

TRANSMIGRANTS, TRANSNATIONAL LINKAGES AND WAYS OF BELONGING: THE CASE OF BANGLADESHI MIGRANTS IN ITALY

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ABSTRACT

Transmigrants, Transnational Linkages and Ways of Belonging: The Case of Bangladeshi Migrants in Italy

In this study we sought to understand the transnational linkages and “ways of belonging” of Bangladeshi migrants in Italy with their country of origin. Both quantitative and qualitative methodologies were applied. A total of 100 Bangladeshis were surveyed and 12 Bangladeshi migrants from the Province of Padova, Italy were subsequently interviewed. The findings of the study reveal that a high proportion of Bangladeshi migrants who participated in the study have strong transnational linkages with their homeland. They send remittances, maintain communication and visit their families, relatives, friends and others who live in their ancestral villages and towns in Bangladesh. The empirical findings also indicate strong transnational ways of belonging to their homeland.

KEY WORDS: transmigrants, transnational ties, ways of belonging, Bangladeshi migrants, Italy.

IZVLEČEK

Transmigranti, transnacionalne povezave in načini pripadanja: primer bangladeških migrantov v Italiji

V študiji skušava razumeti transnacionalne povezave bangladeških migrantov v Italiji z njihovo domovino in »načine pripadanja«, s pomočjo katerih te povezave izražajo. Raziskava temelji na mešanih metodoloških pristopih, tako kvantitativnih kot kvalitativnih. V prvi fazi je bilo v anketo vključenih 100 migrantov, v drugi fazi pa je bilo opravljenih še 12 polstrukturiranih intervjujev. Rezultati kažejo, da velika večina bangladeških migrantov vzdržuje močne transnacionalne vezi z domovino. Tja pošiljajo remitnine, negujejo stike in obiskujejo svoje družine, sorodnike, prijatelje, znance. Rezultati nakazujejo tudi močne občutke pripadnosti njihovi domovini.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: transmigranti, transnacionalne vezi, načini pripadanja, bangladeški migranti, Italija.

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INTRODUCTION

Academic discussions about transnational migration in the present era of globalization are gaining momentum. However, it was not until the 1990s that studies of transnational migration became a recognized field of academic research (Vertovec 2003). Whereas in earlier migration research migrants were viewed as people who uprooted themselves and later integrated into the host societies, in recent decades researchers have noted that migrants develop and maintain various forms of relations with people and institutions in their societies of origin (Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Vertovec 2001; Levitt and Waters 2002). Thus, current studies recognize that an increasing number of migrants are ‘transmigrants’ “whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationships to more than one nation state” (Glick Schiller et al. 1995). Faster, cheaper, and more efficient means of transportation and communication have made this increased density, multiplicity, and importance of the transnationality of transmigrants possible (Castles and Miller, 2009).

In considering the issue of migrants’ transnational relationship with their homeland, we aimed to explore how Bangladeshi migrants in Italy construct transnational linkages and ways of belonging through everyday practices and social interactions with people in Bangladesh and elsewhere around the world. Italy has recently emerged as one of the major destinations for Bangladeshi migrants (Knights 1996; Zeitlyn 2006; Rahman and Kabir 2012). It is estimated that the number of Bangladeshi migrants living in Italy is the second highest among Bangladeshis in Europe, after the UK. According to Italy’s official data source *Itstat*, there were 82,451 Bangladeshis living in Italy in 2010.¹ This makes Bangladeshis one of the largest South Asian communities in Italy, after migrants from India. However, very few studies have been conducted about them, particularly with regard to their transnational relations with Bangladesh, which remain largely unexplored.

The studies that have been conducted have focused mainly on their relations with their homeland and contributions to the people (family members, households, relatives etc.) they left behind, and were mainly conducted with Bangladeshi migrants in the USA and the UK (cf. Garbin 2005; Eade and Garbin 2006; Mand 2010; Alexander, Firoz and Rashid 2003; Siddiqui 2004).

Therefore, there is a need to explore the transnational ties of Bangladeshi migrants in Italy with non-migrants in their homeland. We chose two cities in the Province of Padova in northern Italy as our study location. In order to identify their transnational linkages, we used three main indicators as mediums of migrants’ transnational linkages with family members, relatives, and others who stayed behind: remittances, visits, and communication. However, in this study we identified their transnational ways of belonging by analyzing their belonging to their ethnic culture in the host country. In this case, we basically focus on their access to Bangla newspapers and Bangla TV channels, through preparing and eating Bangla food, and through the joint activities of various associations for preserving the Bangla language, various cultural practices and traditions.

MIGRANTS’ TRANSNATIONAL LINKAGES AND WAYS OF BELONGING

Recent studies from the perspective of transnationalism have indicated its various meanings. Glick Schiller et al. (1995: 49) have noted that the meaning of transnationalism is linked to the “diminished significance of national boundaries in the production and distribution of objects, ideas and people”. Levitt and Waters (2002) argue that this transnational social field is engaged with all aspects of life that emerged from migrants’ economic connection with non-migrants. However, later the focus shifted

¹ This is the official number as calculated by *Itstat*. However, Italy also hosts some undocumented Bangladeshi migrants, so the real number is probably larger.

also to religious, political, social and other ties. Nevertheless, it is also argued that not all migrants are frequently involved in transnational practices (Glick Schiller et al. 1995: 48; Levitt and Waters 2002; Guarnizo and Díaz 1999).

