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সংখ্যা ১৬

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# নবজ্ঞান পত্রিকা

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নবজ্ঞান বিভাগ • জাহাঙ্গীরনগর বিশ্ববিদ্যালয় • ঢাকা



Francesco Della Puppa\*

## Rinterpreted and Exploited Ethnographical Look on the Spaces of a Crossroad of Bangladeshi Diaspora in Italy

### Introduction

The most important researches addressing the relationship between migration in Italy and urban areas are interested mainly in large-sized cities such as Turin (Cologna *et alii* 2009), Milan (Breviglieri *et alii* 1999; Ambrosini and Abbatcola 2004; Granata and Lanzani 2006), Rome (Lucciarini 2005) or Brescia (Granata *et alii* 2007; Orelli 2009). But the form of population distribution in the Italian land itself makes the migration phenomena affect also small towns and villages in the province.

Quoting Saskia Sassen (2001) the Research Laboratory on Migrations and Social Transformations of Ca'Foscari University in Venice writes (2010, 11)

If thirty or forty years ago only a few European cities could be considered "global cities", today, after a short time, Italy is full of small and medium-sized global cities; medium and small cities where is condensed the world; [medium and small cities] composed by tens -and sometime more than one hundred- of nationalities and different languages; [medium and small cities] linked by thousands of networks to the whole world.

In fact if compared with countries with longer tradition of immigration, such as France, Germany and England, in Italy (even) the migrant population is more widespread in small urban contexts. Moreover, the absence of a migration from "former" colonies (as in other European contexts) has increased the heterogeneity of the populations making sporadic patterns of concentration of national groups.

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The Italian province is an area of difficult mobility, retraining and "land of [social] action, relationships and more constrained visibility" (Quattrocchi *et alii* 2003: 5). It (and its transformation) may represent a field of considerable interest for research on migrations.

In Italy exist a lot of small urban areas in which the percentage of immigrant residents are higher than in the provincial capitals. Sometimes it results in a relationship for which one-fifth of the population is migrant, for example some municipalities in province of Vicenza as Arzignano and Longo, town with more than 20,000 on inhabitants where about 20% of residents are foreigners, or Alte Ceccato where, despite of being a fraction with a population of 6,447 inhabitants, over 35% are "foreign" citizens (2.263).

These data show that it is necessary to pay attention towards the many provincial and municipal contexts. Those kind of social context for many reasons are becoming a privileged area of settlement migrants and their families (economic and productive development of local areas, housing conditions, but also for the important influence of migration networks and many others).

Despite of the heterogeneity of nationalities which characterizes the settlement of immigrants in Italy, this socio-spatial context has been marked by rapid growth of the Bangladeshi community for this reason this article would like to appear as one of the first ethnographic work on the Bangladeshi community in diaspora in Italy, but some ethnographic works must be mentioned, for example the anthropological ones done by Francesco Pompeo (2007, 2011) on Bangladeshi migration to Rome (and especially in the municipal territory of Torpignattara), the pioneer one done by Quattrocchi, Toffoletti and Tommasin (2003) on Bangladeshi community of Montafalcone, the sociological one commissioned by a famous Italian Ngo (Codici, 2008) and the geographical perspectives on Bangladeshi migration in Rome of Melanie Knights (1996; with King, 1998).

### From a citadel of industrial work...

Province<sup>1</sup> of Vicenza, North-East of Italy. Not today's North-East presenting the small to medium enterprises that have driven the national economy in the '80s and '90s towards the current economic crisis or the

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North-East of the Northern League<sup>2</sup>, but the way it was immediately after the II. World War when children of farmers were forced to emigrate and the number of factories could be counted on the fingers of one hand.

Two major highways, the Vicenza-Verona and the Longo-Arzigano-Valdagno, cross in the middle of nowhere, behind a tavern "Da Piero" where people tired of pedaling stop for a glass of wine following the tradition of the Mediterranean countries and especially of the peasant North of Italy in that period. Then there are only fields.

We are in the '50 of the last century in the Alte di Montecchio Maggioro, a semi-deserted town near a major road junction. This is the place where the industrialist Pietro Ceccato realized his ambitious project to create a citadel of work. He owned the Fipa (Italian factory producing guns and airbrushes), that in 1954 became the Mapa (Machinery and equipment for motor car repair shop), and the "Ceccato" which manufactured air compressors, elevators for cars and accessories for motor car repair shops. By means of the functional planning of residential spaces and construction of housing for industrial workers coming from rural areas, the industrialist managed to transform the agricultural nature of Alte, village behind a bar, into a small Veneto *mangorod*.

