

## **The role of religious affiliation in migrant lives: a socio-anthropological investigation in the Bangladeshi community of Rome**

### **Il ruolo dell'affiliazione religiosa nelle vite migranti: un'indagine socio-antropologica nella comunità bangladesa di Roma**

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#### **Abstract**

This paper questions the role played by religious affiliation in the migratory experience, examining, specifically, the Islamic community of Bangladeshi migrants in Rome, which has been observed in the urban space of the multicultural district of Tor Pignattara. Starting from the results of an ethnographic research on the local Bangladeshi mosques, the investigation focuses on the intolerance with which the diffusion of Islamic places of worship in the Italian urban landscape is generally received, highlighting the deep implications that attitudes of closure can have at the institutional level on the actual social and political recognition of Islam in the reality of the territory. By observing the prayer halls of Tor Pignattara, it is possible to highlight the complexity of the functions they perform, which go far beyond the spiritual sphere, and elevate religious institutions in the contexts of arrival to essential points of reference for the integration of Muslim believers in the Italian social fabric.

**Keywords:** Bangladeshi migrants, Islam, urban space, prayer rooms, Tor Pignattara.

#### **Sommario**

Nel presente elaborato ci si interroga sul ruolo assunto dall'affiliazione religiosa nell'esperienza migratoria, prendendo in esame, in particolare, la comunità islamica dei migranti bangladesi a Roma, osservata nello spazio urbano del quartiere multiculturale di Tor Pignattara. Muovendo dagli esiti di una ricerca etnografica relativa alle moschee bangladesi locali, si pone l'accento sull'insofferenza con cui è generalmente recepita la diffusione di luoghi di culto islamici nel panorama urbano italiano, evidenziando le profonde implicazioni che atteggiamenti di chiusura a livello istituzionale possono avere sull'effettivo riconoscimento sociale e politico dell'Islam nella realtà del territorio. Osservando le sale di preghiera di Tor Pignattara risulta poi possibile mettere in luce la complessità delle funzioni da esse svolte, che vanno ben oltre la sfera spirituale, ed elevano le istituzioni religiose nei contesti di arrivo a punti di riferimento essenziali per l'integrazione dei fedeli musulmani nel tessuto sociale italiano.

**Parole chiave:** migranti bangladesi, Islam, spazio urbano, sale di preghiera, Tor Pignattara.

#### **Introduction**

This contribution tries to deepen, without any pretension to be exhaustive, some of the many facets that characterize the link between migration and religious belonging; a variable, the latter, which can play a decisive role in the concrete life experiences of migrants. In order to do this, the analysis was focused on the Islamic religiosity of the Bangladeshi community in Rome, a collectivity that finds in the affirmation of its religious identity an important tool to negotiate a space of placement in the urban environment of the Capital. The reflection focuses, in particular, on a specific spatial context: that of the multicultural neighborhood of Tor Pignattara, also called *the Roman Banglatown* precisely because of the conspicuous presence of migrants from Bangladesh (Broccolini, 2014; Ficacci, 2016; Fioretti and Briata, 2019). The considerations contained in this study are based on an ethnographic research related to the main Islamic prayer halls present in Tor Pignattara, all Bangladeshi-run, carried out through observation, in-depth interviews and informal dialogues with social actors who live in the area and

habitually meet in the different mosques<sup>1</sup>. The chosen terrain is, in fact, a privileged setting for examining the debated issue of the spread of Islamic places of worship in the Italian urban landscape, which meets with strong resistance at the local level and is often the object of political instrumentalization. Mosques, or rather the main spatial markers of the Islamic presence in the public life of the receiving society, due to the *native* hostility, are in fact relegated to neutral external spaces, invisible to non-Muslims, thus undermining the effective social recognition of Islam in the reality of the territory. The exercise of religious freedom is, therefore, for Bangladeshi migrants, an important channel of legitimation of their participation in the public sphere of the city. Moreover, it is clear – from the words of the believers who attend them daily – the complexity of the functions performed by the prayer rooms of Tor Pignattara, which are not limited to being places of spiritual recollection, but also represent spaces for social sharing and cultural promotion, as well as crucial sources of psychological and moral support for migrants. In this way, these places of worship contribute to contain the most traumatic consequences of the contact with the host society, acting as essential points of reference for the integration of Muslim believers in the Italian social fabric and contributing to some extent to fill the gaps of institutional bodies in the field of social services.