Scholars have classified migrants as transmigrants based on their ongoing transnational linkages with the country of origin, focusing on the ways migrants usually communicate with non-migrants in their homeland by maintaining personal contacts and sending remittances to family members, relatives, friends and others whom they left behind (e.g. Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Olwig 2003; Guarnizo 2003; Valenta and Strabac 2011; Coughlan 2011; Orozco 2005). Contact is usually sustained through personal visits and regular communication. It is worth mentioning that in the case of communication, several studies have argued that migrants use various ways of communication for maintaining their relationships with families, relatives and friends back home, including mobile phones and social media such as Facebook, Skype and email. Also, through sending remittances, migrants are involved in supporting their families, buying land, making investments and establishing businesses back home. In most of these cases, through sending remittances migrants take the role of chief supporters of families and relatives that stayed behind (e.g. Olwig 2003; Valenta and Strabac 2011). According to Guarnizo (2003: 670), remittances express migrants' "long-distance social ties of solidarity, reciprocity, and obligation" which link them with their kin and friends across national borders. However, some scholars (e.g. Valenta and Strabac 2011) argue that migrants send remittances only to their closest relatives such as siblings and parents.

Among the scholars who have tried to explain the above mentioned transnational linkages through personal contacts and remittances, Glick Schiller et al. (1995) in their ethnographic studies of Filipino and Caribbean migrants in the U.S. have pointed out that these transnational practices go beyond household and family networks as part of the migrants' 'transnational family strategies'. Olwig (2003) also mentioned family networks, which she sees as vital for migrants' transnational linkages with their homeland. In her ethnographic study of migrants from the Caribbean, she mentions that through family networks, migrants identify their roots, maintain social and economic support and work for their family and/or household as a chief supporter. Based on a study of migration from Cape Verde to the Netherlands, Carling (2008) has established that the issue of transnational moralities is essentially based on this transnational attachment, which has been explained as migrants' obligations towards non-migrants, in other words as a way of 'repaying the gift of communality' i.e., a sense of obligation towards non-migrants in the family, community or whichever social group they have left behind through remittances, communication, holiday visits and so on. Furthermore, Valenta and Strabac (2011) also mention migrants' obligations towards non-migrants as the reason behind migrants' motivations for transnational attachment with their country of origin. Working with Bosnian migrants living in different countries in Europe, however, they claim that migrants only show a sense of obligation towards family members and close relatives who stayed behind. According to them, this emerges from, first, migrants' individual empathy and sense of emotional attachment to their close family members and second, from one's image about "what the non-counterparts will think about me" if obligations are not fulfilled.

Recent studies from the perspective of transnationalism have also indicated that migrants actively maintain their sense of belonging to the country of origin through several activities during integration into their host societies; especially through preserving their ethnic culture. In this regard, migrants usually listen regularly to their ethnic radio stations, watch television channels and read newspapers etc. (e.g. Guarnizo and Diaz 1999). Similarly, preparing, eating and sharing their ethnic food also expresses their strong connections with home, and signifies their ethnic identity (e.g. Valianatos and Raine 2008). In addition, various associations work as 'cultural brokers' for the migrants' communities in their host societies. Through association or club activities such as various cultural events and practices, they can aim to preserve their ethnic identity, i.e. through organizing various sports events, folk music and dance programs and celebrating their national holidays and ethnic

festivals (cf. Frykman 2001; Orozco 2005; Cheran 2003; Vertovec 2003). They invite famous popular orchestras, singers and artists from their country of origin to perform at the events (Guarnizo and Diaz 1999).

The studies which have mainly focused on Bangladeshi migrants in the UK and the USA (e.g. Garbin 2005; Eade and Garbin 2006; Mand 2010; Alexander, Firoz and Rashid 2003; Siddiqui 2004) have pointed out that Bangladeshi migrants also maintain several forms of transnational linkages with their country of origin. These ties are mainly expressed by sending remittances to their families and relatives back home, and through their investment in various sectors of their natal villages or towns. In addition, the researchers also pointed out that Bangladeshi migrants often visit their homeland twice or even three times a year. There they attend major festivals and functions such as weddings etc. in order to maintain their social relations. Communication with their kin over the telephone was also found to be the most common way in which they keep in touch with their family members and relatives in Bangladesh. They also preserve the importance of Bangladesh as the 'ancestral homeland' and their cultural roots – as they celebrate various Bangladeshi national, traditional social, cultural and religious festivals in their host societies (Siddiqui 2004; Eade and Garbin 2006).

However, the aforementioned transnational attachment has not yet been extensively researched with respect to Bangladeshis in Italy. This paper therefore attempts to fill the gap by presenting a general scenario of transnational linkages and ways of belonging of Bangladeshi migrants living in Italy.

DATA SOURCES AND RESEARCH METHODS

This paper is based on the findings of an empirical study conducted in the municipalities of Padova and Cadoneghe in the Province of Padova, Italy during the period from September 2012 to March 2013. We used a mixed-methods approach in which we combined qualitative and quantitative methods of data collection and analysis. For data collection, social surveys and interview methods were used as part of the quantitative and qualitative methodology.