The "Bulletin of the Italian geographic society" wrote as follows: Ceccato was convinced that the industrial core had to facilitate the birth of new activities that would consequently distort the working hunger of the employment. And here comes the post-war mass immigration. Traders and employees are stimulated by the breath of fresh air and by bright and promising prospects.

The employees, about a hundred of them already in 1946, became more than 700 in 1953 thanks to the migration from Veneto rural areas and from the South. Around twenty factories grew around the home company, half of which where direct suppliers of the "Ceccato".

This fraction of Montecchio is called Alte Ceccato and was called and is called [until today] "The Foreign Legion". They sent me here when I arrived because it was the land of southern Italians. Since I was from Sicily they told me straight away to adapt to the rule. And so I...accepted and opened the surgery that you have visited and it is always the same surgery from '75, it has never changed [he laughs]...



However, the population has changed since the last ten years. Only *few* southerners have remained, *many* all of the people from Veneto have left and people from different... from different places have arrived: "The Foreign Legion" has always remained [he laughs]! (Italian doctor and internal migrant)

The locality designed by industrialist took shape very quickly with inauguration of new streets and avenues such as Viale delle Industrie, Via Leonardo da Vinci, via Fermi and then Viale della Stazione with its buildings. In the summer of 1954 Alte di Montecchio Maggiore was baptized Alte Ceccato. So it came to creating a community-factory where social and working life was focused only on productive infrastructure.

The factory was the only public space of the community. School, cinema, concerts of the band *Banda Ceccato*, everything was taking place inside the buildings of the company, even the church in the central square *Piazza San Paolo* was completed thanks to the workers of the Ceccato.

It is this square that today unveils the real identity of this town's public space, born around a factory and stretching along a crossing of two state roads. In fact, it is enough to look beyond the bas-relief depicting Pietro Ceccato to see a square in front of the church in the middle of the town that is teeming with life. It is a space animated by children that are playing and by their mothers keeping an eye on them, by women with colorful dresses discretely walking through the public space but mainly by their fathers, men united in this space, gathering in small groups gesticulating and talking to each other once the hooter of the factory goes off. They talk about the politics, economic crisis scourging the working families, about mortgage tax to be paid, about cost of living and they always talk with spirit of community solidarity and a strong ambition for personal and collective improvement.

A shadow of the tree in the center of the square makes the chatting more agreeable between the members of the community who are sitting on the benches under this tree. It even becomes a symbolical center of this expanse of concrete surrounded by bars, grocery shops, pizzerias and other businesses.

It would seem that the dream Pietro Ceccato had sixty years ago comes true. However, the entrepreneur would have probably never

imagined that the voices that are animating the streets of the village as well as the desire of the community that can be perceived at the main square (that puts up the bas-relief representing him) would be the ones of workers, also migrants, not anymore from the rural areas or from the South of Italy but from a young and enterprising nation in the South of the world: Bangladesh.

### ...to a new boundary of the Bangladeshi diaspora

Today Montecchio Maggiore belongs to the Comune<sup>3</sup> of Vicenza and is located very close to one of the most prosperous Italian industrial centers - the Chiampo Valley. It is characterized by engineering industry and by mining and processing of marble and it finds its main production activity in tanning. Indeed, the area bounded by Arzignano, Chiampo and Montebello encloses the most important tannery district at the international level concentrating *in loco* the whole industry (Finco 2004). At the end of 2009 it included 23,857 residents, 4362 of whom where foreigners and approximately 18,28% in the whole Comune, which almost tripled in the course of a decade. But when it comes only to the territory of Alte Ceccato, a small fraction of the Comune, the data reveal that out of 6447 inhabitants, 2263 or rather more than 35% are migrants. It is indeed the Bangladeshi community which is the most represented with more than 1500 people all through the Comune.

As acknowledged by the registry office of the Comune, the increase of residents in this remnant of the North-East Italy is due to mostly family migration of Bangladeshis and to their stabilization. This latter one is demonstrated not only by the abundance of family reunions and the rate of property acquired, but also by structural presence of children in schools, famed attendance of the two mosques, the use of public spaces and associative, political and cultural unrest characteristic for this settlement (Mantovan 2007).

So, the fraction that covers a limited part of territory contains a high number of Bangladeshi residents. However, when strolling through its streets, walking through its square and watching some of their shops, it becomes clear that the immigrated population is concentrated and lives in a much smaller space than the entire territory of this locality. They live inside the orthogonal grid of the streets adjacent to the San



Paolo square where huge buildings were constructed after the II World War for workers coming from the South of Italy and from rural areas of the province. Today many satellite dishes are standing out from these buildings and on their balconies are hanging and getting dry blue overalls right next to the *shari* and colored *three piece*.

