Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

NORMA
International Journal for Masculinity Studies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rnor20

Chasing the dream: masculinity and male honour of Italian-Bangladeshi men relocating to London

Francesco Della Puppa

To cite this article: Francesco Della Puppa (2023): Chasing the dream: masculinity and male honour of Italian-Bangladeshi men relocating to London, NORMA, DOI: 10.1080/18902138.2023.2251350

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2023.2251350

Published online: 30 Aug 2023.

Submit your article to this journal

View related articles

View Crossmark data

Full Terms & Conditions of access and use can be found at
https://www.tandfonline.com/action/journalInformation?journalCode=rnor20

NORMA: INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL FOR MASCULINITY STUDIES
https://doi.org/10.1080/18902138.2023.2251350

Chasing the dream: masculinity and male honour of Italian-Bangladeshi men relocating to London

Francesco Della Puppa

Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage, Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Venice, Italy

ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the gender identity transformations of Italian-Bangladeshi men who, after first migrating from Bangladesh to Italy, then undertook a further onward migration, relocating, along with their families, to London. The paper shows the ambivalences and contradictions, in terms of male honour, involved in the new migration towards the UK. Specifically, it shows how the crossing of multiple borders, as well as their arrival and stabilisation in political-territorial contexts that were socio-historically constructed by colonialism as prestigious and wealthy areas, may increase the symbolic capital and male honour of male Bangladeshi migrants. However, if this experience increases their symbolic, gendered and social credentials, it also implies trajectories of professional, biographical, and social downgrading that compromise their image and position as 'successful' men.

ARTICLE HISTORY
Received 20 May 2023
Accepted 18 August 2023

KEYWORDS
Migrant masculinity; male breadwinner; Bangladeshi diaspora; onward migration; social mobility; honour

1. Introduction

This article analyses the social construction of the masculinities and successful identities of Bangladeshi migrant men that have experienced *multiple migration trajectories* and *multiple border crossings*. It focuses on heterosexual men whose wives have been reunited with them and who have created a nuclear family in Italy. Specifically, it answers the following research questions: How does the crossing of borders shape the masculinity of Bangladeshi migrant men? Does it increase the symbolic capital and male honour of male migrants (Hopkins, 2006) or does it imply a sense of defeat and humiliation due to migratory 'tribulations'? What symbolic meanings are associated with reaching political-territorial contexts socio-historically represented as prestigious and wealthy?

In the next section, I lay out the theoretical reference framework of the article (Section 1). This is followed by a section on fieldwork methods (Section 2). I then sketch out the background of the European context of multiple migration mobilities and the specific history of diverse waves of Bangladeshi migration to the UK and Italy (Section 3). Next, I analyse the process of the social construction of the masculinity of Italian-Bangladeshi men through their crossing of international borders, as well as biographical and family borders (Section 4). In the following section and its subsections, I analyze how the reasons behind onward migration from Italy to London and the further crossing

CONTACT Francesco Della Puppa francesco.dellapuppa@unive.it
© 2023 The Nordic Association for Research on Men and Masculinities

of geographical and political borders can be read through the lens of the search for an increase in symbolic capital (Section 5). Finally, I show the ambivalences and contradictions of male honour involved in new migration towards the UK (Section 6).

2. Border crossings and the social construction of migrant masculinity: A transnational and Bourdieusian perspective

In recent literature, the dimension of border crossing has been explored in relation to refugees and asylum seekers (Della Puppa & Sanò, 2021) and to the police, institutional and state violence that they suffer (Isakjee, Davies, Obradovic-Wochnik, & Augustova, 2020) through practices of border control and the governance of migrant bodies by technological infrastructures (Parmar, 2020). This is part of a broader debate at the intersection of border studies and migration studies, which include the discourses and processes of the racial construction of Europe and of non-European otherness (De Genova, 2017; Rumford, 2008; 2013), and the pervasiveness of borders as hierarchical and racializing devices (Mills, 2020; van Houtum, 2021). These devices are aimed at making migrants increasingly vulnerable in the labour market and creating a new industrial, agricultural and service sector reserve army, which creeps into every part of their daily lives (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). Assuming a transnational theoretical perspective and empirical practice, some have analysed the social downgrading inherent in crossing the borders that separate the world's peripheries from its metropolises (Della Puppa, 2019). This includes its rituals of degradation, the ways in which it occurs, and the dynamics of civic and social stratification (Calavita, 2006), triggered by migration from the so-called 'Global South' to the so-called 'Global North'.

In classical sociology, the theme of the foreigner/outsider and their relations with the new community has been extensively investigated, including within the Chicago School, through theoretical systematization and relevant empirical research experiences (Elias & Scotson, 1965; Thomas, Park, & Miller, 1921). For the sake of brevity, here I will recall the dialectic between the Established and Outsiders empirically observed by Elias and Scotson (1965), which they argue is the real cause of discriminating prejudice, which easily finds racial, ethnic, religious, economic or cultural support whenever the power relations between different groups are involved in a single complex system.

This paper focuses on the construction of the masculinity of Italian-Bangladeshi men who, after first migrating from Bangladesh to Italy have undertook an onward migration, relocating along with their families to London. The paper will take into account both the process and the experience of bordering as a crossing of national, political, geographical, juridical, symbolic and identity borders, and as a trajectory of entry or exclusion from a specific social group (Calavita, 2006).

The first generation of Bangladeshi migrants in Italy – who arrived in Italy in the 1990s and 2000s and are today leaving for London as Italian citizens – was made up of members of the middle and upper-middle classes of their society of origin. They were the educated children of landowners, industrialists and government officials. Therefore, their experience of international migration was not configured as a desperate escape from hunger and misery, but as a family strategy to engage in upward social mobility both for themselves and for their household. In this context, the representation of 'successful masculinity' is a social product emerging from the intersectionally constructed

perspective of middle-class families of heteronormative Bangladeshi society (Pande, 2017) striving to acquire upward social mobility, that is male and family honour (Bourdieu, 1998; Norheim & Bjorvand Bjørkøy, 2022), through various strategies, including international migration and arranged marriages to women from wealthier families.

