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LOCAL YOUTH, GLOBAL FUTURES. EXPERIENCES, ASPIRATIONS AND CITIZENSHIP OF YOUNG CRICKETERS OF MIGRANT ORIGIN IN ITALY

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Local Youth, Global Futures. Experiences, Aspirations and Citizenship of Young Cricketers of Migrant Origin in Italy

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Abstract

This contribution discusses the relationship between sport and citizenship by exploring the citizenship paths described by young cricketers of Bangladeshi origin living in Venice (Italy). In particular, it focuses on the processes of misrecognition, enacted both by natives and their older countrymen, that these youths are suffering in their everyday life and that are rooted and reflected in their playing cricket in the neighbourhood. Starting from these premises, their aspired citizenship paths are described, revealing how the European passport, often an aspiration in itself, may become a *passé-partout* to react to misrecognition, allowing them to describe aspirations, reflected also in their sports practices, that are nationally, transnationally and globally deployed and that may aim, although through an individual claim, to restore the disruptions lived by the whole Bangladeshi diaspora. In this sense, within their distinctive aspired citizenship paths, the borders between distinction/integration with their older countrymen and native people are blurred, thus revealing their willingness to enjoy the same rights as their native peers as well as to overcome the differential inclusion suffered by their parents.

Keywords: second-generation, migrant youth, sport and immigration, citizenship, aspiration Bangladeshi diaspora.

Introduction

In the field of migration studies, sports practices have been analysed as a means for identity re-elaboration for migrants (Porro, 2016) or as a means of social “integration”, underlining also their contradictions and ambivalences. These were linked in particular with the colonial pasts that link the Countries of origin with the Countries of arrival of immigrants (Carter and Eaves 2016; Gasparini 2016). Particular attention has been given to the processes of construction of social

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identity and inclusion through sports activism developed by youths with migrant origins, the so-called “second generations” (Ambrosini 2005; Ambrosini & Molina 2004; Rumbaut 1997) – that is, children and youth who are born or have been reunited in the context of immigration by their parents.

If, for young people in general, adolescence is a particularly complex age, for young people of immigrant origin this biographical passage is characterized by even more disorientation: on the one hand, school inclusion can be marked by the fatigue of linguistic misunderstanding, different educational references, material inequalities that reverberate in the training paths; on the other hand, their family may be the context in which intergenerational tensions between children and parents may arise, especially concerning divergent social and cultural expectations, as well as different languages, references and lifestyles-(Ambrosini and Molina, 2004; Ambrosini, 2006).

In this framework, extra-school and extra-family practices are configured as spaces of greater expression, freedom and participation (Ambrosini & Molina, 2004). Among these experiences, we may include sports practices (Besozzi, 1999; Zoletto, 2012). Indeed, sport can become a space-time in which it is possible to experiment empowerment paths and deconstruct stereotyped, negative or caricatured images of oneself, experienced in other spheres of social action, a refuge in which it is possible to feel protected and to earn respect (Farnè, 2008; Scandurra & Antonelli, 2010; Scandurra, 2010; Zoletto, 2010; 2012).

Sports practices run by “immigration’s children” are considered a field for the valorisation of the differences (Castellani, 2016) as well as a field that can facilitate forms of social inclusion (Conti, 2016). Furthermore, if the sports practice has been partly socialised in the Country of origin of their parents, it can be a privileged standpoint to observe the transcultural dynamics and the pluralities of forms of citizenship that cross societies (Fasola *et al.* 2013; Zoletto 2010), as well as paradoxes and contradictions that take shape within the paths of social inclusion in the “destination” societies (Gasparini, 2016).

Thus, practising sport, and in this case cricket, in public spaces within the city can assume for youths different meanings. Firstly, it can be linked with the expression of intergenerational ties, showed in the attempts both to restore the biographical ruptures following the migration experience – lived or told by older generations – and to differentiate from the youngest generations or their peers (Storato, 2015). Secondly, playing cricket in public spaces can be not only a means of identity construction and to express their transnational belongings, but also it may be underlying a claim for visibility, activating processes of active citizenship that may foster the intercultural encounter (Zoletto, 2012; 2010). Together, these processes may both promote immigrant youths’ social inclusion,

as well as revealing mechanisms of social distinction and exclusion. In this sense, the relationship between sport and immigrants' social inclusion is not always self-evident: other research has already shown the ambivalence and pitfalls that can be hidden behind it (Fonzo, 2019; Jakubowska, 2018).