The socio-territorial context of the country is crossed by symbolic and material boundaries that absorb implicit meanings and exercises functions of exclusion. However, the wof of the invisible urban network that operates a tacit division between the indigenous and the migrant population is destined to become more and more porous as a result of social forces.

Here we have two kindergartens. One is in the zone where...over the highway...yes, in that zone. The other is on the other side of the main road. They are not too far (between them) but in the zone behind the highway are going almost all the Italians and here towards Alte, it's more like *Bronx* [it's like a ghetto of Bronx], so mainly foreigners are coming here. So we were trying to bring the ones that are on the Italian border, to bring them here... "On the Italian border?" [just imagine what I have just said [the laughs] to make you understand [the laughs]. So, the ones that are on this "border" [and] Italians are in the middle between these two schools. And the Italians prefer to stick to the Italians. Just a small number of them wants to mingle, [even if this number keeps growing today because there are still more foreigners and... Basically the percentage increased in these...in how many years? Five years! In an exponential way. [...]. Seventeen years ago, there were [only] *few* children per classroom...there were many Slavs, then Africans, their movement [migratory] is, let's say, more anti... But we are noticing these ones [Bangladeshi and from Indian subcontinent] in our parts since the last ten years, especially, I will tell you... there was a *boom* five years ago... in fact "a state of emergency" was declared. But let's say that it is already a couple of years now that *it is not emergency anymore*. We have finally understood that this is the situation we [normally] have to handle [...]. In fact, you can read about it also in the newspaper [he refers to the media description of the context as "socially problematic"]. I tell you: many things are true and many of them are exaggerated, invented...

(Italian teacher)

Bangladeshi community migration presents the characteristics of a *diaspora*. The Alte Ceccato *Bilesh* constitutes a "multiple community,"

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(Clifford 1999) "without propriety" (Faist 2000), composed of a *stabilized* and *settled* population that deploys international solidarity and migrant networks (Castles 2004, Ambrosini 2005) consisting of multiple bonds of attachment. The Bangladeshis of Alte Ceccato try, through negotiating practices, to fit into the immigration context and to accept its social and political norms, but also to resist and contravene them. This is a community that builds around a mythical image of its homeland a unique, stable and active identity reference that forges collective diasporic memberships. These collective feelings emerge as a result of worrying about the support and the development of the homeland as well as of the attention dedicated to the political and cultural events happening in the biggest places of Bangladeshi diaspora: [Talking about the Bangladeshi community most viewed TV networks] They are [in] Bangla, but controlled by England. They are in Bangladesh and also here. They do TV programs in Bangladesh, they go to... which country... maybe Singapore, through Singapore they link with satellite, broadcast from England and then in the whole Europe and also Italy. Here we see it by satellite dish, from about three years, five maybe. Not before. We are lucky always to see these channels. They give many things about our country, politics, social system, economy, everything. [...] Now in the English Parliament there is a woman from Bangladesh. Have you heard that a woman from our country is now in the English parliament? We are all happy, also here, it's like an acknowledgement, you know? It took about 50 years, but it's important, you know?

(Bangladeshi migrant man)

Alte Ceccato Bangladeshi community presents the diaspora's constitutive characteristics as identified by Clifford (1997). The Bangladeshi diaspora originates through a detachment from an original centre (or, to better identify the current international migration from the South to the North of the world, from a *periphery*) and it settles in at least two places *peripheral* in relation to the homeland but *central* in relation to the unequal global division of labor (Wallerstein 1974, 1980). The Bangladeshi diaspora unites from Asia to Europe the communities of petrol monarchies and the communities settled in the Asiatic South-East, the generational turnover of *Londoni* in Great Britain and the *Prohaski* communities in Italy and Spain.



Moreover, Bangladeshi migrants keep an idealized memory of their homeland that becomes "a sacred place, a blessed place, a holy land" - where they periodically go on pilgrimage - "reaching the purpose of every pilgrimage, return to the origins" (Sayad 2006: 83). It represents not only a utopian waiting for a definitive return, a physical and a geographic return, but also a return to the self, to the group and, above all, to the time before the emigration, return to the memory. But the impossibility of a real return screams in silence as an unspeakable truth. A social "misaid" linked to the tacit knowledge that *migration changes everything* and that, even if there was a return, it would not be a cure against the diaspora pain. This "nostalgia of the present" (Jameson 1989) is not a nostalgia of space but a nostalgia of time, a nostalgia born from the awareness that, even if it is possible to return to the *place* of departure (occasionally), it is not possible to return to the *moment* of departure. So, in a low voice and far from compatriots, it is possible to trust the "stranger" described by Simmel (1908), in this case the researcher who gives the migrant a moment to reflect on himself: "[To feel at home? It] doesn't happen when I go home to Bangladesh, either".

