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**Migrant Masculinities In-between Private and Public Spaces of Reproductive Labour:
Asian Porters in Rome**

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Abstract

This article explores the construction of migrant masculinities in the context of reproductive labour. It focuses on Asian Christian men working as porters in upper middle-class residential buildings in Rome (Italy). This masculinised niche of reproductive labour combines differently gendered chores: feminised tasks (cleaning and caring), which are mainly performed in the most private spaces of the home, and masculinised tasks (maintenance and security), carried out in the public or semi-public spaces of the buildings. The analysis addresses the dearth of studies on the sex-typing of jobs in the context of migrant men's work experiences. It also contributes to ongoing debates on the geography of reproductive labour and on masculinities and place, by exploring how practices of migrant reproductive labour construct private and public places. The construction of masculinities and place is shaped by the gendered racialisation of migrant men at the wider societal level, which materialises in the construction of 'dangerous' and 'respectable' urban areas. The article suggests that widespread concerns over religious difference and public

security play a key role in defining migrant men's access to the workplace and in shaping work relations.

Keywords: masculinities, migration, reproductive labour, workplace, public/private spaces, racialisation.

Introduction

This article brings together debates on migration, gender and reproductive labour, on the one hand, and on gender, racialization and place, on the other, in order to explore the construction of migrant masculinities in the workplace. It focuses on Asian men employed in porter work in upper middle-class apartment buildings in Italy – a specific niche within the ‘international division of reproductive labour’ (Parreñas 2001, 561), henceforth IDRL. ‘Reproductive labour’ encompasses all moral, material and emotional activities and relationships necessary to maintaining people inter-generationally on a daily basis (Nakano Glenn 1992). It is unequally divided across global hierarchies: in affluent immigration societies, privileged women purchase low-wage services from migrant women from the global South. Following Kofman (2012) and Duffy (2005), we understand ‘reproductive labour’ as comprising a wide range of activities addressing the needs of dependent individuals (children and adults), as well as those of the active population. Reproductive labour expands beyond the domestic sphere, to affect places, material goods and the environments we live in (Tronto 1993; Kabeer, Milward and Sudarshan 2013). This broad understanding has the advantage of recognizing the wider, often-neglected community dimension of reproductive labour (Razavi and Staab 2010). Non-relational or weakly

relational work which involves taking care of objects or things rather than people – such as that done by gardeners, handymen or drivers, and which is dominated by men – should be included in the analysis of social reproduction (Kofman and Raghuram 2015). In comparison with ‘care’, which relates strongly to relational tasks such as the provision of elderly- or child-care (and which are more often done by women), reproductive labour thus appears as a broader concept. It also better allows for exploring the internal hierarchies in the organisation of non-relational jobs, making visible the activities of human reproduction (such as cleaning) that are least valued and are disproportionately performed by racialised workers (Razavi and Staab 2010).

We argue that porter work in Italy is a peculiar masculinized niche in the IDRL, since it involves performing a range of differently gendered tasks. Like migrant gardeners and handymen, porters perform less relational masculinised tasks such as door attendance and building maintenance. However, unlike these other masculinised reproductive labourers, who are employed in the upkeep of valuable private property (Ramirez and Hondagneu-Sotelo 2009), porters are also responsible for less valued feminised relational tasks. A gendered spatial division of work settings complicates this internal distinction between feminised and masculinised reproductive labour. Feminised reproductive labour is mostly carried out in the home, while masculinised jobs tend to be performed outdoors or in the least ‘private’ spaces of the home (Duffy 2005). Porter work requires men to perform cleaning tasks in semi-private places such as the building stairs or entrances, but they are also required to do cleaning, maintenance and sporadic care work in the private spaces of residents’ apartments. In addition, porters are expected to supervise the outdoor areas of residential buildings – gardens, parking spaces and the immediate neighborhood surround – to report anything that might threaten the upper middle-class residential community. Finally, they also perform shopping services for the residents or

assist them with transport in the city. Such responsibilities offer migrant men greater status and higher pay than household-based care and domestic work, where women are overrepresented (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2014). Porters are required to wear a uniform during working hours, which they appreciate and value as a symbol of professional status distancing them from feminised domestic and care jobs.