### **1. The question of mosques in the Roman *Banglatown***

The migratory processes of recent decades have led European nations to measure themselves against the interaction and sharing of social space with communities identified as being discordant from a point of view of values and culture. Everyday multicultural cohabitation has not infrequently been accompanied by the manifestation of feelings of aversion, discriminatory attitudes or openly hostile behavior on the part of members of the receiving society. An emblematic example of this conflictual climate is the sense of apprehension and impatience that exists around the spread of Islam and the rooting of Muslim believers in the European religious panorama (Allievi, 2002; Marechal, 2002). However, these attitudes of closure clash with the evidence of a reality of coexistence that appears anything but transitory: in Italy, according to CESNUR estimates, updated to 2020, the number of Muslim believers would reach 2,221,500 units, thus constituting by far the largest religious minority in the country (Introvigne and Zoccatelli, 2020). Considering the numerical entity and the non-temporariness of the Islamic stabilization on the national territory, it is possible to understand the strong impact it has had on the evolution of the Italian urban space. The distinctive expression of Islamic spatiality, i.e. the ways and places through which Muslim immigrants settle and characterize their presence in space (Chiodelli, 2014), which is most tangible in the city context of countries of immigration, is substantiated, without a doubt, in the establishment of special places of prayer, which constitute a physical symbol of the actual entry of Islam into the receiving public sphere. Three basic types of spaces dedicated to worship can be distinguished: first, *Islamic centers*, aggregative spaces that offer the community a variety of cultural, social, and religious activities; second, *actual mosques*, located in buildings with architectural elements typically associated with the Islamic faith, such as domes, minarets, Islamic symbols, and Arabic lettering; third, the neighborhood prayer rooms or *musallayat*, usually located in small rooms, often precarious and undignified, obtained by adapting basements, apartments, warehouses or garages for religious purposes (Allievi, 2010). An analysis of the data aimed at quantifying the places of Islamic worship in Italy does not reveal any particular problems related to the scarcity of available spaces, which, according to the estimates of Maria Bombardieri (2011), amounted to 769 already in 2008. What arises is rather a question of a qualitative nature: almost all places of prayer