The Bangladeshi diasporic identity is forged by the perception (supported by real elements of social, material and political nature) of not being entirely accepted in the immigration social context. Against the hostility of immigration society, Bangladeshis deploy and oppose, even if every time in a different way, a group solidarity mostly defined *through the generations* by the persistence of the relationship with the homeland.

The migratory phenomenon of Alte Ceccato shows a crucial characteristic of Bangladeshi diaspora in Europe and in Italy.

If in the eighties the Bangladeshi presence in Italy was minimal, in the nineties the peninsula becomes an important migratory destination, especially Rome where 92% of Bangladeshi migrants were living. The settlement in the capital city has been so fast that this community (formed almost exclusively by *middle class men*) has become the biggest of the European Bangladeshi communities after the British one (Knights 1996). Moreover, a new phenomenon emerges in the nineties: the territorial scattering of the Bangladeshi people in the entire

peninsula. The subjects with a regular residence permit and work sought to leave the city in order to obtain better social, working and housing conditions<sup>4</sup> (Knights 1996, Zeitlyn 2006). So, it is in socio-territorial contexts as Alte Ceccato that many Bangladeshi migrants in the diaspora start a *stabilization process*, which implies the realization of a *family project* through the reunification with their relatives (or rather with whom Italian migratory politics, applying forced family "nuclearization" methods, permits the reunion). In such contexts we also see/ testify the birth and the socialization of the second generation.

The current state of the Bangladeshi presence in this little snip of the Italian North-East represents an important frame of the socio-familiar consolidation and stabilization process of the Bangladeshi migration. Bangladeshi migration presents a strong diasporic nature, develops a sensible tendency to *familiarization* and a consolidated disposition to reunification. These quantitative empirical evidences are also confirmed by the high presence of reunited children in every kind of Alte Ceccato school:

In some classes of the primary school we have almost 50% of Bangladeshi children. But if we look at the nursery school there is an even higher percentage, mostly in the Piaget school that is often in the newspapers because there are classes with 80%, this year also with 100%, of foreign children, almost all coming from Bangladesh.

(Italian teacher)

and from other indigenous privileged testimonies, in this case a town doctor:

There is a concentration of habitats around the clinic. There was a transfer of population: the Italians have moved elsewhere and the houses were filled quickly, by word of mouth, by this "ethnicity". They started in a few and gradually assembled here. [...] Gradually in the course of approximately twelve years. The ratio was reversed: twelve years ago I had 20% of foreigners and 80% of Italians, and now I have 80% of foreigners and 20% of Italians. Taking into account also other origins, of course, not just Bengalis. But the majority of the 80 [%] are Bengalis [...] it is almost as if I worked abroad in a foreign country where there is a minority of Italians. (Italian doctor)



### Re-interpreted geographies and gendered spaces for a changing community

Almost as a gateway to the country these large complexes, which are reflected on one side in everyday traffic of the road, are setting the boundary of one of the most vibrant historical centers of an area, like the one of the low and west part of Vicenza province, characterized by small and medium localities that follow one after the other along the road. Unlike the towns of neighboring regions, where the withdrawal of social life from public spaces is normality, Alte Ceccato is, in fact, a particular exception that draws new vitality from the Bangladeshi community and from the ways it manifests itself in the town.

As a result of the gradual abandonment of indigenous peoples in favor of outlying areas and continuous work of migration networks, the settlement of new residents in Alte Ceccato has resumed "a primary dimension of street and neighborhood" (La Cecla 1998) that, once vanished, is now immediately noticeable when leaving the blocks of flats behind and moving forward along the streets of the town.

These streets that are called after scientists and inventors are a place of a constant passage of countymen, who pass and cross and then stop for a while in small groups in front of windows of many retail stores, giving to an observer the immediate impression of bustling and restless activity, animated by movement, trade and pace of life, which (although they seem to emerge from the recent past) show, in fact, the intensity of life on the territory of immigration. This dual aspect, which testifies coexistence and overlapping of elements, that are apparently linked to the past, and rather modern and globalized practices, in the framework of the public space used by migrants, finds its highest expression in the nearby Piazza San Paolo cited above. It is the only town square and true center of social life of members of the Bangladeshi community. Inside its borders, emptied of meanings and functions by the Italian population, families, men and Bangladeshi women have indeed found a place of collective reference that gained in recent years a strong community value and eventually coincided for them and for the community with the very same idea of a public sphere.<sup>5</sup>

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These attributes of values and meanings are reflected, moreover, in the geography of the square that, divided horizontally by a recently constructed colonnade and vertically by the space in front of the church, has testified the growth of several businesses at its sides, most of which phone centers, "banga bazaars", money transfer that are now managed and assiduously frequented by Bangladeshi families.