Therefore, sports practices and citizenship paths, are intimately linked to each other, considering citizenship as "substantial citizenship" even if this concept does not find a clear and shared definition in the scientific literature, but it may assume a plurality of meanings (Della Puppa, 2015). A first meaning is that of political and social participation (Basso, 2010; Basso & Perocco, 2003; Mantovan, 2007) which refers to how subjects who do not formally belong to a political or legal community – such as immigrants – manage to participate in the political-social life through a multiplicity of practices – even conflictual ones. A second meaning is that of the fullness of rights (Castles & Davidson, 2000), that is, the description of the gap between the formal and legal recognition of rights and their effective enjoyment. A third meaning is that of social recognition as members of the community. A fourth meaning is that of cultural citizenship (Rosaldo, 1997), that is the recognition of supposed cultural belonging and specificity.

Starting from these premises, this contribution aims at analysing the citizenship paths, both lived and aspired, developed by a group of young Bangladeshi cricketers living in Venice, Italy. In particular, a specific purpose is to understand how immigrant youths' experiences and aspirations are shaped and signified, also differently, within the cricket team and if the latter may have a role in facilitating and enhancing processes of substantial citizenship, which in turn may be sustained or hindered by the formal one.

In doing so, we will refer to a research carried out in Venice, between 2016 and 2018, based on ten in-depth interviews with members of the "Venezia Cricket Club", all young people of Bangladeshi origin, born or arrived in Italy in their early childhood, through family reunification exercised by their first-migrant fathers.

After a brief description of the research context, a first focus is given to the forms of misrecognition suffered by the young cricketers in their everyday life in Venice. Thus, the ambivalent relationship with both native people and their older countrymen is underlined, offering the basis to develop further reflections on the processes that shape their aspirations which in turn may reveal different uses of the formal citizenship and a substantial one that can be deployed in different spatial and symbolic horizons. At last, throughout this discussion, presented in different paragraphs, specific attention is given on how all these processes are related to and can be found within the cricket game.

Methodology

The data used for this article consist in 10 in-depth interviews with young people, between 15 and 18 years old, of Bangladeshi origin – one of the youngest and most representative migrant communities in the Venetian hinterland –, members of the cricket team called “Venezia Cricket Club”. Among the interviewees there are high school students, student-workers, worker-students, unemployed young people looking for work.

The interview approach was of “dialogic” type (La Mendola, 2009). This perspective provided for “generative” questions (Becker, 1998), which, in other words, bring out *processes* rather than information: questions that favor the *flow* of experiences, rather than the precise experience, starting, however, by concrete episodes and by means of “relaunches” (including nods of the head, expressions of assent, silences, etc.).

To conclude, the wide and useful use of social networks, as a tool for creating and maintaining contacts with the young people involved in the survey, and for organizing appointments with them, should be emphasized.

Below, a summary table of the interviewees (*Tab. 1*).

Table 1. *Interviewed subjects*

Subjects	Gender	Age	Studies
S1	Male	17	High School
S2	Male	15	High School
S3	Male	15	High School
S4	Male	16	High School
S5	Male	18	High School
S6	Female	16	High School
S7	Female	15	High School
S8	Male	17	High School
S9	Male	18	High School
S10	Male	17	High School

Results

Venice Cricket Club, in Marghera, Venice

Venezia Cricket Club is a Cricket team, in the City of Venice, that was created in 2004 as an informal group and has been institutionalized in 2006 as Amateur Sports Association (Asd). In the same year, it was registered in the Italian National Olympic Committee (Coni) and the Italian Union Sport for Everyone Federation (Uisp).

It seems to be a “simple” sports association, but it aims to use sports activities as a tool for the social inclusion of young people – especially with migrant origins, but not limited to them –, in order to incorporate them into a broader network of relationships within the neighbourhood in which the cricketers live and in which the team is based (i.e. Marghera), to provide them with an educational reference and family support (when these do not exist), to solicit their individual and collective agency, to enable them to make experiences and get involved with activities and practices not just connected with sport. The president that has created the Cricket club supports the self-management and self-organization of the activities of the club: the young people, members of the team and cricket players manage the budget of the team, organize matches and trips, etc. Furthermore, this project tries to provide young people of migrant origin certifications and credentials (umpire, referee, coach, scorer, first aid, etc.) that can be spent in the national or local labour market, although into the specific niche of the sports industry related to cricket (cricket leagues and championship, schools, etc.). Actually, in 2008, it started to work with the Social Services network of Marghera – the neighbourhood in which the team is based.