are, in fact, *musallayats*, while there are only twelve official mosques. The lack of real mosques on the Italian territory is closely related to the resistance of the population and local institutions to the start of new construction projects (Ferrari, 2008): the requests of faithful Muslims in this sense can trigger heated conflicts with the locals and run into a series of technical and bureaucratic obstacles that, in fact, prevent the concrete realization (Saint-Blancat and Schmidt di Friedberg, 2005). Muslim practitioners, therefore, faced with the many difficulties that accompany the opening of more impressive mosques, opt to meet their religious needs in *musallayats* that are difficult for non-Muslims to locate. The discreet exercise of freedom of worship, in places that appear cramped and inaccessible to the *autochthonous* population, contributes to preventing the Islamic community from having greater access to public life which, instead, the construction of a more majestic building could help to encourage: the mosque, in fact, by marking the space and, consequently, openly manifesting the presence of a local Muslim community, expresses the passage of Islam from the private sphere to the public sphere of the hosting context (Cesari, 2005). In addition to the aversion experienced in the country of arrival, the establishment of Islamic prayer places is also hindered by a structural problem concerning the Italian regulatory framework for the protection of religious minorities. Article 8, paragraph 3 of the Italian Constitution states that relations between the State and religious denominations other than the Catholic one are regulated by law on the basis of agreements with their representatives. Therefore, legal recognition is not addressed to a generic confession per se, but rather to a particular association that proposes to represent it. A reality as varied as that of the Islamic community, lacking an univocal representation, has not stipulated any agreement with the Italian State: consequently, Muslim mosques are officially recognized as cultural associations, with the obvious discrimination that this entails. In a scenario such as the one just outlined, the Roman neighborhood of Tor Pignattara is a privileged point of observation of the complex issues related to coexistence: the large foreign presence is, in fact, a distinctive feature of a palpable local landscape where, especially since the mid-nineties, a large community of migrants from Bangladesh has settled (Pompeo, 2011). Despite the heterogeneous religious landscape that characterizes the neighborhood, it is the presence of Islamic believers, and especially the spread of their places of worship, that tends to monopolize the public attention of the area regarding the religiosity of the migrant component, constituting a fundamental thematic node of the effervescent local political debate (Russo and Tamburrino, 2015). There is, in fact, a certain resistance, if not opposition, on the part of institutions and part of the community to the opening of mosques in the territory, fuelled by suspicions about the practices carried out by Muslims in their religious spaces. «All Muslims are terrorist forces, aren't they?»<sup>2</sup> (Bachcu, manager of Masjidul Ummah & Madrasah, January 12, 2021)<sup>3</sup> says in an obviously sarcastic tone Siddique Nure Alam, known as Bachcu<sup>4</sup>, an important Bangladeshi community leader and president of the Dhuumcatu Association, an organization that since 1992 has been working in the political, social and cultural fields in support of foreigners in the area:

After 2001, after the September 11 attack, politically the Western world has criminalized the Islamic religion. We still do not understand why. Italians, because of this criminalization on the news, on television, in debates, in politics, ask themselves: «But what are they doing inside those halls? They speak in Arabic, we don't understand. They are preparing bombs!» Citizens are afraid of Muslims. There is a lack of knowledge about this faith, wrong information. So to respond to this problem we sought public visibility (Bachcu, manager of Masjidul Ummah & Madrasah, January 12, 2021).

Therefore, in the face of growing disparaging propaganda aimed at tarnishing the image of their faith, practicing Muslims have gathered to pray in the squares in order to publicly show the true face of Islam:

Seeing that more and more our religion was being targeted, the association called on its Islamic members to take to the streets and bring prayer, culture, and Islamic custom in public and not stay locked in prayer halls. You have to do the *adhān* publicly with the microphone, so everyone sees the prayer. Because that's what you do in mosques, you pray! We also organize public *Ramadan*. This way you understand what we do and you don't say bullshit on television (Bachcu, manager of Masjidul Ummah & Madrasah, January 12, 2021)!

The prayers in the square were also an important tool to protest against the repeated closures of Islamic places of worship. In fact, in the absence of an agreement that defines the relationship between the Islamic communities and the Italian State, the faithful Muslims of Tor Pignattara are forced to self-organize for the exercise of their religious freedom, opening *musallayat* in garages, stores or basements, officially registered as cultural associations. The concentration of practitioners in these places often generates the irritation of the neighbors, who may choose to turn to the authorities for intervention. When subjected to a police inspection, such facilities easily incur irregularities such as non-compliance with safety regulations or building abuse, resulting in their immediate seizure. Thus, the faithful who have been left without a room in which to gather to pray have no choice but to find a new space to worship:

The Administration has given no indication of how or where to build a prayer room and no one has ever given us help. And then it intervenes by closing here and there. The problem is not the prayer that is done five times a day. There are few people who go to pray and it can be done in the halls. The problem is on Fridays, which there is so much participation and in times of celebration. Then the people of the condominium make complaint after complaint, complaining about the crowd in front of the door or to hear people talking or praying early in the morning: they throw dirty water, bleach, glass bottles, everything. However, the administration has never intervened to solve the problem that we are many and we need a place and thus we have self-organized for prayer. Because it's a vital thing for the faithful! The problem is that when it's all self-funded you clearly end up in a garage or in a basement because the rent is lower (Bachcu, manager of Masjidul Ummah & Madrasah, January 12, 2021).