From the first observation of the apparently rigid and homogeneous profile with its perpendicular lines delineating an area that is tidy inside and full/rich of excitement and liveliness at the edges, it is possible, however, to spot on the second glance unexpected places where words and codes are particularly important and where *to stay and to be* connotes specific meanings.

Focal points of a new cartography, as two sides of the same coin, the spaces in question with the polarity organized around two bars, best represent the distinct ways in which the community enjoys the city square and interprets the territory. In the first case, in fact, the one represented by the Bangladeshi-Muslim pastry, the square becomes a meeting place for members of the community that have transformed these places, now capitalized, into an internally closed center of the Bangladeshi public and social life. In the other case, however, consisting of an opening between a second bar and the two benches under an isolated tree growing nearby in the middle of the square, it is a position that breaks the geometrical features and becomes essential by providing visibility and making visible who wants to communicate with the outside world.

The "staying" of Bangladeshis in the square, thus, brings about a double meaning. On the one hand, the sense of community and the need to share are evident, on the other one, it is possible to observe a need for visibility and, even if expressed in contradiction to its diasporic characters, claims the rooting and stabilization in the context of immigration. If the Bangladeshi community considers gathering at the square as a good brand to show off, it takes on different meanings for the Italian population. They interpret it as a problematic place, stigmatized and stigmatizing, the source of degradation and symbol of deviance to such a point that those who lived in the apartments facing



this area and had sufficient economic resources moved to the most decentralized areas of the fraction or have moved away from the village.

The result is a strong and risky contrast, a process of synchronic valorization and devaluation of spaces (the effect of economic devaluation is already producing substantial impact on prices for housing) that will create a segmented real estate market and will consequently launch further forms of stigmatization and phenomena of segregation and spatial concentration in the area. However, it will lead at the same time to the acceleration of the process of settlement and rooting of the vibrant community that is being formed.

The space enclosed within the described triangle is also the place dedicated to intracommunitarian political confrontation in which the intense political associations, characteristic for the Bangladeshi diaspora, gained visibility (Mantovan 2007) and through which the self-organization exercised by this national community manifests itself, not without contradictions.

Enhanced public space thus becomes a political space: a strongly gendered place where male declination is used along with the space divisions so typical for the Bangladeshi society (Gardner 1995, Quattrochi *et alii* 2003), but also for the Mediterranean world. In fact, the analogy with what Scaraffa (1988) writes about the separation of space in a small town in northern Italy at the beginning of the last century is formidable: "Inside the town, the bar and the town square were male places, public space par excellence. The women were passing through, but did not stop for a long time to talk". In the case of Bangladeshi migrant families in Alce Ceccato, however, the square is divided by a huge screen of bricks as it was already said. One is open, made of marble and concrete, laid before the church and teeming with life, the other is more quiet and secluded, made of a comfortable lawn with benches and playground for children. The square has been adapted (to be in harmony with the architectural structure) and made compatible in the process of development with this symbolic and material differentiation of such practices and representations.

That was done before the restoration of the church. It has been done by the [Northern] League's administration [...] ten or fifteen years ago in fact. One of the first ... one of the first League's administrations that has been

here in Montecchio, when the League was established. [It] was split in half [the square] with these fascies inspired by fascists, like architecture, in neoclassical style, isn't it? - And it doesn't have any meaning, it only served to separate - according to the League's culture - evidently this is one of the values of the League, separate the religion ... and the society. Half of the square belongs to the church and half of the square belongs to the secular citizens. This was done shortly before the arrival of so many foreigners, now it has become the playground of all the "Indians"; only they are there. They also had the slides put for children. Paradoxically, the [Northern] League's administration made a square that is now being used [only] by foreigners. (A privileged witness and internal migration)

The wall containing large openings that allow the physical transition and visual intrusion divides and at the same time unites two separate locations that, however, belong to the same spatial unit. It acts as a urbanistic and material *partida* between public and political space (where the male components have their meeting point and exhibit themselves) and the more secluded and family space, place for care and nurturing, where women accompany their children to play.