By using snowball sampling, a total of 100 Bangladeshi migrants were surveyed through face to face interviews with a questionnaire. These were filled out by the Bangladeshi migrants irrespective of age, sex and religious affiliation, in order to make the survey as comprehensive and inclusive as possible. The questions addressed issues such as socio-economic characteristics, migration experiences, transnational linkages (visits, remittances, communication) and transnational ways of belonging (access to Bangla Newspapers, TV channels and websites, preparing, eating and sharing Bangla food, wearing Bangla clothing and association activities preserving Bangla culture and traditions). In order to fully evaluate Bangladeshi migrants' transnational activities as intensively as possible, certain survey topics were further explored in order to obtain a qualitative insight with the help of semi-structured interviews. In this case, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 12 Bangladeshi migrants who are involved with various Bangladeshi associations operating in this area.

In order to gain access to the Bangladeshi communities in Padova and Cadoneghe, one of the researchers approached a friend, a Bangladeshi PhD student at the University of Padova, who helped him get in touch with some of the community leaders. Afterwards, the community leaders helped him contact other Bangladeshi migrants and the researcher was able to visit several migrants' residences, workplaces and meeting places in order to conduct surveys and interviews. All interviews were conducted in Bengali.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Socio-economic background of the respondents

Among the total of 100 respondents who participated in the survey, 11 were women and 89 men.² Most of them (71%) were aged below forty; the majority of them were between 30-34 (25%) and 35-39 years old (22%). The majority of the population in Bangladesh is Muslim, and this is consistent with our survey findings. Thus, 97% of the respondents were Muslim and the rest were Hindu. The percentage of married correspondents was much higher (83%) compared to the unmarried group (17%). Our findings show that a fairly large percentage (25%) of the respondents has completed higher education; 18% have Bachelor's and 7% have Master's degrees. Our findings also show that our respondents work in various professions. The top five occupations are (i) industrial worker (49%); (ii) restaurant and bar employee (10%); (iii) street hawker selling toys and flowers (8%); (iv) clothing business (4%); and (v) restaurant or bar owner (4%). The monthly income of the majority of respondents (64%) was EUR 1200 or higher.

On the other hand, of the 12 respondents who participated in semi-structured interviews, all were male, as it was mentioned above that these respondents were mostly people who were involved in the functioning of various cultural, religious, sports and other associations and institutions.³ 11 of them were Muslim and 1 was Hindu. Almost half of these respondents were aged above 50. All of them resided in Padova and Cadoneghe along with their families. Most of them (9 respondents) have completed graduate and postgraduate studies (7 of them hold Bachelor's and 2 Master's degrees). Professionally, most of them work in industry (shoe factories, metal manufacturing factories, and transport facilities).

Three types of linkages – remittances, communication, and visiting – were considered important aspects for exploring the transnational linkages of Bangladeshi migrants in Padova and Cadoneghe. The following sections present and discuss the related findings.

Transnational linkage through sending remittances

Our findings indicate that Bangladeshi migrants in Padova and Cadoneghe help not only their families back home but also extended family members such as siblings and parents, other relatives, friends, and poor people from their neighborhoods.

i) Remittances for families back home: Our survey findings show that our respondents send different amounts of money every year to their families back home, on average EUR 4,975 per year. Among them, almost half of the respondents remitted more than EUR 5,000 annually. More specifically, 21% remitted between EUR 5,000 and 7,000, 15% between EUR 7,000 and 9,000, 10% between EUR 9,000 and 11,000, and 2% between EUR 11,000 and 13,000. 27% of the respondents remitted less than EUR 5,000 annually and only 3% of respondents sent more than EUR 17,000 in a year.

The survey data reveal that their remittances are mostly spent for the development and maintaining of family dynamics, and fulfill many purposes, from basic expenses to medical treatment for their family members in Bangladesh. Table 1 presents the major functions of remittances, i.e. family expenses (around 45%), purchase of land (nearly 19%), education (12%), savings (nearly 9%), and running

2 With regard to bias and validity, it is worth mentioning that among the 100 respondents who were surveyed, only 11 were women. One should be aware that this number does not represent the actual situation as among the total number of Bangladeshi immigrants in Italy, 67% are male and 33% are female. It has already been mentioned that the data was collected at migrant's homes, workplaces and meeting places such as mosques, restaurants, bars. In these research locations, the researcher was mostly able to contact only male respondents.

3 There are no female community leaders in Bangladeshi associations in Padova.

businesses (5%). Other reasons were reported such as purchasing an apartment or building a house, gifts for the *Eid* holidays,⁴ medical treatment, and paying off debts. Thus, remittances fulfill the family's needs for basic expenses, as well as income-generating activities.