However, to understand how culturally specific masculine norms operate among the Bangladeshi middle-classes and what is defined as successful masculinity and socially realised adult migrant men, it is necessary not only to assume an intersectional perspective (Crenshaw, 1991), but to understand some of the social dynamics related to the socio-economic stratification and material conditions of Bangladeshi society. Strong economic growth in Bangladesh – the GDP has grown by about 6% per year in the last 10 years, to reach 8% in 2019 – has not translated into a generalised improvement of people's living conditions in the country. In fact, there are profound inequalities and growing social polarisation: apart from a small elite connected to the global economy, the mass of people survive in incredibly precarious conditions. The first generation of Bangladeshi migrants to Italy came from a class between these two poles: an anxious middle class struggling with difficulty against the erosion of its socio-economic position (Della Puppa & Ambrosini, 2021). That is why defending their social position or, better still, being upwardly mobile, was an obsession and duty for middle class men, as well as fundamental to achieving successful masculinity (Bourdieu, 1998; Norheim & Bjorvand Bjørkøy, 2022). Pellerin and Stearns (2001) affirm that people's felt need to make status claims increased when their status and honour were threatened. This may be the case with the Bangladeshi 'anxious middle class' struggling against losing their social status and, therefore, their honour. Migration is firstly a crossing of national and political borders. Here, the concept of border is not understood simply as the geographical and political separation (Lamont & Molnàr, 2002; Levine, 1996) between continents and nations, but also as: a social border (Bail, 2008) between classes within the same continent and country placed in an unequal position in the social division of labour (Lamont & Fournier, 1992); a symbolic, biographical, gender and generational border, whose crossing is facilitated by multiple migratory experiences (Ahmad, 2016; Della Puppa, 2019; Monsutti, 2007); and a border of civic hierarchization (Calavita, 2006; Morris, 2003) among the various statuses of citizenship in countries of definitive or temporary migration (Della Puppa & King, 2019; Della Puppa & Sredanovic, 2016). It is a question of recognition by other people, both by those belonging to the same social class or gender group, and those outside that group (Calavita, 2006). This recognition consolidates and legitimises power dynamics and inequalities. In fact, as Bourdieu (1997) suggests, even when it appears motivated by material interests, the social struggle is always, at the same time, a struggle for social recognition.

3. Methods

The empirical material for this paper consists of 60 in-depth narrative interviews with Italian-Bangladeshi men, conducted between 2015 and 2019. Respondents were mostly male heads of nuclear households, between 30 and 50 years of age, who had lived in Italy for at least 15 years and had Italian citizenship and an EU passport. Of these, 30 were people who had already relocated and were interviewed in London and 30 were Italian citizens planning to move to the UK who were interviewed in Northeast Italy.

The interviews were conducted in Italian or English, according to the interviewees' preference and the language proficiency of the interviewers, so as to reduce the *inevitable* power asymmetry between the interviewer and the interviewee. On the one hand, this asymmetry reflected social hierarchies and could, therefore, be amplified by the fact that I, as an interviewer, am a native white European, who is also an academic (which implies high symbolic capital), whereas the interviewees were racialised Southeast Asians, who have been employed as unskilled workers in industry and in the low-skilled tertiary sector. On the other hand, this asymmetry could have been partially compensated for by the fact that I was unmarried and had no children and, therefore, was understood as being 'in the making' and partially 'unrealized' in my biographical path, and thus still in the process of the social construction of a successful (family) man. Our unequal placement in the fields of citizenship and family partially balanced cial asymmetries, facilitating interaction during interviews.

The words of the respondents were fully transcribed and reported as faithfully as possible, bearing in mind that this always involves extensive interpretive work, and sometimes a form of re-writing. The interviews in Italian were then translated into English for the purpose of this contribution. All names used are pseudonyms.

4. The Bangladeshi diaspora in Italy and the UK

Bangladeshi migration to Italy is a relatively recent phenomenon. A key trigger was the large-scale regularisation of 'irregular' migrants made possible by the Italian migration policies of the 1990s, which attracted large numbers of Bangladeshis, including many who were already present in other European countries (King & Knights, 1994).

The growth of the community has been extremely rapid: from around 4,000 Bangladeshis in Italy in 1990, to an estimated 120,000-150,000 in 2010. They were initially heavily concentrated in Rome (Priori, 2012), where they mainly worked as street-hawkers, but quickly spread to other parts of Italy after the 1990s, especially to the prosperous north-east part of the country, where they found jobs in factories and workshops, creating their own ethnic enclaves or 'Bangla-towns'.

Bangladeshi migration to the UK has its roots in British colonialism. To briefly summarise, Bangladeshi migration started with the East India Company's recruitment of seamen from the Sylhet district of Bangladesh in the nineteenth century, some of whom settled in British port cities over time, above all in the London Docklands. A second wave of migration and settlement occurred in the post-war period, fuelled firstly by the demand for low-skilled labour in factories, catering and services, and then consolidated by family reunification in the wake of the Commonwealth Immigration Act (1962) and the Immigration Act (1971), as well as by marriage migration. In the 2011 UK census, people of Bangladeshi origin numbered 447,200, with nearly a fifth living in the borough of Tower Hamlets (Zeitlyn, 2016).

The fact that Bangladeshi migration to London and the UK has a longer history than to Italy has created a more diverse population in terms of class composition and cultural capital. Whilst wage earners working in the low-skilled industrial and tertiary sectors still dominate, there are also increasing numbers of middle-class households with a higher education. Yet 90% of British Bangladeshis still trace their regional origins to rural Sylhet. By contrast, the generation of Bangladeshis who began arriving in Italy in 1990

mainly had urban, middle-class origins in different regions of Bangladesh (Della Puppa, 2019).