This symbolic and spatial division, which at first glance may appear statically rigid, becomes gradually softer: the boundary between the two hemispheres is getting progressively more porous and the two dimensions get nuanced and penetrate into each other. As the recruitment of men for care work increases, at the same time emerges the female protagonism in relation with the associations. The reasons are in part due to the legacy of the struggle for independence and to the willingness for social change as well as change in gender relations, but also and above all, to the effects of migration that, inevitably, "leaves nothing at the place where it was before" (Basso and Perocco 2000: 11)

Consequently, scale and heterogeneity characterizing the male ("masculized") places are contrasted with the intimacy and homogeneity of the female and "feminized" place par excellence: home. The houses of Bangladeshi migrants and their families in Alce Ceccato, as has been mentioned before, consist of apartments in buildings that from the '50s hosted the working-class families from the surrounding countryside or the southern rural areas. "White house" is particularly important among these, one of the most dilapidated of these buildings, so named for its



color and known by the migrant community from Bangladesh of the entire northern Italy as a housing reference point for newly arrived countrymen: a focal point of the migration network through which the Bangladeshi diaspora unravels, a first port from which to undertake a subsequent and progressive stabilization, a capitalized place on which to build and reinterpret their own socio-cultural, communitarian and national identity. Moreover, its "patrimonialization", which occurs through the practices, is based on a purely intra-communitarian dimension: this living space is extremely significant in terms of identity, linking local and global dimension. It does not appear, in fact, as such for natives who, even if facing it daily, ignore not only its name but also its dynamics and functions.

Similarly to the central square (built to meet the need of aggregation of a community of internal migrants who underwent progressive creation but abandoned and forgotten by them a few decades later because not used, to be then reclaimed and reinterpreted by the "new" migrants), even the white building, marked by time and wear, built up in the commercial and stigmatized (for the high number of migrants) Viale della Stazione, has gradually become empty until the migrant families from Bangladesh have given impetus to a process of collective "patrimonialization" transforming it into a point of reference of the community.

**Field of struggle and institutionalization of discrimination**

In this context, in June 2009 the Comune of Montecchio Maggiore has testified a radical change of the administration: the previous town council was replaced by a majority, hegemonized by the Northern League<sup>6</sup>. The new town council has become immediately after its establishment the protagonist of series of measures targeted at the social conditions of the migrant population residing in the municipality (and, thus in Alce Ceccato) and at the redefinition, on the symbolic and material level, of the balance of power between the actors involved.

The administration's political strategy contemplates a range of actions including the removal of part of street furniture, socially constructed as a place of deviance being a match point for migrant residents (more specifically the benches used by migrant workers as

meeting place as well as space of sociality in their free time, out from work in the factory); the narrowing of the access to the rooms of Islamic prayer hall; the decision that interrupts the supply of school "foodservice" for families (mostly migrants) who are unable to provide for the payment of the fee; but in particular a decision passed in December 2009 that foresees the enlargement of the living parameters necessary for housing suitability, residence issue and, consequently, for the renewal of permit to stay and for the *certificate of no impediment* to family reunification.

Many migrant families, therefore, find themselves owning a property (or paying installment loans to buy it) that will result unsuitable to receive all members of the reunited family unit.

During the assembly between trade unions and migrant associations a father reports his experience: he and a son live in the house of property, while his wife and another son are friends' guests in a territory of the adjoining municipality since the apartment for which they have taken out a loan would result "livable", even if only for a few tens of square centimetres, for a maximum of three people.

The fact that, therefore, every morning he has to make a long journey to bring their children to school since his wife does not own a driving license, is causing him many difficulties in the workplace, where not always he manages to punch the clock within the time schedule, with all the case's consequences. (Ethnographical diary)

Such measures (which already in themselves bring into question the rights of social citizenship), in fact, would appear "undifferentiatedly spread" on the whole resident population, but if decreased in the reality of social dynamics strike with particular stuffiness migrants and their families, a real target of these policies.

That happens for both reasons, discretion with which municipal decisions are implemented (reserving, i.e., a particular attention to this part of the population, independently of the formal acquisition of Italian citizenship) and for the consequences that their interinvolvement with the socio-legal condition of migrants implied.