The Club started its activities in a meadow in front of one of the local churches, but they had problems with some residents that didn't appreciate that young Muslim people used these public spaces, and thus the association moved to another parish. Then, the president and founder of the association has also had issues with the local Bangladeshi community that saw in the cricket team led by a native a threat to the hegemony of the leaders of the local Bangladeshi associations - especially when the cricket team intervened in the organization of public events and festivals of the migrant collectivity.

A double missed recognition: between discrimination and control

As indicated by its brief history, the “Venice Cricket Team” stands on a seesaw between local native and local immigrant representations, doing efforts to find its own space within the neighbourhood. The same tensions can be found in youths' everyday relationship with native people and their older countrymen. Some of the interviewees report a daily experience studded with episodes of discrimination in

public spaces, school, within the peer group of native origin and the wider society – areas in which they are reputedly constructed as “foreigners”:

“It bothers me when I go shopping and I ask the saleswoman if she can help me because I don’t understand something about an item, and she doesn’t stop talking with that Italian woman, and she doesn’t look at me because I am a foreigner and this is not pleasant” (Subject 6)

Perceived as “foreigners” by local native people, they are in turn represented as “less native” by their older countrymen, that exercise control on their everyday practices, probably afraid they are acting outside the proper rules to behave of the Bangladeshi “imagined community” (Anderson, 1983), that has been disrupted with the migratory experience:

“I cannot stand my parents’ mentality on my regard, of their generation: what to do, what I can do and I can’t do; by now they have to understand that the world is evolving, that at my age boys want to have a girlfriend, move around freely; I want to feel freer, more relaxed, more aware of the fact that nothing happens to me, now I am under pressure, everywhere I go, every choice I make, I feel under observation. Watched over by unknown people, who maybe know my parents” (Subject 4)

In this ambivalence, immigrant young people seem to suffer a double missed recognition that is contextualised and fuelled also by playing cricket in the neighbourhood as a team: a practice that is perceived as “other” from both native and immigrant collectivities and that is forced to move together with the biographical trajectories and aspirations of its players.

The generational aspirations gap: an upward mobility

The ambivalence in youths’ relationship with their older countrymen is reflected also in how they shape their future aspirations. First of all, the interviewees clearly express the rejection of the condition of social and working subordination of their first-migrant fathers, aspiring to upward mobility compared to the social position that the south-north migration assigned to their families in Italy.

“I don’t want to do my father’s job, at the restaurant. [In twenty years, I imagine to be] a little businessman, who has his own business and sells products, not created by me, but products created by others, not physically, but virtually, so if I do like that, I am a businessman who doesn’t produce. My project is to open a virtual shop on Ebay [...] then I will not need a store where products are sent by my provider to the final consumer, I only have to do the hands’ passage and just keep what remains. Basically I could do what a normal person does to work .. in this shop while working, during the break I can see which order has arrived and then buying from him what I need, or during the evening I could do the orders in an hour and I buy from him and then he sends it, knowing this thing is a positive point for gain for him. (Subject 5)

If on one hand, this aspired upward mobility can be seen as a distinction strategy, as an attempt to take distance from the *segmented assimilation* suffered by their parents and that seems to have a destiny effect on their own biographies (Portes & Zhou, 1993), on the other hand it can be interpreted as an attempt to resist, not only for themselves, this differential inclusion, thus contributing with their aspired future job to restore the lost family status. It should be emphasized that international migration is a *socially selective process* (Ambrosini, 2017). The larger is the geographical and social distance between the country of origin and that of destination, the greater are the cultural, social, relational, personal, but, above all, economic resources necessary to carry out such an experience. That is why, migration from Bangladesh to Italy represents a sustainable investment exclusively for the middle or upper-middle classes of the Bangladeshi society (Della Puppa, 2013; 2018; Priori, 2012). In other words, it is an experience that is accessible only to those individuals and social groups who have adequate knowledge to face the challenges of travel and, above all, sufficient economic resources to cover the expenses.

This implies that the immigrants who manage to reach Italy from Bangladesh share common socialization processes, a set of socio-cultural values and *habitus* typical of their social class of origin in Bangladesh (Bourdieu, 1972; Della Puppa 2016). However, at the same time, the downgrading embedded in migration itself forces them into lower and more humble social and working positions compared to those expected and in line with their *habitus* (Della Puppa, 2013; Zeitlyn, 2006). Therefore, in light of these considerations, the words of the young people interviewed are now more understandable:

“I am not angry with my own Country, but those who are arriving now and who are Bangladeshi, I hate them, there is a thing that annoys me: bosses are treating them bad because they don't understand Italian, so they work a lot and earn little. If I go there with my CV, and I go there to ask for a job, they say no immediately, because they already know that I won't accept anything, I understand Italian, I know my rights, I have documents, so, because of them I am not able to find a job. I am angry for that. If I go there and if he says something wrong, I am going to answer him back. He cannot trick me; if he decides to make me work more, he has to give me more money. Differently, they are treating the others badly, they make them work more, they give them little money and they stay silent” (Subject 10)

Born or grown up in the country of arrival, the young cricketers seem to recognise that there is not only a generational gap, but also a knowledge one with their older countrymen. Knowing they are more acquainted with the rules and norms of the Italian context, they aspire to reach a better working and social position than their parents, thus avoiding to be exploited and included in the lowest sectors of the labour market. They reject to be identified as silent and unpaid workers as other immigrants. If at a first glance, this positioning can be interpreted as a clear-cut opposition between them and their countrymen living in Venice, a

more detailed analytic lens can reveal how within their words we may find a claim for the recovery of the lost privileged status lived with the migration experience by the first-migrants. In this sense, their aspirations for upward mobility can be read as both an individual and a collective claim not to be included differentially, thus expressing not only distance but also proximity with the older immigrants and confirming the ambivalence previously discussed. This claim can be seen also in their aspirations related to the cricket game:

“I aspire to play for the Italian national team... to represent Italy in cricket or I don't know ... because staying here was a strong decision, I risked leaving the sport, because I played at a fairly important level in Bangladesh and, despite everything, yes, I moved” (Subject 9)

In this sense, playing cricket in Italy successfully for these young players means not only a personal fulfilment in terms of sportive competitiveness, but also in terms of identity building, thus confirming within the sports practice the aspiration of upward mobility for themselves and, through the sport they practised in their country of origin, for the whole Bangladeshi “community”.

A passport for globally deployed aspirations

Within this frame, it seems interesting how the acquisition of Italian citizenship is a strategic element to realize these aspirations, deployed also beyond their everyday spaces of living. That is, holding an Italian passport may be a strategic factor for intra-European mobility. Indeed, by becoming Italian citizens, they also become European citizens and acquire the faculty to move within the territory of the EU – and onward – undertaking new international migration. This also demonstrates a cosmopolitan conception of the European space and an instrumental use of the “citizenship to go” (Della Puppa & Sredanovic, 2016).

The European passport, acquired thanks to it, would act as a key to transnational mobility. It would enforce their educational credentials and qualifications achieved in Italy in an international context and allows them to express a cosmopolitan *habitus* and a globally deployed “capacity to aspire”.

“I would like to visit a country like Australia and in my project there are three countries if I don't have any future here in Italy. The first aim, given that we are close, is Germany. As soon as I have the possibility, when I am 18, I will go because I have never been there, because for Australia, to move with a limitless paper you have to find a person who gives you a job to buy food, or I would go to study, if you study you don't need a job, I could live there, attending an English university. I am undecided if moving to an Italian University or a foreign one, in Australia or Germany, because in Germany it's easier, because in two years I am having the Italian passport and I can go everywhere in Europe. I would like to go to Frankfurt, also Berlin, but I don't know anybody in Berlin, a person who may help me to live there, while I know people in Frankfurt and Karlsruhe”. (Subject 2)

“I have been to England, I visited London, Cambridge, I would like to attend University in London, I would like to find a job that allows me to travel”. (Subject 7)

Therefore, in some youths’ future perspectives, it is possible to observe how the formal citizenship, an aspiration in itself, is represented only as a necessary step to allow them to travel and to study abroad, revealing how, within their imaginings, the aspired upward social mobility previously described is possible thanks to a spatial and geographical one and thanks to an education gained in another European country, and in particular in the UK. For these youths, becoming Italian citizens can represent a way to escape their lived missed recognition, thus reacting its effects through globally deployed identity-making processes.

A passport for transnational aspirations and belonging

If for some holding an Italian passport is a strategic factor for intra-European mobility, for others it symbolizes the ultimate goal of a process of stabilization and rooting in Venice and/or Italy.

In Italy, the residence permit is strictly subordinate to employment status (Basso & Perocco, 2003). In a country in which the immigration policies bind the residence permit to the employment contract and which is characterized by an increasingly deregulated labour market, dismissal from one’s job is the precursor to administrative irregularity for immigrants and young people of immigrant origin. The acquisition of citizenship, thus, represents a form of resistance to the progressive narrowing of their social rights, outlining an instrumental conception of the “citizenship to stay” (Della Puppa & Sredanovic, 2016).