Finally, the onward migration of Italian-Bangladeshis is transforming communities of Bangladeshi origin in the UK. According to the Bangladeshi embassy in Italy, in 2015 there were approximately 6,000 Italian households of Bangladeshi origin (approximately 25,000 people) who left Italy and moved to London (Della Puppa & King, 2019). The Italian National Institute of Statistics (2016) reports that, in 2016 alone, among the 29,000 Italians with a non-European country background who left Italy, over 2,500 were of Bangladeshi origin and that 92% of Italians of Asian origin who left Italy moved to the UK.

5. Crossing geographical, civic, and social boundaries to acquire masculine and family honour

The first generation of Bangladeshi migrants in Italy was mainly composed of young and educated unmarried men from the Bangladeshi middle-class who accepted their downgrading in Europe in order to improve their social position (Priori, 2012). In Italy, they mainly do so-called 3D jobs (dirty, dangerous and demeaning), which they would never have accepted in Bangladesh due to their class position there. At the same time, the reactivation of upward social mobility and the socio-economic improvement of the household through migration are understood as responsibilities whose fulfilment can be seen as necessary steps in one's self-realisation as an adult man and in the social construction of a masculine identity (Della Puppa, 2019).

After having been irregular migrants for more or less prolonged periods of time, usually in Rome, they regularise their administrative position through amnesty, thus *crossing the border between irregular and regular administrative conditions*. This experience allows us to identify the process of the (civic) *bordering and stratification* (Calavita, 2006; Morris, 2003) of 'documented' and 'undocumented' migrants in Italy, as well as their social trajectories. This administrative border crossing gives migrants the opportunity to return 'home' to Bangladesh, and to explore the marriage market in their country of origin, where they have acquired social credentials as successful migrant men. In fact, their condition allows them to arrange marriages that are particularly advantageous, often with women from a higher social status. Thus, there are multiple and *overlapping crossings of different borders*: political-geographical borders (migration); civic-administrative borders (the residence permit); and generational and family borders (marriage). This dynamic also highlights a double border between masculinities of unequal symbolic value and social prestige: there is a border between the social group of those who emigrated and the social group of those who have remained in Bangladesh; as well as between those who get married by virtue of their image as successful *probashi*,[1] possibly taking advantage of a particularly advantageous arranged marriage to increase their class position, and those who have not (yet) married or have not been able to exploit the prestige of a successful migration experience to marry a woman of particularly high social and symbolic status (Della Puppa, 2019). Getting married and, therefore, completing family reunification and becoming fathers, triggers new reflexivity processes for migrants and loads them with new responsibilities, allowing them to meet an intra-family and intra-generational mandate and to increase their honour as successful adult men (Della

Puppa, 2019). At the same time, geographical mobility from the 'Global South' to Europe corresponds to a downward social mobility from the middle-class to the working class (Priori, 2012). Therefore, *crossing geographical and political borders through migration* from Bangladesh to Italy implies upward social mobility for the migrant and his family member in the context of Bangladesh, that is, an *upward crossing of a social border in Bangladesh*, but a downgrading between Bangladesh and Italy, that is, a *downward crossing of a similar social border*.

These representatives of the first generation of *probashi* have now fulfilled the necessary requirements for another civic border crossing: the acquisition of Italian citizenship, that, if granted, is transferred to their children and – after at least two years – to their spouse.[2] At the same time, the birth and socialisation of their children in Italy has caused many migrant fathers to reflect on the discriminatory mechanisms of Italian society, in particular in its labour market, that they have personally experienced as migrants, even once they formally became Italian. *Probashis* are aware of the racial discrimination that migrants and their children have to suffer in Italy, due both to institutional racism and 'popular racism' (Basso, 2010) – that is the racism of the working class and civil society, which, however, does not arise within the working class and civil society, but is the product of the dominant ideology, descended top down by the mass media and political institutions: in the labour market, where they carry out the most low-status, dangerous and worst paid jobs; in the housing market, where they only have access to less than optimal housing in peripheral areas; and in the public sphere, where they are continually represented as enemies and criminals (Fullin & Reyneri, 2011; Perocco, 2012).

By becoming Italian citizens, they can move freely within Europe and engage in new migration (Danaj & Çaro, 2016), which is almost always oriented towards London and the UK (Della Puppa & King, 2019). Therefore, it is possible to identify an attempt to *cross social borders* (aiming at upward social mobility), through a *crossing of geographical-political borders* (South-North migration). These dual and combined movements result in an accumulation of symbolic capital and male honour that shapes their identity as successful migrant men.

6. Relocation to London: migratory success and male honour

A further migration to London, as well as further crossings of geographical-political, migratory and social borders, shape the male and family identity of migrants, giving them symbolic capital and the *allure* of male success in the eyes of their compatriots. In the following sections, I will show the ways in which this migratory and identity success is articulated.

6.1. 'To move upward' and accumulate symbolic capital

One way of explaining onward migration is to trace it back to the global economic crisis that has particularly affected countries in Mediterranean Europe, frustrating the working classes' hopes for social mobility, especially if they are migrants. In fact, the respondents in our interviews argued that their decision to leave Italy and relocate to London was motivated by their search for upward social mobility, both for themselves and their

children, thus it was driven by their desire for 'male' realisation – that is, the entry into adult life and the realisation of social success, according to the habitus of the middle classes – , rather than by the economic crisis (Della Puppa, 2019). The reactivation of migratory mobility was described as an 'escape' from the economic and social immobility that characterises Italy, denying younger generations any possibility of realisation, especially if they belong to a racialized social group and have a 'migrant background' (Calavita, 2006). This is due both to the informal racism operating in Italian society and to the effects of the 'Mediterranean model of immigration' (Pugliese, 2011). They mainly represented it as an investment aimed at the reactivation of the upward social mobility of their children born in Italy as evidenced in this quote:

> I chose to come to England because I was thinking above all about the future. Not my future or ours, mine and my wife's, but the future of our children. Looking around a bit in Italy, knowing that there is a crisis, talking to young people … I could not see any future for them in Italy. I was afraid for the future of my children. What should I do as a father and a man? So, I came to England for them, to give them a better future, because I feel that there are better chances for them here. It was my paternal duty. (Mukul, London)

When the Bangladeshis arrived in Italy in the 1990s and 2000s, it was still an expanding economy, with a relatively inclusive labour market and flexible migration policies. It was thus a stimulating environment in which to aspire to social improvement for themselves and for future generations. This allowed the men to aim for their realisation as men and fathers, and to demonstrate their successful masculinity to their families, compatriots, society and themselves.