Table 1: Function of remittances⁵

Function	Frequency	%
Family expenses	65	45.4
Purchase of land	27	18.9
Education of children/siblings	17	11.9
Savings	12	8.4
Running a business	7	4.9
Purchase of apartment/ building a house	6	4.2
Gifts during Eid	5	3.5
Paying of debts	2	1.4
Medical treatment	2	1.4
Total	143	100

Our semi-structured interview findings show that, just as with the findings of Glick Schiller et al. (1995) and Olwig (2003), the respondents develop and maintain strong family networks by sending remittances as part of their household strategy. As one of the respondents stated, “My older brother maintains everything, he calls me whenever money is needed and I send money to him, I don’t even ask what the purpose of the money is. I heard that they are buying land and investing in a business.” (Interview 8, 11 January 2013) In this case, the interviews also show that the respondents usually have strong feelings of affection towards their family members in Bangladesh. One of them stated: “I am sending money because I want to establish my family and increase the family income. I simply send money to make sure my family can meet its needs.” (Interview 9, 13 January 2013)

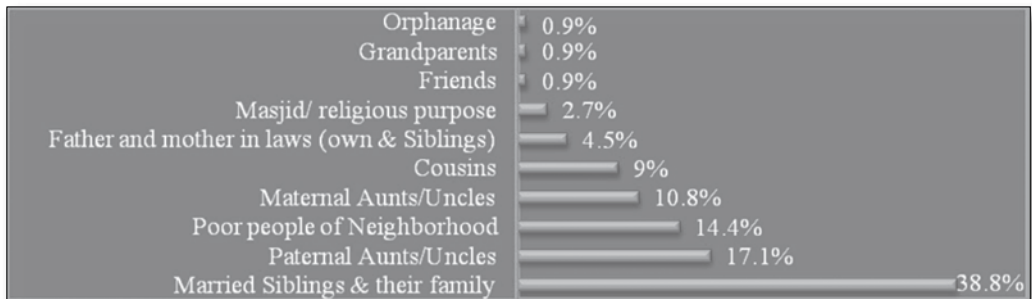
As the survey data indicated that respondents also send money back home in order to invest in businesses, land and other forms of property in Bangladesh, in the semi-structured interviews, the respondents were asked why they are investing in their country of origin. In most cases the respondents explained these investments as building something permanent in their country of origin. That is, through this type of investment they are attempting to foster a link between their children and Bangladesh. For instance, a respondent who has Italian citizenship stated the following during his interview: “[...] I am building a house in Sylhet. Do you know why? It is because of my children. If I have a house in my *desh* [country] my children will go there in future with us; they will feel that my parents are *Bangali*, they left property for us in Bangladesh, so we should go back and take care of it” (Interview 1, 28 December 2012). In this case, the respondents also expressed their deep attachment to their homeland. As one respondent mentioned, “I have invested about one hundred thousand euros in Bangladesh in order to build a house. This investment is for my country. If I had wanted to, I could have invested this amount in Italy. But I did not, because in my heart my love is only for my [own] country” (Interview 2, 1 January 2013).

4 The term *Eid* refers to the two biggest Muslim religious holidays, *Eid-ul-Fitr* and *Eid-ul-Adha*.

5 The percentages are based on multiple responses and therefore do not total 100.

ii) Remittances for relatives and others: the majority (75%) of the respondents to the survey also sent remittances to their relatives and kin.⁶ 36% of them sent less than EUR 1000 annually, followed by 24% who sent between EUR 1000 and 2000, 8% who sent between EUR 2000 and 3000, and 6% who sent between EUR 3000 and 4000 annually. Only 1% of the respondents sent above EUR 4000 in a year. The average amount per migrant is EUR 791 per year. Many studies have argued that migrants send remittances only to their closest relatives such as siblings and parents (Valenta and Strabac 2011). However, our findings suggest that in the case of Bangladeshi migrants in Padova and Cadoneghe, the range of the relatives can be very large. They not only include their married brothers and sisters who are living separately from their household, but can also include maternal and paternal aunts and uncles and their family members, and even their own and their siblings' fathers and mothers-in-law. For instance, Figure 1 shows that relatives who received these remittances included married siblings and their family (38.8%), paternal aunts and uncles (17.1%), maternal aunts and uncles (10.8%), cousins (9%), and their own and their siblings' fathers and mothers-in-law (4.5%), friends (0.9%) and grandparents (0.9%).

Figure 1: Remittance recipients among relatives and others



In the semi-structured interviews we further investigated the subjects' reasons for sending remittances to their relatives and others. We found that most of the respondents have a sense of obligation towards their non-migrant married siblings even though they live in separate households. Bangladeshi migrants identified them as their joint or extended family members. In these cases, some of the respondents mentioned that they usually sent remittances for the purpose of education of their nephews and nieces since their siblings are not able to provide educational for their children. These gestures of solidarity are examples of migrants' emotional attachment towards their non-migrant married brothers and sisters living in separate households. For instance, one respondent stated: "My older brother holds the rank of *Habilder* in the police, but his salary is too small. It is impossible for him to bear the cost of his son's education with this amount of money. Besides I treat my elder brother's son as my own son. So I sent money for their studies" (Interview 8, 11 January 2013).

The interviews revealed that in some cases, even though their non-migrant married brothers and sisters do not need any economic help, Bangladeshi migrants in Padova and Cadoneghe still send them a portion of their income. This furthers the claim of migrants' feelings of empathy and solidarity towards their extended families. One of the respondents stated:

The son of my younger brother studies in a private college; he needs BDT fifteen thousand [Bangladeshi Taka] each month. My niece, the daughter of my elder brother, studies in a government college and she needs BDT five thousand each month. My brothers can meet these financial needs, however, since I live abroad, my income is higher than theirs. So I take the responsibility of financing their studies. (Interview 2, 1 January 2013)

⁶ These include their maternal and paternal aunts and uncles and their family members, and even their own and their siblings' fathers and mothers-in-law and so on.