Recently, the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic has greatly exacerbated the problem of the scarcity of space for prayer: the capacity of mosques, in fact, has been greatly reduced, in compliance with new rules of social distancing that require restricted access and the maintenance of at least one meter between the various carpets. Bachcu says that his association has made several proposals to interrupt the frustrating vicious circle of closures and openings of places of worship, but only receiving refusals from the institutions:

We can understand that so many people can create disturbance for the condominium, but then give us another place! We have asked the Administration, since there are so many disused and abandoned lands nearby, where they go to shoot up or throw garbage, and where at night there is also prostitution, give us a corner of land to

build a tent and ask for rent. So we can go there on Fridays, send the children there after school, or when there is a bigger religious initiative, without disturbing anyone. But the answer is always no. We are ready to move, but where do we go? Under another building?! We always do the same thing (Bachcu, manager of Masjidul Ummah & Madrasah, January 12, 2021)!

The Dhuumcatu leader argues that the inconsistency found in the institutions on the issue of places of worship is due to a lack of political will in finding a real solution to the problem. In fact, from this point of view, the debate on prayer halls would be a useful resource for political forces to increase electoral consensus and any move on the issue would only be part of a strategy that, in truth, does not contemplate a real change in the status quo:

If the police want to find some irregularity, they find it everywhere, even in the Italian Parliament. If they want to close, they close. When they come they already have the viewpoint «We must close!». We have a proverb in our country: «Of how many stars you see in the sky, there are more articles in the pocket of the Police to cheat the citizen!». The problem is not solved with the uniform, the uniform only serves momentarily to plug the hole. The real problem is that they don't want to solve the issue because it is a political tool: when they see that to get a few more votes it is convenient to say something against, they say things against, or if, at that moment, they have more votes by saying something in favor, they say things in favor. «If I give the Islamists this land at the next elections what do I get? Someone brings me votes! No. What do I care about solving» (Bachcu, manager of Masjidul Ummah & Madrasah, January 12, 2021)!

With these words Bachcu seems to want to convey the sense of deep mistrust that his association feels about the work of Italian institutions:

We have seen that Italy is a country in which, despite its democracy, no one hears until you scream! No one hears, whether in public office, whether they have a uniform, whether they don't have a uniform, whether they have political representation, if you don't scream no one hears you (Bachcu, manager of Masjidul Ummah & Madrasah, January 12, 2021)!

## **2. Religiosity as a resource in the migratory experience**

In Tor Pignattara there are five Islamic prayer rooms, located not far from each other: the Masjid e Quba, in via della Marranella 68, the Masjid e Rome, in via Gabrio Serbelloni 25, the Masjidul Ummah & Madrasah, in via Capua 4, the Torpignattara Centrale James Mosjeed, in via Lodovico Pavoni 47 and the Torpignattara Muslim Center, located in via Carlo della Rocca 25. These places of worship are all managed by Bangladeshis and therefore, the *khutba*, the Imam's sermon, is held in Bengali; this has obvious consequences on the users of the mosques which are attended mostly by practitioners of that nationality. Bangladeshi prayer halls are characterized by a clear separation between administrative management and religious guidance: it is not the Imam, holding a role exclusively related to spiritual matters, who deals with the concrete management of the mosque which is, instead, in the hands of the political and economic elites of the community. This division of tasks is clearly explained by A., a trader engaged in import-export activities, who manages the Torpignattara Muslim Center, an important Islamic