That has created a situation of widespread discrimination and a climate of generalized insecurity supported by spying<sup>8</sup> and police control. Following the experience of a Bangladeshi worker:



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The administration's political strategy contemplates a range of actions including the removal of part of street furniture, socially constructed as a place of deviance being a match point for migrant residents (more specifically the benches used by migrant workers as

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meeting place as well as space of sociality in their free time, out from work in the factory); the narrowing of the access to the rooms of Islamic prayer hall; the decision that interrupts the supply of school "foodservice" for families (mostly migrants) who are unable to provide for the payment of the fee; but in particular a decision passed in December 2009 that foresees the enlargement of the living parameters necessary for housing suitability, residence issue and, consequently, for the renewal of permit to stay and for the *certificate of no impediment* to family reunification.

Many migrant families, therefore, find themselves owning a property (or paying installment loans to buy it) that will result unsuitable to receive all members of the reunited family unit.

During the assembly between trade unions and migrant associations a father reports his experience: he and a son live in the house of property, while his wife and another son are friends' guests in a territory of the adjoining municipality since the apartment for which they have taken out a loan would result "livable", even if only for a few tens of square centimetres, for a maximum of three people.

The fact that, therefore, every morning he has to make a long journey to bring their children to school since his wife does not own a driving license, is causing him many difficulties in the workplace, where not always he manages to punch the clock within the time schedule, with all the case's consequences. (Ethnographical diary)

Such measures (which already in themselves bring into question the rights of social citizenship), in fact, would appear "undifferentiated spread" on the whole resident population, but if decreased in the reality of social dynamics strike with particular stuffiness migrants and their families, a real target of these policies.

That happens for both reasons, discretion with which municipal decisions are implemented (reserving, i.e., a particular attention to this part of the population, independently of the formal acquisition of Italian citizenship) and for the consequences that their intertwinement with the socio-legal condition of migrants implied.

That has created a situation of widespread discrimination and a climate of generalized<sup>7</sup> insecurity supported by spying<sup>8</sup> and police control. Following the experience of a Bangladeshi worker:



It was seven o'clock in the morning. They rang the bell. I opened the door and... bumbumbrumbrumbum! They entered just inside: five people, here and there, everywhere. [...] I saw Gianni [a local police official], and later other officers. Gianni also saw me... I know him very well, because I know well his house, he lives in Montecchio, I know his father. I've known Gianni for a long time because I met him when I made a request for a permit of stay for the association and other things. [...] I know the other officers because I always see them around here, in Alte [...]. However that does not mean that when I open a door people can enter in that way... people can not enter in that way. Into my house. Not even my brother. That's not the way. Four or five people entered into my house. One entered into my study, another one in kitchen, the third in the bathroom, the fourth in the room where my little girl [the daughter of nine months] was sleeping. How come? What is this? What have I done? [...] The same thing happened another time. Another time. Police and carabinieri [Italian military police] entered into my house... in that way... To make control, how many people live in it, if I have guests, how many children I have, like that... Without court mandate. [My elder daughter was having breakfast... she was preparing herself to go to school [...]. My younger daughter was afraid of them... she still has some problems, she is very afraid of police. They arrived very early that morning, she was born recently. She saw new people with hats and she cries even now when I wear a hat in cold weather. She's afraid of me when I wear the hat [...]. My wife was not at ease with them in the house, because he is evil when he sees a woman. [...]. She was preparing herself in the morning, and she was not ready yet when he came, God! - into the master bedroom!

(Bangladeshi migrant)

To cope with this situation, Bangladeshi migrant workers have done their best, through the self-organization, giving life to the political manifestations and actions that involved other social forces of the territory, to protest against the decision on the living parameters.

At the same time, however, the resistance put to use by migrant workers risks to be reduced to a "bargaining chip", exploited, i.e., by political forces that supported the previous municipality (not immune from political, legislative and police practices, also racist and discriminatory) in order to get back a small quotas of votes, that hold the balance of power in the electoral division.

Such exploitation has been unmasked in several occasions by the struggle of migrants.

During a parade held through the streets of the village migrant workers, coming from different countries of the Indian subcontinent, have manifested united, side by side, with the slogan that, not only contextualized local discriminatory measures within a large frame of institutional and state discrimination [Basso 2010], but also highlighted the continuity between the previous administration and the current municipality rejecting racism without distinction of "yesterday's" more *soft* and underhand from "nowadays" more stern and declared.

The space (public and private) in Alte Ceccato thus takes on specific political and symbolical contents and becomes a central element in the process of redefinition of the relations between dominating and dominated subjects. It appears as a *field of struggle* (Bourdieu 1977, 1981, 1988, 2000; Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) where hierarchically positioned subjects enter in a conflict in order to reproduce or undermine the structure of this camp. It is a place where, by means of a subtle *symbolical violence* (Bourdieu 2003, Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992) perpetrated by dominating subjects on dominant ones, the social citizenship rights get commercialized (subordinated to the income and to the national belonging of the citizens) and the dynamics of social exclusion and subordinate inclusion take shape.