In the case of other relatives, the interview findings suggested that some respondents also send a small part of their income to their maternal and paternal aunts' and uncles' families, and old friends and neighbors in Bangladesh who are suffering because of the economic crisis. They consider this economic help to be their obligation towards them. As one of the respondents said, "I should contribute, as I have the ability to do so, because those who are in need require help from people like me who have the means to contribute to our community" (Interview 9, 13 January 2013).

Furthermore, our findings suggest that the practice of sending gifts also helps to construct Bangladeshi migrants' strong transnational ties through everyday practices and social relations with their relatives who do not need any economic help. As one respondent stated, "I usually send some gifts to my relatives who do not need financial help during *Eid*. It helps to maintain a strong relationship." (Interview 6, 7 January 2013) Therefore, the above mentioned findings are highly concordant with the findings presented by Guarnizo (2003: 670) that through remittances, 'migrants maintain long-distance social ties of solidarity, reciprocity, and obligation' towards their kin and friends in their country of origin. With regard to Carling's (2008: 157-158) findings, we found that the Bangladeshi migrants we interviewed are 'repaying the gift of communality'. That is, they have a sense of obligation towards non-migrants in their family, community or other social group in their country of origin. In the case of relatives and others, though the amounts which they sent are not high, they are focused on their sympathy, empathy and commitment towards them.

Transnational linkage and communication

The survey findings show that all respondents are in constant communication with their non-migrant family members; more than half of them maintain communication on a daily basis. Nearly 10% of the respondents stated that they maintain communication with their family members three times a week, 13% twice a week, and 20% once a week. Their communication with non-family members is also significant. 96% of the respondents maintain communication with their relatives and friends in Bangladesh. Even though they don't communicate on a daily or weekly basis as in the case of their family, they keep in touch with them at least twice a week (2%), once a week (32%), once every two weeks (22%), once a month (37%) and once every two months (3%).

It has been argued in several studies that the number of migrants who use social media such as Skype, Facebook, email (Messenger) etc. tends to be high, such as e.g. the Bosnian diaspora in the USA (cf. Coughlan, 2011: 111). But in this study, the data (Table 2) shows that most of the respondents (nearly 96%) use mobile phones or land lines. The users of social media were few in numbers; only 3% used email, 12% Facebook, and 12% Skype all the time.

Table 2: Means of communication

Communication	Percentage of the total 100 respondents				
	Mobile/ Land Phone	Email	Facebook	Skype	Post mail
All the time	96%	3%	12%	12%	0
Most of the time	1%	0%	0%	4%	0
Sometimes	2%	9%	12%	22%	0
Never	1%	88%	76%	62%	100%
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

In the semi-structured interviews we further explored the motivation behind this communication. As Glick Schiller et al. (1995) and Olwig (2003) state, this type of transnational engagement usually goes beyond household and family networks. Our findings suggest that Bangladeshi migrants in Padova and Cadoneghe maintain strong family networks by keeping in touch with family members that live in Bangladesh. They perceive this communication as a duty and a responsibility towards their families back home. One of the respondents stated: "I am my parents' oldest son, so I have all the responsibilities for my family... For that reason I have to maintain communication with my mother and others members of my family who live in my home..." (Interview 7, 9 January 2013).

In this regard, some of the respondents mentioned that even though their wives and children live with them in Padova and Cadoneghe, they have regular communication with their parents, siblings, nephews and nieces. They perceive this as a responsibility and a duty to their non-migrant extended family members. Some of them also stated that this duty arises from their 'blood relations' with their parents and siblings. For instance, one of the respondents stated: "Well, it is because I have blood relations with them, they are my blood; it is my duty to maintain contact with my family members..." (Interview 3, 3 January 2013). Similarly to Mand's (2010) findings, in this study we found that the respondents tend to foster strong ties between their children and their parents and siblings who live in Bangladesh by maintaining regular telephone contact. As one respondent stated:

[...] through these telephone conversations the relations between my mother and my children are sustained and continued, even though they don't see each other for long periods of time, but they have a strong affection for each other. If the kids were not able to speak with their grandparents often enough, this strong affection would not be able to develop. My mother asks them how they are, how are your brothers and sisters? My children enjoy this and they understand that their grandmother loves them very much (Interview 4, 5 January 2013).

On the other hand, if we view the findings related to communication with non-family members in the light of Carling's (2008) study, it may be arguable that Bangladeshi migrants in Padova and Cadoneghe feel empathy and a sense of emotional attachment towards their relatives and friends who stayed in Bangladesh. For instance, one of the respondents said: "Though I am working and living here, my mind is always in my home, in my natal village. That is my birth place, all my relatives live there. I feel all of them, so I communicate with them; with my sisters' husband, maternal cousins, my classmates from primary school, and with so many village friends, I try to keep in touch with all of them" (Interview 11, 26 January 2013). Moreover, their sense of Bangla identity is also revealed through their statements as the motivation behind their communication. For instance, "In simple words, no matter where we live, our roots are in Bangladesh. Whatever we are doing here, the main reason is our country. So maintaining the communication is only for the country" (Interview 2, 1 January 2013).

Transnational linkage by means of homeland visits

In our sample, a large proportion (81%) of our respondents visits their homeland. A good number (38%) visited Bangladesh at least once a year, of which 26% every year, 8% twice a year, and 4% three or more times a year. These respondents were also asked about the length of their stay while visiting Bangladesh. The survey findings show that most of the respondents (70%) stayed in their home country one month or more during their visit, of whom 30% stayed at least one month, 16% for more than one month, 13% for at least one and half months, and 11% for at least two months.

