, however, especially in the initial phase, it can constitute an imposition and an experience of loneliness, as reported by the husbands themselves:

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)

Therefore, family reunification also involves a 'dark side' made up of the suffering and frustrations experienced by the wives, subjected to the loss of social status inherent in south-north migration, torn from their sources of affection in Bangladesh, moved to a small grey town next to an industrial area, in a country where they do not know the language, where their only point of reference is a husband with whom they do not have a close relationship, as they have known him for only a short period when he returned to Bangladesh on holiday and their marriage was an arranged marriage (Della Puppa 2018b).

## **Bodies at Work, Work on Bodies**

The immigration policies and expectations of the target society make the ill health of migrants the element that reveals their real existential condition and social life, their reason for being, which is the labour force they embody. That is how Shantu perceives

it and explains: ‘I’m so afraid because, for example, if I get hurt or sick, without work, then we’re all in the middle of the street’. Ill health and the inability to work, in fact, make the migrant’s presence in the host society a ‘social scandal’ (Sayad 1999). More importantly, if he is surrounded by family members, their presence is only allowed as ‘granted’ relief to the first-migrant who works and is responsible for working. Reunification, supporting his family, and the legitimacy of his presence are therefore enshrined in the body of the *probashi*, which is constrained, forced to adapt, exposed to danger and broken, through work:

It is a chemical factory, when I’m working [there are] different kind of chemical issue. The chemical is harming me and my body. Also some people are already infected by the chemical some of them get cancer. Even small accidents. But there is no choice. What we will do? We have to work. (Mukul)

I work in tannery and I have a thyroid disease. [...] Where I work, it is normal, there is pollution in the factory. The doctor said that this disease is so widespread where I work. But I do not talk to anyone, because I do not care, because... I have no choice, you know... then anyway I feel good. (Musharaf)

The socio-working discipline of migrants and their capacity to narrow their social life, therefore, assumes the function of an ascetic practice in the form of bodily suffering and exemplary conduct, rites that assign a new identity to the migrant (Bourdieu 1982), transforming the condition of the ‘lone migrant’ into that of the ‘migrant with family’.

The interviewees represent themselves as bearing ‘hyper-responsibility’ as the head of the household who must of necessity take care of family members in Italy. He decided to reunite the family and now he is the one who must bear the responsibilities associated with it. Consequently, if, for any reason, the chance of meeting these obligations should be missed in Alte Ceccato, he must rebuild the family’s life in another context through his own resources.

In addition to the economic crisis that has forced migrant workers out of the Italian labour market (Bonifazi and Marini 2014) and is one of the reasons that migrant workers are forced to embark on new mobility in Europe (Andrijasevic and Sacchetto 2016) by exploiting the Italian passport they have acquired in the meantime (Della Puppa and Sredanovic 2016), there is also the impossibility of continuing to work in the particularly demanding jobs in which migrants are usually occupy until retirement (Friberg 2012; Carter et al. 1996).

Among many examples of this kind, we mention the experience of Licu, a tanning worker, who for more than 20 years has worked in that part of the leather working process where the raw material comes into contact with the acids. This work has heavily compromised his health:

The doctor told me that after 20 years, I can no longer do this job or big risk. So, everything depends on health. When health is good, everything is fine, when health is not good... It is no longer possible to change everything. Because I can not go any further and I can not go back. When there is good health, it goes a little better [from the point of view] of economic progress, but when health is not good, everything is lost. What shall I do? (Licu)

The doctor suggested that he should not continue in tanning industry, as his body can no longer endure this work. According to Musharaf, however, a Bangladeshi migrant in Italy—although possessing formal citizenship—is destined to be a worker. ‘Where should I go?’ he asked me and himself too, during the interview. Within a few weeks, he found the answer. He decided to reactivate migration mobility through ‘onward migration’ (Ahrens et al. 2016; Della Puppa and King 2018; Giralt-Mas 2016; Ramos 2017; Toma and Castagnone 2015; van Liempt 2011), using the European citizenship he acquired in Italy, and to move with his family to the UK, where he hopes to support his two daughters, hoping to find a job in any sector of the labour market other than tanning and manufacturing.