However, today, Italian society is static and asphyxiated, and the possibilities of realisation and social mobility are severely limited (Oecd, 2018). For Italian-Bangladeshi men, the only way to fully realise their goals as men and not frustrate the efforts they put into the migration experience is to use their social and material achievements in Italy to invest in the upward social mobility of their descendants through onward geographical mobility and the *crossing of intra-European borders* (from Italy to the UK), which in turn has been made possible by the *crossing of civic and legal borders* (the acquisition of Italian citizenship and the transition from the condition of foreigner to that of European citizen). This dynamic also highlights the functioning of ethnic-racial borders in Italy and the subaltern position of racialized Italian citizens with a migratory background and their descendants. It also shows that these groups have much greater difficulty in achieving upward mobility than 'native Italians'. This racializing border can act as an obstacle to attempts made by the first generation of Bangladeshi fathers to gain male honour and to achieve successful masculinity in Italy. So, once again, there is a *crossing of political, symbolic, social, and 'ethnic and racial' boundaries*, reflecting male honour on the biographies of Bangladeshi migrant fathers.

6.2. English: a key to the world, an intergenerational family bridge

There are different ways in which London appears more attractive in terms of investing in the future of one's children. Firstly, Bangladeshi parents' dissatisfaction with the Italian school and university system. Although Italian universities are not in themselves a problem, the impossibility of educating and socialising children in the English

language, which is not commonly spoken in Italy, is a major concern for Bangladeshi parents, who are more oriented towards the globalised and cosmopolitan world than the native Italians. The words of the respondents clearly express these 'global' aspirations:

> Another reason, that is very important for me and for the Bangladeshi community, is English, for my daughter's future. If she studies and grows up in an English environment, she will be able to work here, in Bangladesh, or all over the world, but if she stays in Italy, she will learn only Italian, just a little bit of English. (Kabir, London)

The interviewees recognise that the expansion of opportunities for social and economic realisation that they wanted for future generations – and that would socially and symbolically realise them as successful migrant men with families – could only take place in an international labour market and through geographical mobility transcending national, and probably even European, borders. In addition to being a symbol of status distinction[3] that would allow them to reclaim their original social position in Bangladesh, the English language and the UK's more prestigious education system would allow their descendants to acquire the social mobility that they themselves had tried to re-activate through their first migration. Furthermore, English not only allows communication with the world, but also with their families back in Bangladesh, where it is spoken and perceived as a native language. By making communication between their children, parents and siblings smoother, the *probashi* realise themselves as family men and are able to enjoy successful communication between generations – even if (ironically?) not in Bangla, rather than in English, the colonial language.

Male honour is thus configured as accumulative and expendable capital, both at an individual level and at a collective and family level, shaping the male identities both of migrants and their male left-behind household members. Within this context, the socialisation of migrants' children in the English language acts as a bridge that facilitates *the crossing of borders between the generations of the transnational family* spread between Bangladesh and Europe.

6.3. A way out of the factories

Italian-Bangladeshis perceive that although it is true that it is very difficult for young Italians with native Italian parents to achieve upward social mobility, it is even worse for those of migrant origin. They say they feel discriminated against as migrants in Italy, especially in the labour market, being classified as unskilled workers and thus channelled towards more strenuous, unhealthy and lower paying tasks; they are thus deprived of concrete possibilities for vertical mobility. They point out that being Italian 'on paper' is not a sufficient condition for escaping the informal and structural discrimination that many migrants face in Italy (Andall, 2002). Although they have formally been granted citizenship, they consider it to be 'third-class' due to the prejudice embedded in all areas of social action, which means they are discriminated against on the basis of the colour of their skin, their surname and other elements that 'betray' their Bangladeshi origin:

> If you live in Italy, but you come from the Third World like me, you'll always be a third-class citizen with a third-class citizenship […] I am Italian, but only in words. My skin does not change. […] I'm Italian on the documents, but my daughters will always be the daughters of a Bangladeshi worker. (Bitu, Bologna)

Another interviewee said that Italian society was still unprepared to include people from different national, cultural and ethnic backgrounds and expressed his aspiration to live in a more cosmopolitan context. He was especially concerned about his son, whom he wanted to spare the suffering and humiliation of growing up in a context in which he would likely be trapped in the condition of being a ‘foreigner’ and ‘migrant’:

> My son was born here, he’s got Italian citizenship. He feels Italian. A few days ago, I got my son into a guitar school. The secretary told someone on the phone: ‘An Indian boy has come to do lessons’. My son, eight years old said: ‘Why did she say I’m Indian? I’m not Indian!’. He is Italian, he feels Italian, but his skin colour says he is Indian. It is so painful. What can I do as his father? (Zaeed, Vicenza)

They fear that remaining in Italy would make any actual improvement in their socio-occupational conditions impossible and would run the risk of their children following them in their professional and existential trajectory: working in factories or employed in subordinate segments of the labour market performing ‘3D jobs’. Whereas first generation migrants seem to accept the degradation of being considered ‘third-class citizens’ themselves, they do not consider it acceptable for their children, and would see it as a failure on their part, as fathers and as men:

> If he went to university, graduated, did a PhD, then where would he work? In a bank? In insurance? Imagine he tried at a bank, let’s say among ten white colleagues, as the son of a migrant he would have such a battle to get accepted, to get hired and then to have a career! Maybe I’m biased, but I speak of my practical experience. Then I asked myself, ‘But why did I do all this work, as a street vendor, in restaurants, in factories, to see my son do the same work as his father?’ I did not want my son to have the same struggle. One day Italy will change, but it has not happened yet. So when I got my passport, I thought, ‘If I stay in Italy, it will go like that, if I go to London, it will be different’. (Apnan, London)