center that arose in the area in 2014: «For information about the prayer room, you don't need to talk to the Imam. The responsibility is here, it's mine. In our culture it is not the Imam who is responsible. The Imam reads the book and does the prayer» (A., manager of the Torpignattara Muslim Center, January 14, 2021). Against this backdrop, it is easy to see why the Masjidul Ummah & Madrasah, which opened in 2014, is placed in the same location as the Dhuumcatu Association: this overlap shows the level of interconnectedness, within the Bangladeshi community, between political, social, and economic leadership and the management of religious spaces, with the most prominent migrants in the community rivaling each other to channel a consensus that legitimizes their social role, placing themselves at the head of the cultural associations that manage the prayer rooms (Russo, 2019). Observing the mosques of the neighborhood from the outside, one notices the almost total invisibility of those that instead, in the eyes of the people who visit them daily, constitute to all intents and purposes sacred places of intense significance. The only identification marks that might suggest to passers-by that they are in the presence of one of these *hidden* religious spaces, which would not otherwise be distinguishable from the common door of a building or the entrance to a garage, are the small signs with the name of the place at the entrance or the signs bearing directions for the faithful, written strictly in Bengali. This *camouflage* is in deep contrast with the crucial importance that mosques actually assume in the daily experience of the migrant component of the territory. Religious affiliation, in fact, can prove to be a source of resources of various kinds in the contexts of arrival (Bava, 2011; Bonfanti, 2014; Hagan and Ebaugh, 2003; Hirschman, 2004): the inclusion in religious communities gradually formed in the territories of destination, with the attendance of spaces used for worship, provides members with answers not only about spiritual needs, but also to a whole series of concrete needs that characterize the daily life of migrants. These institutions can, in fact, perform important functions of practical, organizational and logistical support, providing different types of assistance and proposing educational and recreational activities for leisure time, economic aid services, as well as the organization of funerals and the repatriation of remains to the motherland (Ambrosini, 2007). In this regard, R., a faithful Bangladeshi frequenter of the Masjid e Rome, which remained closed from April 2019 to May 2021 following the seizure of the premises by the local Police, recounts the prominent role of the mosque in relation to its educational offerings and its commitment to supporting and engaging the community:

Many believers used to come, up to 1000 on Fridays. Before the closure we used to do different activities. In addition to prayer, we did the Islamic cultural school. There was the *madrasa*, we taught the Koran to children. For those who wanted, there was also an Arabic school and then, very important, we did the teachings of Bangladeshi culture for the new generations. There was also homework help for the children (R., practitioner at Masjid and Rome, January 18, 2021).

In addition to educational and cultural initiatives, *musallayats* can provide material aid to the community, for example by financially supporting families struggling with expenses through donations: «The prayer room is in the business of helping people because there is often no work, especially in this time of Covid. If we hear information about some family that doesn't have money to buy groceries and get by we collect it and organize a donation» (A., manager of the Torpignattara Muslim Center, January 14, 2021). Beyond the practical advantages, participation in religious life allows the migrant to be part of a context of conviviality and social exchange in which it is possible to share experiences and ensure mutual support, regardless of the intensity of the personal

relationship: the sense of reciprocal trust is, indeed, generated by the common respect for shared values, which, in some cases, are very distant from those of the host society. Human contact and daily encounters with their own compatriots can provide migrants with decisive forms of psychological support in order to cope with the sense of hostility and isolation often experienced in receiving countries (Hirschman, 2004). Furthermore, the mosques in Tor Pignattara implement several initiatives aimed at fostering mutual understanding between immigrants and the local population. Notably, A. emphasizes the need for openness to cultural contact through the promotion of interreligious dialogue between the various faiths and the creation of opportunities for socialization among the different components that inhabit the area:

Developing a dialogue with other cultures, other faiths, is very important to us. There are many prayer rooms and cultural centers in this area because we are so many Bangladeshis and Muslims living here. Sometimes Italians have trouble accepting Muslim prayer places. But, you see, we live here, in this area, in Italy, and we have to know our Italian neighbors and let them know us. To live together it is important to know each other (A., manager of the Torpignattara Muslim Center, January 14, 2021).