Although his ‘capital-body’ is running out (Wacquant 2007), Licu cannot afford to stop working and the only way to continue to consume, invest, and work with the last remaining energy of his biological machine is to change his field of work, but in his view, this is possible only by changing the geographical setting. Overseas, he hopes to be able to find different and better work, as something other than a factory worker. The homeland to which he ‘belongs’ is therefore no longer Bangladesh, where he spent the first 20 years of life, or Italy where he spent the last 25 years and where his daughters were born. His homeland is represented by his own body, which moves where it can work.

## Symbolic Meanings of Labour and Wage

The acceptance of wage labour in Italy and the internalization of socially inscribed determinisms, (Sayad 1999) in addition to the social and hierarchical organization of factory work and new working conditions, contribute on the one hand to shatter the established social and symbolic order in which the *probashi* were organized in their former life in Bangladesh. On the other hand, these conditions contribute to the construction of a new social identity in Italy. Reunification was achieved thanks to paid work in the factory.

The *probashi*, who left Bangladesh as unmarried boys, become men, husbands, fathers, and breadwinners in Italy. The affirmation of adult status is thus reinforced through the unprecedented experience of working in the factory, upon which the pride of the ‘male who supports the family’ is built. The source of this pride is represented by the coincidence between his wage and ‘a family wage’: now, the migrant worker’s salary is not only used to send remittances to Bangladesh, but it must also meet the needs of the family in Italy. Therefore, for the migrant, a re-ordering of his position in the family takes place, referring to the context of origin as well as the destination context.

The breaking up of the ‘traditional’ order and the internalization of a new identity associated with wage labour, however, also takes shape in the new social position of the migrant. For the sons of peasant families, factory work seems to have a positive meaning: it marks an entrance into the ‘modernity of the first world’ and the abandonment of the rhythms and uncertainties of the agricultural economy (Gardner 1995). Middle-class men, however, see that this work has lowered their social status and feel undervalued.

In both cases, this is a process of ‘proletarianization’ of *probashi*. Migration has transformed those from peasant families into wage labourers and has demoted those from the urban middle class to workers. At the same time, this dynamic of redefining migrants’ personal and family identity has consequences at the transnational level. In fact, as the *probashi* in Italy are part of a dense transnational network in which expectations, social obligations and status symbols circulate and are reproduced and transformed (Della Puppa 2014; Gardner 1995; Kibria 2011; Priori 2012), the migratory success in Europe of a family member—confirmed by obtaining a regular residence permit, by having a secure home and work, by the receipt of a ‘first world’ salary and, above all, by the realization of family reunification—together with remittances received from Italy, increases the personal and family status of relatives left behind in Bangladesh. In fact, the success of the migrant contributes to the accumulation of economic and symbolic capital for his family of origin which, in turn, increases the symbolic and material resources of its individual components and family and personal honour that can be spent in the market of symbolic assets (Bourdieu 1972). The family left behind can thus face new economic investments, build a better and more solid house, free themselves from the uncertainty of agricultural rhythms, arrange more advantageous marriages for each of its members, etc.

Entrance into factory work, coinciding with arriving in Alte Ceccato, marks a shift between unemployment and employment, between a socially static nature and new upward mobility in Bangladesh, but it also facilitates escape from Italy’s shadow economy through the ability to procure a legal residence permit that is predicated on work placement. This does not simply mean an improvement in working conditions, but also involves the ability to support a family and provides an individual with the identity of a worker. Although it is a step down from their original position in Bangladesh, it represents an improvement on working illegally that is often a necessity when a migrant first arrives in Italy.