Apnan’s words reveal the dream chased by Bangladeshi migrant fathers: the dream of crossing national borders to break down racial boundaries, that is, to break down the boundaries created by devices of racialisation. The interviewees were aware of the way in which migrants and young people of migrant origin were perceived in the Italian labour market. They also realised that all members of Italy’s younger generation – *albeit with unequal intensity* – were subject to ‘serious economic and social immobility’ and had few possibilities for satisfactory individual achievement, regardless of their nationality. They feel that this makes all their crossings of political, biographical, symbolic, and social boundaries, through which they attempted to accumulate symbolic capital and male honour, completely worthless. These effects, as well as the economic and labour trajectories of migrants and of all workers in Italy, are constructed across ‘ethnic-racial’ borders, which are difficult to cross (Fullin & Reyneri, 2011).

Racial boundaries, structural discrimination and everyday exclusions are perceived as operating more explicitly in the Italian society than in the British society. These are boundaries mapped into the skin, thus, for these *probashi*, bringing up their children in Italy means depriving them of important opportunities. So to escape this perceived fate, they chase the London dream.

6.4. 'Here it's almost Bangladesh'

The idea that you can find something like Bangladesh in London can be seen as a legacy of British colonialism and of the long migratory tradition that links the Indian subcontinent to the 'motherland'. London has the oldest and largest Bangladeshi community outside of Bangladesh, and is thus perceived as a 'homeland outside the homeland' or 'Bangladesh in Europe' – an environment where you can feel at home and live in accordance with what interviewees regard as the 'Bengali culture and lifestyle'. East London is seen as 'almost Bangladesh' or 'like Bangladesh' but 'better than Bangladesh'.

> Here it is no different to Bangladesh … If you go to Whitechapel, you find everything. If you don't want to speak in English, it doesn't matter – 99% of people talk Bangla. Here there is music, arts programmes, so many things … Every week you get some minister, artist, politician or important person from Bangladesh. They come here. Here it's almost Bangladesh. I feel at home, here you find everything. (Rashid, London).

However, a contradiction emerges: on the one hand, the new migration to the UK is understood as a way to enter a cosmopolitan context in which their children will be able to speak in English and, thus, have an advantage in a increasingly global labour market; on the other hand, something else that makes London attractive seems to be the possibility of being part of the largest and most famous Bangladeshi 'community' in the world outside of Bangladesh. This means you live in a context where you can speak Bangla and thus cross the border that separates British-Bengalis from the 'white British', but also the Bangladeshis of the diaspora in a generic *Bidesh*,[4] from the Bangladeshis living in the capital of the former empire. Another product of so-called '*post-imperial formation*' (Hansen, 2014) is the sense of admiration that some citizens of the ex-colonies have for London. Despite the historical reality that the British Empire dominated and exploited the subcontinent and its peoples, laying the foundations for economic dependency and subsequent mass emigration, it also provided the basis for the administrative, legal, educational and political systems in the area. In this way it shaped the aspirations and imaginaries of generations of Bangladeshis, for whom London became 'the dream' – a 'migratory dream'. For those who made it to Italy, the dream was within reach:

> Anything in Bangladesh makes you dream of England. Also the children of rich people, ministers, important people, politicians, successful entrepreneurs, studied in England, in London. For us Bangladeshis, London has always been a dream. (Apan, London).

The dream becomes realisable through the acquisition of Italian citizenship, which, for them, has a dual function: it allows them to stay long-term in Italy, and it also gives them the right to travel, live and work anywhere in Europe (Della Puppa & Sredanovic, 2016).

So, as we have said above, the acquisition of Italian citizenship is not only understood as a goal that *per se* involves an increase in male honour, but also as a means for moving to London, meaning that their descendants can 'live the dream' of generations of Bangladeshis, further increasing their symbolic capital and strengthening the perception of male success.

7. Ambivalences and contradictions in the onward migration experience and its effects on successful masculinity

Not all aspirations that migrants had before onward migration were matched by their actual experiences in London and other cities in the UK. On the contrary, there were many ambivalences and contradictions in terms of male honour, as for some individuals and families there was no improvement in their quality-of-life or opportunities for advancement. In this situation of extreme powerlessness (Pande, 2017) there was a sense of disappointment and frustration, which was perceived as calling into question the masculinity and male success of Italian-Bangladeshi onward migrants.

7.1. Downward social mobility and the impairment of masculinity

For first-generation onward migrants, the idea that a move to London would improve their labour-market position and boost their income often proved to be a myth. It is true that, in Italy, their jobs as factory workers were physically arduous, socially unrewarding and badly paid, but these jobs generally had a 'regular' contract, with fixed hours, a steady income, and a recognised social identity as a family breadwinner. Moreover, their lives in Italy involved daily interactions with their colleagues in the workplace and other residents in their neighbourhood, based around a stable routine of work shifts and days off, which gave them opportunities for family time and other forms of sociability.

By contrast, the working lives of Italian-Bangladeshis in London were marked by precariousness and insecurity in terms of time schedules and locations. Furthermore, the type of work available to them was generally considered not good enough for their age and social identity, with typical jobs being mini-cab drivers, security guards or washing dishes in restaurants. Interviewees in London generally said they suffered a process of professional devaluation and de-skilling. For example:

> Here, I worked in restaurants washing dishes. The work was very hard and my boss didn't treat me well. I also worked in a fast-food shop washing chicken. I didn't like that either. All the time, ten, eleven hours, washing chicken or cleaning the floor. My job in Italy was better: I worked in a factory, full-time, long-term contract, good salary, fixed working shifts, I felt fulfilled. I liked it much better than the jobs I can get here. Now I work as a security guard in a supermarket. It's OK, better than washing dishes or working in fast-food. (Kobir, London)

Onward migrants often give a bottom-up testimony of the ruthless liberalisation of certain segments of London's labour market, especially unskilled and badly paid jobs in catering and other labour-intensive services, in which migrant workers are heavily relied on (May et al., 2007). The backward steps taken by male migrants with respect to their own professional and, thus, biographical and migratory path, has a negative effect on the male identity of the male breawinners.