In this article, we investigate how migrant male porters manage these different spaces in order to construct gender in their professional routines and in daily interactions with the residents. The term ‘resident’ is a translation of the Italian word *condomino*, adopted by our migrant informants to describe the people who lived in the apartment buildings where they worked. The residents acted as ‘collective employers’: while management and supervision were formally assigned to the building administrators, in practice the porter was accountable to the residents. Our analysis demonstrates how migrant porters capitalise on their earlier professional trajectories in feminised niches of reproductive labour (as household-based cleaners and elderly carers) and on the potential to build their professional identities by moving in-between the differently gendered tasks and spaces their jobs involve. Further, we suggest that porters build on the positive stereotypes widespread in Italy around ‘Christian Asian men’ to consolidate their respectability *vis-à-vis* the criminalisation of other migrant men who are hyper-visible in public places.

The article has two objectives. Firstly, it contributes to studying how masculinities are constructed in and shaped by specific places, at the interplay with other social relations (Hopkins and Noble 2009; Gorman-Murray and Hopkins 2014; Cox 2014). The relationship between masculinity and paid work has often been taken at face value, with a resulting dearth of studies on how gendered experiences of paid work underpin the forging of masculinity (Batnitzky,

McDowell and Dyer 2009; Kilkey et alii 2013). The analysis of the spatial and relational organization of porter work allows us to understand the multi-layered relationship between masculinity, domesticity and the workplace. It highlights how migrants construct their masculinity by negotiating the private and public dimensions of their occupation.

These debates hold relevance in relation to the study of the IDRL. The study of the spatial dimension of reproductive labour has been largely focused on relations between women employers/women employees, with the effect of ‘tenaciously tying domestic place to femininity’ (Cox 2014, 227). Similarly, in migration studies, the growing demand for migrant domestic/care labour has been associated with the feminisation of migration, as opposed to earlier male-dominated flows. Feminist scholars have stressed the limits of simplistic distinctions between an earlier male-dominated labour-oriented migration versus a later family reunion migration, comprising women and children (Kofman et al. 2000): women migrated on their own for a variety of reasons in ‘pre-stoppage’ years. Feminist studies of migration also invite us to reconsider the stereotype of family reunion migration as exclusively feminine: from the 1980s onwards, a process of masculinisation of family reunion migration was observable across Europe (Bhabha 1996). We need to go beyond the dichotomisation of women's and men's experiences of migration (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005) and look at how (migrant) men too are involved in reproductive labour in domestic places (Gallo and Scrinzi, 2016a). We explore how men's international mobility both overlaps with and differs from the experiences of migrant women, and how professional practices underpin the construction of migrant masculinities (Hibbins and Pease 2009; Ye 2014) in both the domestic and public spaces of porter work.

Secondly, we explore the spatialisation of reproductive labour, addressing how porter work practices define the moving boundaries between private and public space. Porter work

exemplifies feminist geographers' concerns around the mutual constitution of spatial (private/public) relations and social (gender) relations (McDowell 1999). We further connect this construction of migrant masculinities in the workplace with wider processes of gendered racialisation occurring in Italian and, more broadly, in Western European cities. Migrant men's presence in public urban spaces is perceived as threatening and is associated with gendered deviant behaviours (Schrock and Schwalbe 2009), as they tend to be represented as backward in matters of gender. Migrant men, particularly Muslims, are targeted by anti-immigration actors and portrayed in the media as misogynistic and violent towards women (Wodak 2015). This 'moral panic' around Muslim men materialises in the racialised construction of certain urban areas, as public spaces serve as a 'stage for constructions of difference and sameness' (Ehrkamp 2008, 119).

In the context of our study, both Christian Asian porters and the Italian residents they work for mobilise such gendered stereotypes, contributing to construct public and private spaces in racialised ways. We map how the construction of masculinities in the domestic sphere interconnects with sites and practices beyond the home (Gorman-Murray and Hopkins 2014) and how masculinities are embedded in actual places and can vary depending on local, regional and global contexts (Hopkins and Noble 2009). We suggest that the criminalization of racialised men in Italy, particularly Muslims, sets up a juxtaposition with Christian Asian porters as providers of security. We explore the gendered and racialised dynamics underpinning the acceptance of *some* migrant men (and the rejection of others) into the private domain of Italian households within upper middle-class buildings. Our informants' good standing with respect to Italian society draws from the ambivalent gendered spatialisation of porter work as involving both public and private roles. Their respectability results from their access to Italian private domestic spaces,

where they perform feminised tasks such as childcare, as well as from their masculinised public role as security providers in the upper middle-class neighbourhoods where they work.