In this perspective of reciprocity, the Torpignattara Muslim Centre has undertaken initiatives such as the Italian language course, which is carried out with the support of volunteer students from the University of Tor Vergata, or the translation into Italian of the *khutba* in Bengali language, thanks to the help of some young people of the second generation. Moreover, in collaboration with Italian associations, such as the Ecomuseo Casilino, seminars and conferences were organized on the theme of religious pluralism and intercultural exchange and, on certain days, it has been possible for schools to participate in guided tours inside the mosque. In addition, religious communities represent a fundamental point of reference for migrants, especially with regard to the first reception, providing administrative and bureaucratic help with residence permits and ensuring access to useful information for finding housing and employment opportunities. Therefore, in the efforts made for the inclusion of immigrants in the context of arrival by the complex of Bangladeshi associations – of which the prayer rooms are a crucial element – can be found «forms of do-it-yourself welfare» (Fioretti and Briata, 2019, p. 407), which actually fill the gaps of the institutional bodies in the field of social services for the integration of newcomers and in the support of the weakest segments of the population. The relationship with the Italian welfare is, in fact, strongly conditioned by the legal status of the user, creating a distinction between those who have managed to regularize themselves, and therefore have effective access to social services, and the irregular, excluded from institutional garrisons and forced to turn for their needs to Bangladeshi third sector organizations and social networks within the community (Priori, 2012). At the same time, however, community support chains, acting as mediators in the relationship between the state and individuals, risk exacerbating the sense of distance between the former and the latter; this can lead Bangladeshis to establish relationships with more influential compatriots in the community that are not always free of ambiguity, which sometimes expire in dynamics of exploitation rather than help (Knights, 1996).

## Conclusions

By examining the urban reality of Tor Pignattara, the investigation has attempted to highlight the importance that belonging to a religious community and attending its places of worship in the country of arrival can have on the existential paths of migrants. Hence,

as shown in the case study, religious affiliation can be a valuable tool to find one's place in the host context and ensure access to a range of resources that can be crucial for effective integration into the new social reality. The coexistence in the place of cultural, religious and linguistic universes of heterogeneous origin makes Tor Pignattara an ideal point of observation of the daily negotiation that generally accompanies the sharing of social space between the *autochthonous* population and the immigrant component. The multi-religious cohabitation in the neighborhood seems, in fact, to be highly problematic regarding the presence of Muslim believers and the consequent processes of Islamization of urban space (Cesari, 2005) connected to the spread of mosques. Overall, in the Italian context there is a certain resistance of institutions and part of the receiving society to what Suzanne Hall (2015) defines in the title of her work as *migrant urbanisms*, i.e. the processes of urban transformation triggered by the settlement of immigrants in the receiving territory. In this framework, any proposal put forward by the Muslim faithful of Tor Pignattara to solve the problem of overcrowding of prayer rooms and interrupt the surreal spiral of openings and closures to which they are subjected, seems inevitably destined to clash with the structural immobility that paralyzes the public administration on the matter. The Italian ruling class chooses to confront the so-called *migratory issue* with an emergency approach, preferring contingent police responses to effective long-term political solutions. Therefore, Muslims, in spite of the numerical size and the duration of the stabilization of their communities, instead of being perceived as an internal and lasting element in the Italian socio-cultural landscape, are on the contrary deliberately understood as an alien and passing presence (Pompeo, 2011). Which is why the exercise of their religious freedom, far from being a fundamental right guaranteed in a democratic country, becomes, for Bangladeshi migrants, a crucial field of action to assert their participation in the urban public life (Salguero Montaña and Hejazi, 2021) and claim a real *right to the city* (Lefebvre, 1968), that is, the right to spatial and social inclusion in the urban landscape of the Capital. On the one hand, Bangladeshis, also thanks to their strong political activism, intentionally exert pressure on local authorities in order to find their place in the city's social universe. In this sense, public events such as street prayers held in the neighborhood as a sign of protest are part of a deliberate strategy of visibility and transparency of Islam against stereotypes and prejudices. On the other hand, however, Bangladeshi migrants operate in parallel forms of involuntary daily resistance: by marking the space with their bodies and practices, they shape the physical and social metropolitan landscape, actually challenging, with their very presence, the «dominant ideas of who has the right to occupy and be visible in the city» (Piazzoni, 2021, p. 74). Therefore, the condition of spatial and, one can say, *visual* marginality in which the Muslim mosques in Tor Pignattara find themselves seems to be a direct mirror of the social and, consequently, political marginality to which the Italian institutions consider appropriate to relegate the Islamic component of the population: the mosques are *hidden*, in the clumsy attempt to *hide* the Muslims, in order to avoid, in this way, to take any concrete initiative on an issue with uncomfortable political implications. The push to neutralize the physical imprint of the Islamic presence in the hosting context does not match, however, with the actual centrality assumed by the places of worship in the existential horizons of Bangladeshi migrants, emblematically demonstrated by the operational dynamism of the prayer rooms of Tor Pignattara in the economic, social and cultural fields. The role of mediators between the State and individuals that they, together with the rest of the Bangladeshi associative world, end up assuming in the process of immigrants' incorporation in the Italian society, can however contribute to the emergence of intra-community relationships based on disparities of power and dependence, which conceal oppressive social dynamics towards the weakest members of the community. In