7.2. Trapped in welfare dependency and an inability to perform the role of male breadwinner

The jobs described in the previous section are easy to find – easier to find than jobs in Italy today – but they are insecure and often pay below the living wage, meaning they

are not sufficient to maintain an entire family in London with its high cost of living. Masud told us that he could not earn enough to cover the needs of his family, even when working 50 or 60 h per week:

> Now I have a part-time job … to be honest, I am not willing to do a full-time job … because if I do a full-time job, I get a maximum of £1,200 or £1,300 [per month], but I have to pay the rent that is £1,000 or £1,100 … and how can we live on £200? And if I do a part-time job I can get £600 or £700 and I get housing benefit. So it is better for me. But I don't like this system. Because I would like to work full-time … but I couldn't support my family with my salary. If I work full-time I have to pay everything, but if I don't work full-time, they [benefits] will help me. I don't like it because I feel I cannot be totally responsible for my family. I don't like depending on someone else. (Masud, London).

It is interesting to note that this socio-material condition seemed to have negative impacts on our interviewees not only on the economic front, in terms of their household budgets, but also in terms of their self-esteem and self-identity as male breadwinners and as possessors of male honour. That is, Masud and many like him feel infantilized and deprived of their identity as grown men who have family responsibilities.

7.3. Impassable borders

The idea of joining the largest and most famous 'diasporic community' of Bangladeshis is one driver to onward migration from Italy to London. However, their expectations about the 'historical' British-Bengali community are often disappointing. In fact, the mistrust – sometimes fully-fledged hostility – between the 'newcomers' from Italy and the Bengali community who have been in London for generations is described to us by the respondents:

> Here, 92% of our countrymen are from Sylhet. They don't welcome us, they don't want people from outside Sylhet, they don't like us, they asked me: 'Why did you come here? You are Italian, well, good … why did you come here? Go back to Italy'. (Bitu)

These frictions constitute a border for Italian-Bangladeshis attempting acceptance in the diasporic community. This border arises for three main reasons: the gap between British citizens and EU citizens, especially in the context of Brexit; the chauvinism opposing Bangladeshis from the Sylhet district (the main district of origin of most British-Bangladeshis in the UK) to those families originally came from other Bangladeshi districts (heterogeneously represented in Bangladeshi migration in Italy); and the class gap and different social and family habitus that separates the descendants of rural Sylheti families from the urban secularised and educated middle classes that migrated to Italy (Della Puppa, 2021).

However, this is not the only impassable border that Italian-Bangladeshis face. Bangladeshi onward migrants told us that, in the few years since arriving in London, they had not built any significant relationships with the local population, especially with those 'white British' people who are not members of 'ethnic communities':

> It is difficult to have English friends here. For several reasons. In Italy I had many Italian friends because friendship began in places we frequented together – there we had a workplace. Here, many of us are like me, we are mini-cab drivers, and the British do not do this. Among my colleagues there aren't any English people. We go to work in kitchens or wash dishes in a restaurant, and even there you don't meet any English people … The

> British who do 'quality' jobs, in the City, in the evening they go underground and return home to their neighbourhoods, which are different from ours, and we never meet them. Then, there are the lower-class British workers, manual labourers for example, who spend their time between home and the pub, but we don't go to the pub and so we don't meet them. (Rintu)

The impermeability of this social border is also a product of the specific areas they have settled in, such as neighbourhoods in the inner-End of London. These places are characterised by high rates of 'old' and 'new' immigration from many parts of the world, and only have a minority of 'white British' people (Peach 2006):

> I had a lot of Italian friends. But here I don't know any English people. Also because, look around here: there are no English people, I mean white English. All the people come from other countries or, at least, they are British, but from other origins. So I don't have the opportunity to meet white English people, maybe just in some public offices. (Musharaf)

It is thus also interesting to observe this other contradiction that emerges in interviewees' representations: although they are aware of the complex history of migration to the East End of London, they still internalise the post-colonial border between citizens of different ethno-racial origins, distinguishing those who are 'white British' from British citizens with a different ethnic origin.

Therefore, their onward migration can be read as an attempt to cross some symbolic borders and, at the same time, create borders that distinguish and separate them from those who remain (in Bangladesh and Italy). However, this trajectory made through chasing the London dream has unexpectedly led to them being doubly 'bordered out' in the UK: they are excluded from the British-Sylheti community, as well as being separated from the 'white British'.

Finally, it should be mentioned a further excluding border that affects the Italian-Bangladeshi men relocating to London, placing them hierarchically in a subordinate position with respect to the British-Sylheti and, in general, to the British population: the perception of the UK as privileged context for acquiring social mobility and male honour might have acquired a bruising due to Brexit and the blows to the British economy. This unexpected phenomenon may push them to reorient their migratory, family, social and gender trajectories (Sredanovic & Della Puppa, 2021)

8. Conclusion

This paper has looked at the process of the social construction of the masculinity of Italian-Bangladeshi men who have relocated to London, and how this takes place both through the crossing of international borders and the crossing of biographical and family borders.

The first migration experience involved a series of border crossings for the *probashi*: first, a political crossing between different nations and areas of the world, from Bangladesh to Italy, from the Global South to the Global North, which sets up a divide between the social group that has emigrated and those who have remained in the country of origin; second, a 'civic' border crossing, once they have arrived in Italy, between irregular and regular administrative conditions, thus creating a division between the social group

of 'documented' migrants and that of 'undocumented' migrants – and, subsequently, between the *probashi* who acquire Italian citizenship and those who remain migrants and 'foreigners' – resulting in different and unequal possibilities and trajectories.