The work of first-generation migrants, having achieved reunification thus making it possible to support a family and the renewal of residence documents of his family members, becomes, as has been mentioned, the condition for the family. The working contract between the migrant and the owner of the tannery therefore links all the members of the family by symbolically becoming a contract between the migrant husband and the reunited wife, in that he guarantees the support of the family and the renewal of residence documents for family members working in the factory, and she guarantees the reproduction of his labour force through housekeeping plus emotional and caring work. That is, it seems functional to the need for reproduction of the workforce and capital. The reunification legislation formalizes this exchange between genders by meeting the productive and reproductive needs of the industrial activities. The demand for labour in the tanning district factories is answered by the desire of Bangladeshi workers to find unlimited work in order to meet the requirements for reunification, and later the need for migrant men—and in the same industries—to find support in the care and reproduction of the labour force is answered by the presence of the reunited wives. In fact, it must be underlined that, especially in the case of Bangladesh immigration to Italy, family reunification seems to strengthen the traditional division of gender roles as the first migrant and applicant—who must prove that he has a job that will support the reunited family—is, in most cases, a man (Della

Puppa 2018b). Thus, the reunited family members—especially his wife—are dependent on the first-migrant man who, de facto, plays the role of ‘sponsor’ (Della Puppa 2018a; Donaldson et al. 2009; Pease 2009; Strasser et al. 2009).

## Conclusions

In the same way as Italian policies on entrance and residence, which bind a contract of employment to the continuation of a residence permit—as the residence permit depends on having a job contract—the rules for family reunification are also set up as a means of regulating migrant work and therefore the bodies of migrant workers.

The concession of reunification, in fact, follows a worsening of the ‘normal’ discipline to which migrants in Italy are daily subjected, for whom the possibility of rebuilding part of their family and emotional dimension is intrinsically dependent on the labour force’s production capacity embodied by them.

Those who intend to reunite their family are forced to endure social and working subjugation to gain extra hours of work and square feet of living space until they meet legal requirements. The husband who wants to reunite his family must demonstrate self-denial in selling his labour and accepting any working conditions, as it is not only on this that the renewal of his residence permit depends, but also the possibility of reuniting his family members. As Sayad (1999, 2006) points out, from the point of view of the target society (but, to a great extent, also from that of the society of origin), unemployed migrants constitute an unacceptable paradox and a ‘social scandal’ so that any aspect of their existence—including the right of a family and emotional life—depends on the work of their bodies.

At the same time, however, as we have seen from the interviews of *probashi*, the presence of part of their family would result in a profound change in their lives and in the discipline that they are forced to impose on their bodies. The realization of reunification, in fact, means that the migrant has the chance to become more than simply a labour force for the benefit of the whole family and marital life. There is less daily ‘space-time’ dedicated to productive work in favour of ‘space-time’ devoted to reproductive work and, above all, to his emotional inner life. At the same time, time spent at work is reduced—by reducing overtime work, for example—in the face of changed family duties, and newly found emotional needs.

New family responsibilities, a new working routine and, above all, unprecedented emotional and family stability in the new country of residence, as well as a change in the relationship between migrants and the working sphere, also cause a change in the daily routine, in the management of daily times and living spaces and in the bodily wellbeing of the workers who reunite the family. Emotional stability is reflected in an orderly existential stability that gives new meaning to the working day and to the time spent not working, which the *probashi* would previously have experienced as temporary workers, and now experience as husbands, fathers, and family men in full enjoyment of their corporeality and affectivity (Ahmad 2009).

The work *of* the bodies of migrants who intend to achieve reunification involves work *on* the bodies of the migrants who reunite and a physical and biological usury that leads to disease. Above all, it is disease, in fact, that highlights the condition of mere biological bodies ‘forced’ to work and the inexpressible embodied paradox of the

unemployed migrant (Sayad 1999). Disease of the body does not only reveal the *atopos* condition of the migrant (Bourdieu and Wacquant 2000)—out of place everywhere, inappropriately present especially if he does not meet the productive needs of society—but also that of his reunited relatives, whose presence constitutes a reward that the migrant receives in return for his work.

Here, therefore, trapped between the need to continue using their bodies to work and the depletion of their capital-body (Wacquant 2007), *probashi* are sometimes driven to a new migration, with the intention of seeking new conditions in which to continue their work. The ability to fulfil their responsibilities as breadwinner and maintain the authority that such a role gives them in the eyes of the family is dependent on the work of the first-migrant.

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