### Final thoughts

The places and the spaces of Alte Ceccato were protagonists of a double process of valorization and "patrimonialization" deployed by different social actors. In the first constitutive phase, the community based on the factory Ceccato, responding to a sense of belonging emerged from "endogenous pulses", created its own collective identity with regards to the identification with the productive infrastructure and with the valorization of previously built public spaces.

This was followed by a second phase, mingled with the previous one, where the protagonist was a second unexpected subject: the migrant community from Bangladesh that brought life back to the places condemned to a certain death by indigenous and local



institutions, by conferring new meanings and through their (unconscious) re-adaptation to new emerging social and material needs.

But although the latter process has emerged from the bottom and in the daily practice, finding space and moving in the void of identity characteristic for the fraction, its recognition is inevitably confronted with the context where the power relations between the dominating and dominated subjects get structured as well as with the social political and economic context that, even in a limited area as Alte Ceccato, determines from time to time the roles and functions that the places can take on.

In this unequal balance, marked by a widening gap between a newfound animosity of the social space and a rigidity of the decision-making processes, the places and the town's landmark buildings, where Bangladeshi community is very present nowadays, can take on new but contrasting meanings that, reflecting the processes of valorization and devaluation described, have eventually attributed immense political value to the fraction.

The initiatives of the current administration that, with a series of proclamations and laws, aim at intervening heavily in the public and private space of the immigration in Alte Ceccato make fully part of this scenario and in fact, prevent the migrant component (firstly repopulated, then valorized and eventually in some cases "patrimonialized" through the daily practice) from making fully and freely use of these spaces.

The implemented resolution that involve the removal of urban furnishing from Viale Stazione (since it became a meeting point and a place of socialization for many migrants after a working shift at the factory) and that for the unprecehnt time reinterpret in a restrictive sense the housing parameters necessary for the housing suitability and, so, for the permanent settlement of migrant families, do not represent only instrumental and medialized response to an alleged lack of security and public order but in the end capture, structuring hierarchically the positions that enter in the conflict, the specific meanings in the definition of who and how can enhance the places.

So, in Alte Ceccato the values of places, streets, squares, blocks of flats and residential places constitute a superstructural reflection of

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hegemonic relations and power relations between social actors with uneven opportunities. This gives birth to different positions occupied by agents in the field: those who are entitled to attribute meanings to these places and those who undergo this process, not without putting in place, however, forms of resistance and self-organization in a dialectic of social transformation and change which inevitably regard conflictual issues.

## Notes

1. Italian equivalent for a Bangladeshi *dhania*.
2. Reactionary and conservative Italian political party which hegemonizes the Italian institutional panorama. Adopting strong racist positions, supporting explicitly anti-immigration policies, the party finds in the economically developed north-central Italy, where the productive infrastructures make extensive use of migrant labor (vulnerable to blackmail and cheap), its largest electoral area.
3. Italian equivalent for a Bangladeshi *khana*.
4. According to the latest statistics on immigration in Italy migrants are almost 5 million to which are added between 500,000 and 700,000 of irregular migrants (Caritas-Migrantes, 2010). Most of them are living in large cities and urban areas where is easier to camouflage themselves and to avoid police controls. Also in Alte Ceccato there is a small component of irregular migrants, but it is difficult to estimate precisely.
5. I feel obliged, at this point of the discourse, in order to clarify the double strand binding the global and 'local' dimension, to introduce a parallelism described by Mike Davis (2000) about the settlement of the mass of Latino proletarians in the United States. Similarly to the Italian national context and to the local one of Alte Ceccato, in fact, the deprecated "creation of the own community", presented as a voluntary auto-segregation can be understood also in another way, and not only because living in less expensive areas, less furnished or degraded is certainly not a consequence of a free choice; it should be also taken into account that the "social reproduction of the *latinidad*" and, in the case of Alte Ceccato, of the Bengali identity and cultural belonging means a *rich proliferation of public spaces* because these people, these proletarians, *have not lost the sense of the sociality and the community*, they even give proof



in the abandoned areas of the "visionary activism", of a magical urbanism capable in Los Angeles and elsewhere [even in a small glimpse of the North-East Veneto] of animating, revitalizing "geriatric" and dead urban spaces".

6. Note 2

7. More than five hundred families, in fact, would result "irregular" in terms of accommodation.

8. At that point that, at first moment, my research activity conducted on behalf of an institution, the university, has been received with suspicion and distrust.

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