Their 'new migration' should be understood as continuous with their earlier migration biography. Soon after arriving in Italy, Bangladeshi migrants become aware that Italian citizenship is not enough to make the border crossing between being migrants and being citizens, since their somatic characteristics and Bangladeshi origin seem to impose an embodied citizenship that excludes them and their children from upward social mobility and (racially) discriminates against them in the various spheres of social life – the labour market, housing, public representation, and social opportunities. Thus, if the multiple migratory mobilities that brought Bangladeshi men to Italy were driven by a search for upward social mobility and a desire to realise their own masculinity by having and supporting a family, then this search is not completed in Italy. London then begins to represent the dream goal of this search – their relocation there begins to appear as the *only way* to ensure that their past mobility meant something and to give sense to their lives.

The new migration would allow them to cross other borders and enter the social group of those who have carried out onward migration, socialising their children in a cosmopolitan context and in the English language, and becoming part of the largest Bangladeshi diasporic community in Europe – even if this contradicts the cosmopolitan desire described above. This distinguishes them from those who have not been able to chase the 'dream', remaining in 'provincial' Italy.

However, if the UK, and London especially, seem to be the main target for their intra-European onward migration, based on various *representations* of it as having a buoyant economy, a multicultural society and already-existing ethnic communities, this web of pull factors also has its darker side. London's economy and employment market is an example of the 'Sassen thesis', in which there is increasingly polarised income distribution and a division of labour characteristic of a 'global city' (Sassen, 1991). This trend towards increasing inequality emerged particularly strongly in London after the turn of the millennium and was closely associated with labour-market deregulation and large inflows of labour migrants from within and beyond Europe. Italian-Bangladeshis were more or less forced to fit into the structural straightjacket of what May et al. (2007) call a '*new migrant division of labour*' in London. They were obliged to take the role of unskilled migrants irrespective of their education and skills, becoming part of a new reserve army of migrant workers condemned to a precarious economic existence as casual, just-in-time labour with little or no social protection or pension entitlement. The accumulation of honour and symbolic capital pursued with the onward migration is thus revealed to be an illusion.

It is important to point out the inevitable processes of racialisation operating within the British labour market, with its clear effects on the interviewees and potentially on their children. This is not the only dynamic that pushes the *probashi* men back beyond the border they would have liked to cross and the social group they would have liked to participate in. Other insurmountable borders arise that exclude them from the British-Bengali 'community' in the UK, and that which separates them from the social group of the 'white British'.

To summarise, these dynamics reveal a plurality of different borders, including geographical and political borders, between nations and continents, and social borders, between classes within nations and continents. In the destination country, civic and citizenship borders arise between different statuses of citizens, as well as between migrants with different residence permits, and 'ethnic and racial borders' between migrant men and native men, as well as between Italian men who belong to racialised social groups and 'native Italian' men. In the transnational space, symbolic borders emerge between groups of migrant men and those who are left behind, as well as between migrant men and those who engage in onward migration.

Another crucial issue arises with Brexit and the UK's exit from the EU. This is reorientering the strategies of Italian-Bangladeshis in the UK who, although they are European citizens, once again become 'foreigners': some are planning new international migration, others are migrating within the UK, and others still will acquire British citizenship (Sredanovic & Della Puppa, 2021). These plans may be read as attempts by migrants to recuperate or save their masculinity and honour within a situation of increasing powerlessness (Pande, 2017). However, we have yet to see what affect these changes will have on strategies made by families, Italian-Bangladeshi men's multiple border crossings, and their trajectories of masculinity.

Notes

1. In Bangla this means 'those who went abroad', 'the emigrants'.
2. In Italy, it is possible to apply for citizenship after 10 years of regular and continuous residence in the country.
3. In Bangladesh, only the middle and highly-educated classes have access to the English language.
4. In Bangla, the 'foreign land' or 'abroad'.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Notes on contributor

Francesco Della Puppa is Professor in Sociology at the Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage of Ca' Foscari University of Venice and member of the Master program on 'Immigration: Migration Phenomena and Social Transformations' at the same University. PhD in Social Sciences at the University of Padua, he carries out teaching and research activities on issues relating to international migration, migrant families and family reunification, transformations of masculinity in migration, migrant labour and racial discrimination, refugees and asylum seekers, digital labour. He likes to explore the possibilities that the language of comics and graphic novels offer to social sciences.

ORCID

Francesco Della Puppa http://orcid.org/0000-0003-1437-4719

References

Ahmad, A. N. (2016). *Masculinity, sexuality and illegal migration: Human smuggling from Pakistan to Europe*. London: Routledge.

Andall, J. (2002). Second-generation attitude? African-Italians in milan. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *28*(3), 389–407. doi:10.1080/13691830220146518

Bail, C. A. (2008). The configuration of symbolic boundaries against immigrants in Europe. *American Sociological Review*, *73*(1), 37–59.

Basso, P. (2010). *Razzismo di Stato. Stati Uniti, Europa, Italia*. Milan: Franco Angeli.

Bourdieu, P. (1997). *Méditations pascaliennes*. Paris: Le Seuil.

Bourdieu, P. (1998). *La Domination masculine*. Paris: Le Seuil.

Calavita, K. (2006). Gender, migration, and Law: Crossing borders and bridging disciplines. *International Migration Review*, *40*(1), 104–132. http://www.jstor.org/stable/27645581.