this sense, even if immigrants' ability to influence and negotiate is increased by the fact that they interface with institutions as a united group and not as individuals, there is a risk of excessively strengthening Bangladeshi political and economic leaders: the latter, in fact, despite being members of an elite, can self-proclaim themselves the sole spokesmen of a community, which, in reality, is anything but homogeneous, and thus stifle the voices of subordinate components to pursue their own personal interests (Priori, 2010). It has also emerged how the attendance of places of worship facilitates the settlement of the faithful in the country of arrival not only through practical support services, but also through a more properly moral and psychological support. From this point of view, it is useful to use the definition of *religion* formulated by Clifford Geertz (1966), understood as a system of symbols that helps individuals face the great challenges of meaning in existence. The adoption of this perspective allows us to grasp the centrality that religious life takes on in the processes of signification and repositioning experienced daily by migrants in the face of the experience of chaos, which is produced when you exceed the boundaries of your ability to intellectual and moral understanding of reality and pain tolerance (Riccio, 2012). Migrating means, in fact, to find oneself in foreign value and symbolic horizons and this inevitably involves a deep inner crisis. Therefore, spirituality allows to cope with the fracture of identity implicit in the migration experience, offering the individual interpretive tools to reorder and reattribute meaning to their universe (Pennacini and González Díez, 2006). By reconstructing a social environment composed of known references and experiences close to those lived in the contexts of origin, religious practice helps to contain the traumatic effect of contact with the host society and, thereby, the most obvious negative consequences on the individual, in terms of isolation and disorientation.

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Specifically, the paper discusses the data collected through 11 interviews, conducted between December 2020 and February 2021, addressed to migrants from Bangladesh and regular practitioners at at least one of the five Islamic prayer rooms located in Tor Pignattara. The interviewees were all male individuals, in the absence, within the places of worship, of prayer spaces specifically dedicated to the female component of the community.

<sup>2</sup> All interviews were originally conducted in Italian.

<sup>3</sup> Each quotation of interview excerpts is followed by the interviewee's initial, the subject's role in relation to neighborhood prayer rooms and the date of the interview.

<sup>4</sup> In this case it was decided to report the real name of the interviewee, according to explicit agreements with the interlocutor, whereas it was preferred to refer to other informants with an initial, in order to protect their anonymity.

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