The semi-structured interview findings showed that their motivation behind these homeland visits was mainly generated by the sense of obligation towards family members, relatives and others in Bangladesh. At the same time, it also shows their sense of belonging to the country of origin. In this

regard, one of the migrants who visit Bangladesh every year stated: “The purpose of going home is to visit relatives, parents, sisters and brothers, and my wife’s relatives. Actually, the pull toward the country cannot be explained. Because the country is the only *desh* [Bangladesh], the heart belongs to the country”. (Interview 2, 1 January 2013) This aspect is also explained by another respondent: “Nowadays, I travel to Bangladesh every year, mainly to visit my family and sometimes for a family-related job. Besides, I have an attraction towards Bangladesh, I feel good when I go there. Usually, I try to travel during my annual job holidays, and I stay a minimum of one and half months there. During this time, I also meet my relatives”. (Interview 12, 2 February 2013)

Similarly to these two respondents, most of the migrants whom we interviewed mentioned that they visit Bangladesh to meet their family members – their siblings and parents. In addition, in the light of the study of Glick Schiller et al. (1995), our findings indicate that some of the respondents visit Bangladesh regularly as a part of their family strategy to look after their family investments. For instance, one respondent stated: “[...] we live in an extended family; we have a huge investment in our ancestral village. So I have to visit my home to look after these affairs” (Interview 9, 13 January 2013). Similarly to Mand’s (2010) findings, our interviews also revealed that through homeland visits migrants attempt to make their children familiar with their culture. For instance, one respondent mentioned:

[...] I think, if my children go to my country each year, they will be connected with our culture, as they have the opportunity to learn many aspects of our Bangla culture. Although we are living here together with other Bangali families, our children have very little opportunity to learn about our cultural heritage. Thus, they will learn more if they go to Bangladesh, as this is their origin. (Interview 11, 26 January 2013)

WAYS OF BELONGING

In order to understand transnational ways of belonging of Bangladeshi migrants in Padova and Cadoneghe, the following section presents the findings from respondents’ access to Bangla newspapers and Bangla TV channels, linkages through Bangla food and associational activities for preserving Bangla language, culture and traditions.

Ways of belonging through following Bangla TV channels and newspapers

Several researchers indicated that many migrant communities have their own TV channels or newspapers in their host setting. This is also the case with the Bangladeshi community in the UK and USA (Siddiqui 2004). However, in case of Bangladeshis in Padova and Cadoneghe we found that though they have not (yet) established their own ethnic TV channel or newspaper, they try to follow their homeland’s satellite TV channels and newspapers on a regular basis. The data (Figure 2) show that the majority of the respondents (92%) have the opportunity to watch Bangla TV channels that broadcast from the UK, such as *NTV*, *Channel Eye*, *Channel Nine*, *ATN Bangla*, *Bangla TV UK*, and *STV UK*. On the other hand, more than half (Figure 3) of the respondents (55%) stated that they keep in touch by reading Bangla newspapers on the internet.

Figure 2: Linkage through Bangla TV channels

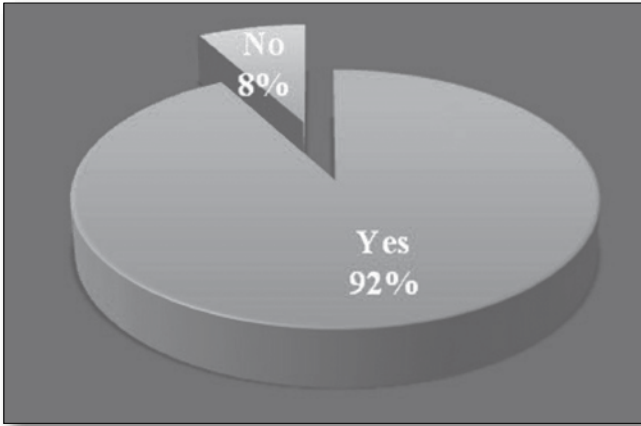
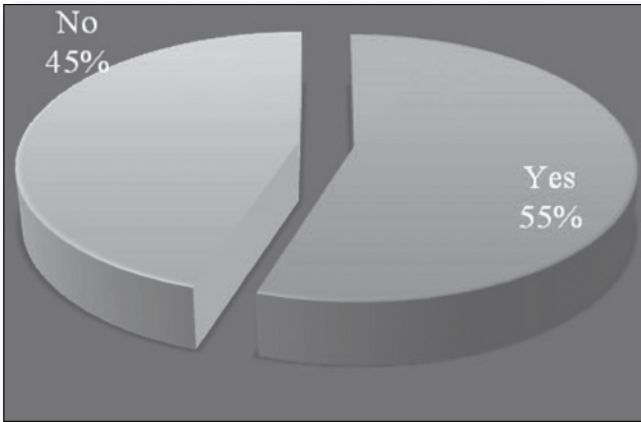