Crenshaw, K. W. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, *43*(6), 1241–99. doi:10.2307/1229039

Danaj, S., & Çaro, E. (2016). Becoming an EU citizen through Italy: The experience of Albanian immigrants. *Mondi Migranti*, *3*, 95–108. doi:10.3280/MM2016-003007

De Genova, N. (2017). *The borders of Europe*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Della Puppa, F. (2019). Transnational families and migrant masculinities: The social institution of male adulthood and family reunification in the Bangladeshi diaspora in Italy. *Dve Domovini/Two Homelands*, *50*, 111–129. doi:10.3986/dd.v2019i50.7461

Della Puppa, F. (2021). Italian-Bangladeshi in London. A community within a community? *Migration Letters*, *18*(1), 35–47. doi:10.33182/ml.v18i1.1118

Della Puppa, F., & Ambrosini, M. (2021). 'Implicit' remittances in family relationships: The case of Bangladeshis in Italy and beyond. *Global Networks. A Journal of Transnationals Affairs*, *22*(1), 134–149. doi:10.1111/glob.12335

Della Puppa, F., & King, R. (2019). The new 'twice migrants': Motivations, experiences and disillusionments of Italian-Bangladeshis relocating to London. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, *45*(11), 1936–1952. doi:10.1080/1369183X.2018.1438251

Della Puppa, F., & Sanò, G. eds. (2021). *Stuck and exploited refugees and asylum seekers in Italy between exclusion, discrimination and struggles*. Venice: Edizioni Ca' foscari.

Della Puppa, F., & Sredanovic, D. (2016). Citizen to stay or citizen to go? Naturalization, security and mobility of migrants in Italy. *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, *15*(4), 366–383. doi:10.1080/15562948.2016.1208316

Elias, N., & Scotson, J. (1965). *The established and the outsiders. A sociological enquiry into community problems*. New York: Frank Cass.

Fullin, G., & Reyneri, E. (2011). Low unemployment and bad jobs for new immigrants in Italy. *International Migration*, *49*(1), 118–147. doi:10.1111/j.1468-2435.2009.00594.x

Hansen, T. B. (2014). Migration, religion and post-imperial formations. *Global Networks*, *14*(3), 273–290. doi:10.1111/glob.12059

Hopkins, P. (2006). Youthful Muslim masculinities: Gender and generational relations. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *31*(3), 337–352. doi:10.1111/j.1475-5661.2006.00206.x

Isakjee, A., Davies, T., Obradovic-Wochnik, J., & Augustova, K. (2020). Liberal violence and the racial borders of the European union. *Antipode*, *52*(6), 1751–1773. doi:10.1111/anti.12670

Italian National Institute of Statistics. (2016). *Migrazioni internazionali e interne della popolazione residente*. Rome: ISTAT.

King, R., & Knights, M. (1994). Bangladeshis in Rome: A case of migratory opportunism. In B. Gould, & A. Findlay (Eds.), *Population migration and the changing world order* (pp. 127–143). New York: Wiley.

Lamont, M., & Fournier, M. (1992). *Cultivating differences symbolic boundaries and the making of inequality*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Lamont, M., & Molnàr, V. (2002). The study of boundaries in the social sciences. *Annual Review of Sociology*, *28*, 167–95. doi:10.1146/annurev.soc.28.110601.141107

Levine, D. N. (1996). Sociology and the nation-state in an Era of shifting boundaries. *Sociological Inquiry*, *66*(3), 253–266.

May, J., Wills, J., Datta, K., Evans, Y., Herbert, J., & McIlwaine, C. (2007). Keeping London working: Global cities, The British state and London's New migrant division of labour. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, *32*(2), 151–167. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4626240.

Mezzadra, S., & Neilson, B. (2013). *Border as meethod. Or, the multiplication of labour*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Mills, M. (2020). *The borders of race: Patrolling "multiracial" identities*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.

Monsutti, A. (2007). Migration as a rite of passage: Young Afghans building masculinity and adulthood in iran. *Iranian Studies*, *40*(2), 167–185.

Morris, L. (2003). Managing contradiction: Civic stratification and migrants' rights. *International Migration Review*, *37*, 74–100. doi:10.1111/j.1747-7379.2003.tb00130.x

Norheim, T., & Bjorvand Bjørkøy, A. M. (2022). The concept of honour and honour narratives. In T. Norheim, & A. M. Bjorvand Bjørkøy (Eds.), *Literature and honour* (pp. 13–34). Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.

OECD. (2018). *A broken social elevator? How to promote social mobility*. Paris: OECD Publishing.

Pande, A. (2017). Mobile masculinities: Migrant Bangladeshi Men in South Africa. *Gender & Society*, *31*(3), 383–406. doi:10.1177/0891243217702825

Parmar, A. (2020). Borders as mirrors: Racial hierarchies and policing migration. *Critical Criminology*, *28*(2), 175–192. doi:10.1007/s10612-020-09517-1

Pellerin, L. A., & Stearns, E. (2001). Status honor and the valuing of cultural and material capital. *Poetics*, *29*(1), 1–24. doi:10.1016/S0304-422X(00)00013-9

Perocco, F. (2012). *Trasformazioni globali e nuove disuguaglianze. Il caso italiano*. Milan: Franco Angeli.

Priori, A. (2012). *Romer Probashira. Reti sociali e itinerari transnazionali bangladesi a Roma*. Rome: Meti.

Pugliese, E. (2011). The Mediterranean model of immigration. *Academicus International Scientific Journal*, *3*, 96–107. http://www.academicus.edu.al/nr3/Academicus-MMXI-3-096-107.pdf.

Rumford, C. (2008). Introduction: Citizens and borderwork in Europe. *Space and Polity*, *12*(1), 1–12. doi:10.1080/13562570801969333

Rumford, C. (2013). Towards a vernacularized border studies: The case of citizen borderwork. *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, *28*(2), 169–180. doi:10.1080/08865655.2013.854653

Sassen, S. (1991). *The global city*. New York, London, Tokyo: Princeton University of Press.

Sredanovic, D., & Della Puppa, F. (2021). Brexit and the stratified uses of national and European Union citizenship. *Current Sociology*, doi:10.1177/00113921211048523

Thomas, W., Park, R., & Miller, H. (1921). *Old World Traits Transplanted*. New York: Harper.

van Houtum, H. (2021). Beyond "Borderism": Overcoming discriminative B/ordering and othering. *Journal of Economic and Human Geography*, *112*(1), 34–43. doi:10.1111/tesg.12473

Zeitlyn, B. (2016). *Transnational childhoods: British Bangladeshis, identities and social change*. London: Palgrave.