Furthermore, formal citizenship would increase job opportunities in the local context, where they could both use the professionalism acquired through university training in Italy and exploit the “ethnic-national” affiliation to conquer the market composed by the Bangladeshi “community” – especially the generation of their first-migrant fathers – both in Italy and taking into account the country of origin in a transnational horizon of opportunities.

“I am interested in business, in economics... but I also plan to become business consultant... I mean... I would like to become the manager of a company, or my idea is to become the business consultant of Bangladeshi companies that are placed here in Mestre and Venice, because given that I am the only Bangladeshi business consultant, who speaks Bangla, all small Bangladeshi businessmen who are living here, owners of restaurants, of kebab shops, everyone would come to me. I will be the first one, at least in Venice, I don’t know in other places”. (Subject 1)

“Citizenship is for higher freedom of people, for example, now I have to go to Austria, it’s true that I have to go there to take the certificate, but once I get the passport I won’t have any limit to move throughout Italy or Europe, because right now I cannot show only my Identity card at the border. For an Italian the ID is enough; once I will have the passport it will be easier, I won’t have to renew it, with the picture, so

practically also when I go to Bangladesh, I move there, I live there for 20 years, than I don't want to stay there any more, OK, I come back to Italy and I can stay here".
(Subject 4)

The two examples show how formal citizenship, i.e. the Italian passport, can represent for some of the young cricketers a fulfilment that allows them to root in the country of arrival as well as to construct or reinforce, through a finally authorised freedom of movement across different countries, ties with their country of origin, thus developing transnational aspirations and belonging. Within these processes, their aspired spatial trajectories betray the use of those same "ethnic-racial" categories that construct them as "foreigners" in Italy and from which they declare they want to take distance, thus reacting to them and showing a strong transnational disposition that prefigures social dynamics similar to those consolidated in other global hubs of the "Bangladeshi Diaspora" in the world, London *in primis*. For these youths, the Italian passport is not only a formal recognition that has to be used, but one that has to be exercised substantially and that may help them to react and overcome that double missed recognition they are suffering in their everyday life.

Conclusion

This article contributes to the analysis of the experienced and aspired citizenship paths developed by young people of migrant origin and, specifically, the Bangladeshi members of the cricket team in Venice, Italy: Venezia Cricket Club, born in 2004 as an informal group and institutionalized in 2006.

The stories, biographies and trajectories of these young people, in the country and the city where they were reunited by their migrant parents and in which they live, seem to trace those of the same cricket team in which they play, in a dynamic for which individual and collective paths reflect each other. The young people interviewed feel disowned and blamed by the Bangladeshi community of Venice, because they assume behaviours that deviate from the norms of the community and tend to represent and perceive themselves as natives, freeing themselves from a "one-way" ethnic and national belonging; but also by the society of natives who labels them irremediably as foreigners, despite having grown up in Italy since preschool age. They feel they are both controlled by Bangladeshi adults and stigmatized and pushed away by Italian adults in the same public spaces. Similarly, the cricket team struggled to find public recognition and physical places to train, as it is perceived as related to an "other" and

“exotic” sport – and world – by the Italian society, but also as “betrayal” by the Bangladeshi community.

Such dialectic between the individual dimension and the collective one emerges, from the interviewees’ words, also concerning their aspirations for social mobility. On the one hand, they suffer from the oppressive control of the Bangladeshi community and they want to distinguish themselves from them in terms of social realization, that is, rejecting the lowest paid and most humble job placements – the so-called “3D jobs”, “Dirty, Dangerous and Demeaning jobs”, of the secondary labour market (Piore, 1975) reserved to migrant people – thus recovering the social positioning of their family of origin in Bangladesh; on the other hand, their desire for social realization also constitutes a form of collective redemption aimed at unmarking the whole Bangladeshi community.

In this aspiration for individual and collective redemption, which takes shape both in sports and in the labour market, an important role is played by Italian citizenship – and, therefore, the European passport: a cornerstone of social stabilization and professional achievement in Italy and/or an access key to European and international mobility. In both cases, it is a path to be conquered, that for their Italian peers “by birth” is “taken for granted”, i.e. to be citizens of the country in which they grew up.

Thus, the acquisition of citizenship constitutes an aspiration in itself and, at the same time, a driving force for other aspirational paths and a form of agency practised to emancipate from a subaltern citizenship. Therefore, unequal youth experiences and “unequal youth” shape unequal aspirational horizons and unequal citizenship paths, but also different forms of agency. It remains to be explored, perhaps in a future research contribution, how belonging to the cricket team has contributed to the formation of these desires and paths of awareness, that is, to what extent the Venezia Cricket Club is an incubator of these aspirations and processes.

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