Figure 3: Linkage through Bangla newspapers



In the semi-structured interviews, we tried to investigate why it is important for them to maintain these connections. In most cases, this is generated through their sense of attachment to their homeland and through their Bangla identity. For instance, one respondent stated: “The main reason is the attraction toward the *Shikor* [roots]” (Interview 2, 1 January 2013); while another one said: “I want to keep in touch because I am Bangali” (Interview 9, 13 January 2013). Almost all of the respondents who have access to Bangla TV programs at home made similar statements of affection for their homeland in their interviews. In addition, the findings show that through this connection Bangladeshi migrants in Padova and Cadoneghe keep themselves up to date on day-to-day affairs in their country of origin. Some of the respondents also stated that in order to maintain their Bangla identity for their children in Padova and Cadoneghe, they watch Bangla TV channels. As one of the respondents stated, “My family is here and my children are growing up now. They need to learn about Bangla culture and traditions. For this reason we have the Bangla TV channels. We make our children watch these so that they don’t forget our culture” (Interview 5, 6 January 2013). Thus it is quite clear that through watching Bangladeshi TV channels and reading Bangladeshi newspapers, the respondents maintain strong ways of belonging with their country of origin.

Ways of belonging and Bangla food

Our findings show that Bangla food is another primary means for the expression of strong feelings of belonging. In the survey (Figure 4), it was found that nearly 92% of respondents prefer Bangla dishes in their daily menus; only 8% of them stated that they prepare Italian and Bangla dishes. In addition, the majority (91%) chose a traditional Bangla dish as their favorite dish. Figure 5 presents the top ten dishes which respondents listed as their favorite. According to the data, nine of the top ten favorite dishes are Bangla dishes.

Figure 4: Dishes in daily menu

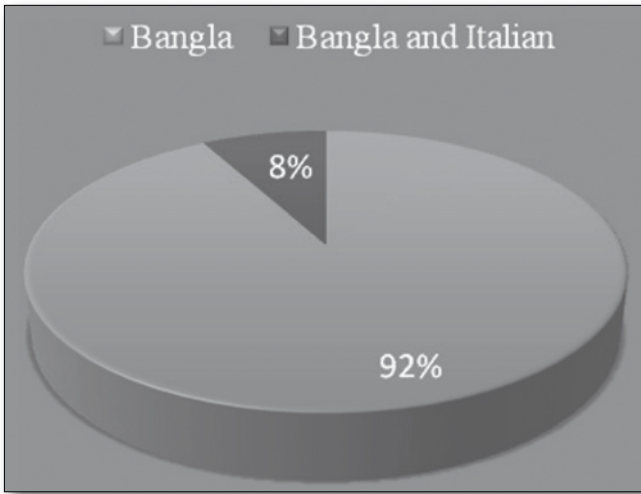
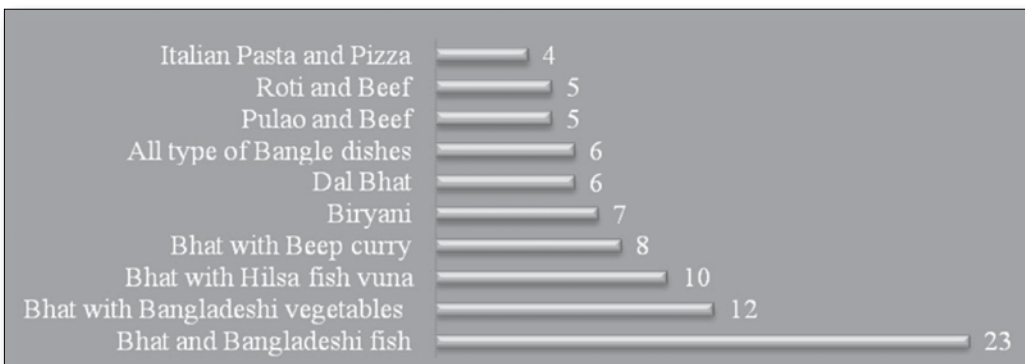


Figure 5: Top ten favorite dishes



The semi-structured interviews indicated that they maintain this connection with ethnic food because it gives them a sense of belonging to their culture and connection with the homeland. For instance, one of the respondents said: “If I eat Bangla food it feels like I am at home in Bangladesh” (Interview 11, 26 January 2013). Another said: “I like to take it from my mind; you can say it is a part of upholding the Bangla culture” (Interview 10, 14 January 2013). It was also noted that since they had grown up with Bangla food, they keep it in their daily menus though they are living in a different cultural environment.

The importance of Bangla food in their transnational lives is also evident in the presence of Bangla markets in our study area – the cities of Padova and Cadoneghe. The growing demand for Bangla food among the Bangladeshi community in these two cities has encouraged some of its members to start their own Bangla markets. As it has been mentioned by one of the respondents who was the owner of a Bangla mini market:

I chose this profession when I noticed that there is a huge demand for Bangla food in my Bangla community. Day by day, our community is growing here. Besides, I thought, if I start this business, Bangladeshi here in Padova will get all the halal meats, fish and vegetables they need. Actually, Bangladeshi like Bangla food very much, that's why I started Bangla Alimentary". (Interview 7, 9 January 2013)

Ways of belonging through the forming of various associations

As discussed earlier, migrant groups usually form various ethnic associations in their host societies in order to actively maintain their sense of belonging to the country of origin through preserving their ethnic culture and practices. Our findings reveal that Bangladeshi migrants in Padova Province also organize themselves in various associations based on regional and national origins, religion, and sports.⁷ The Bangladeshi community in Padova and Cadoneghe has a high level of engagement and participation in these associations. For instance, 66% of the respondents to our survey stated that they are involved in various Bangladeshi associations, and 72% stated that they had participated in several programs organized by Bangladeshi associations.

Our findings indicate that these associations on one hand fulfill the cultural needs of the Bangladeshi community in Padova and Cadoneghe by arranging occasional Bangla musical shows by renowned Bangladeshi artists, popular Bangladeshi sports events, etc. Occasionally, these associations present Bangladesh's diverse culture through various events including Bangla music, dance and exhibitions of arts and crafts. On the other hand, these associations help Bangladeshi migrants to maintain their ethnic identity through celebrating various national holidays and major Bangladeshi festivals, such as Bengali New Year, International Mother Language Day, Independence Day and Victory Day. Special events are arranged by these associations, for instance the day of the Bengali New Year (*Pohela Boishakh*), when they make a special dish called *Panta Ilis*, International Mother Language Day (*Ekushe February*), when they build a temporary *Shahid Minar* (martyr's monument) and lay flowers on it. A painting contest for children and sport events for kids are held on Independence Day and Victory Day. The programs of the national celebrations often include the Bangladeshi national anthem, speeches, and recitals of Bangla poetry. Several respondents mentioned that these types of programs help them retain their ethnic identity and ensure that the following generations of Bangladeshis who grow up in Padova and Cadoneghe are able to preserve this heritage. For instance, one respondent, who is the vice-president of the Bangladesh Samity, also highlighted this issue in his interview: "The events held on these occasions are attended by our children and they learn from these events, we hold these celebrations mainly for them.... We hold these celebrations in order to maintain our culture and to teach our children about it." (Interview 8, 11 January 2013)

7 Regional associations unite Bangladeshi migrants who came from the same region. We identified five associations that belong to this category: (i) Greater *Comilla Samity*; (ii) Greater *Dhaka Samity*; (iii) Greater *Sylhet Samity*; (iv) Greater *Noakhali Samity*; and v) Greater *Shariatpur Samity*. National associations comprise the whole Bangladeshi community in Padova. There are three associations of this type: (i) Associazione Bangladeshi di Padova (ABP) which is known as *Bangladesh Samity* (association); (ii) Associazione Sobuj Bangla Padova; and (iii) Rangdonu. On the other hand, only Muslim members of the Bangladeshi community in Padova have established a religion-based association, the 'Bangladesh Islamic Cultural Center'. Bangladeshi youth in Padova have also formed a cricket club which plays against migrants from India and Sri Lanka.

Other respondents also proudly stated that by attending these types of cultural events their children are taught about Bangla culture. For instance, a member of the working committee of the Bangladesh Samity stated:

They [children] come to the event along with their family members wearing traditional clothing, and they are able to observe many Bangladeshi cultural practices. For instance, they can learn many things from the speeches, especially when someone gives a speech on the history of Bangladeshi independence. In this manner they become informed about Bangladeshi culture and historical aspects (Interview 5, 6 January 2013).

In addition, most of the respondents highlighted that all of these cultural events provide them with an ample opportunity to meet people from their region and homeland who are scattered all around Padova and Cadoneghe. The president of the Bangladesh Samity explained: "On the day of the event, the people who work can't come. Approximately you can say that 100% of the people who have family come. Nearly 1400-1500 people are present at these events". (Interview 2, 1 January 2013)

Thus, the associational activities express their commitment to retain their Bangla identity by maintaining strong linkages with their culture. In addition, they are aimed at preserving their culture and influencing the identity of their children who are growing up in a different culture. These activities also indicate that they are maintaining "specific ways of being and ways of belonging" in their host society in Padova and Cadoneghe, Italy.

CONCLUSION

With regard to our research objectives, the empirical findings about transnational linkages and ways of belonging of our respondents indicate the following:

First, concerning transnational linkages, based on the empirical findings of this study, we can conclude that our respondents are strongly transnational. Similarly to many other migrant groups examined in several previously mentioned studies, a high proportion of our respondents are involved in the construction of various transnational linkages through everyday practices and various social interactions with people in their home country by sending remittances, maintaining communication, and regularly visiting their homeland. These Bangladeshi migrants are not only interested in transnational ties with their family members who live in Bangladesh, but also in strong ties with relatives, friends, neighbors and friends in their local area, and some others. Through such activities our respondents show a 'sense of solidarity, empathy, reciprocity, and obligation' towards their family members, relatives, friends and also their community in their ancestral villages and towns. However, in the theoretical discussion, several authors have argued that not all migrants are frequently involved in transnational practices. In this study the findings show that number of respondents that are not frequently involved in transnational practices is quite low. Even though only a small number of our respondents stated that they don't send remittances and visit Bangladesh, they all maintain regular communication with their extended family members who stayed behind.

With regard to transnational ways of belonging, it can be argued that our respondents feel a distinct sense of belonging to their homeland. This is evident in the activities in their daily life which focus on retaining their Bangla identity by keeping in touch via ethnic media, and maintaining linkages through preparing and enjoying Bangla dishes on a daily basis. Furthermore, they are also trying to promote their ethnic identity among the second generation which is growing up in Padova and Cadoneghe. In this case, as has been shown in many other studies, Bangladeshi migrants in Padova and Cadoneghe are presenting the vibrant cultural life of their host society through forming various Bangladeshi associations.

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