Migrant Masculinities, Reproductive Labour and the Domestic Space

The workplace is a key context for the production of gendered identities (Padavic and Reskin 2002). Jobs are constructed by a set of practices associated with historically shifting masculinities and femininities (Bradley 1989; Crompton 1999). Men adopt different strategies when entering feminized jobs to cope with possible misalignments between their gendered selves and their occupational identities. They may emphasise masculinised aspects of their jobs (such as technical skills or physical prowess) while downplaying feminised ones (Collinson and Hearn 1994). Alternatively, men can stress that masculinity is not incompatible with the emotional sensitivity such jobs – women’s hairdressing or elderly care, for instance – require (Robinson and Hockey 2012).

Limited research has analysed how the sex-typing of jobs operates in relation to racialised and migrant men (Scrinzi 2010; Wingfield 2009). In immigration contexts, downward social mobility challenges migrant men’s sense of masculinity and may prompt them to put aspects of their gender identity ‘on hold’ for the duration of their stay there (Ye 2014). In the context of our research, migrant men’s gendered downward mobility results from a set of three interrelated processes. *Firstly*, most of our migrant informants were highly educated and had held skilled or semi-skilled jobs in their home country. The limited jobs available to them as migrants in Italy resulted in a loss of professional status. *Secondly*, in Italy, Asian men’s migration is often tied to marriage with migrant women who have migrated previously. Immediately after their arrival, men are often dependent on women-centered kin networks

economically, for the purpose of securing job opportunities in the domestic sector, and for obtaining legal juridical status (Gallo, 2008). *Thirdly*, in this context migrant men move away from dominant forms of masculinity, by taking up non-skilled feminized service jobs, in order to fulfill economic expectations and to respect the financial debt originally contracted with their wives' kin (Batnitzky, McDowell and Dyer 2009). Migrant men have therefore 'more to lose in relation to the patriarchal order in their countries of origin' (McIlwaine 2010, 295). Yet, as the following analysis shows, migrant men employed in household-based reproductive labour also develop compensatory strategies to construct their jobs not only in relation to gender divisions but also in relation to ethnic lines: for instance, Eastern European migrants claim that they are culturally better endowed for such jobs than African men (Datta et al. 2009).

These studies question the tendency to conceive migrant men's involvement in paid work mainly in economic terms. They unravel how migrant men's working lives are shaped by wider concerns about family relations and dependency, and how they cope with the challenges posed to their sense of masculinity by their inclusion in the labour market and the changing gender relations in the family within immigration countries (Hibbins and Pease 2009). We need to explore the workplace as a site where migrant men engage with the emotional and relational dimensions of paid work, and to map how spatialised professional routines shape men's construction of their gendered selves (Ramirez 2011; Warren 2016).

As mentioned, porter work is located 'in-between' tasks traditionally associated with feminised domesticity and masculinised domestic service jobs performed in the more public spaces of the home. The analysis of how migrant porters manage the 'in-betweenness' of their work, contributing to producing space in gendered and racialised ways, engages with current scholarly interest in the geographies of reproductive labour, particularly in the context of

domestic settings, where workers and employers ‘negotiate boundaries of intimacy and privacy’ (Conradson 2003, 452; Hopkins 2015). This responds to a call to consider the different spaces of reproductive labour, and to appreciate the multiple social relations underpinning its organization (Cox 2013).

The article highlights the important role of employers – in our case the residents – in the gendered and racialised construction of workplaces. Employers are crucial in driving the demand for migrant labour by targeting specific ethnic groups (MacKenzie and Forde 2009; Gallo and Scrinzi, 2016b). In non-skilled service sector jobs, employers project onto migrant workers naturalised qualities of subordination, which are associated with the migrants’ so-called ‘culture’ (Anderson 2007). Yet middle-class employers also expect less well-educated migrants from specific countries to develop certain interpersonal skills (Waldinger and Lichter 2003). In these jobs, embodied performativity in face-to-face interactions and emotional labour - the processes of management of feelings performed by workers based on organizationally defined rules (Hochschild 2012) - are important. Recruitment draws on constructions of the ‘ideal’ worker as endowed with feminised qualities such as docility and deference. Here, migrant men have to learn new skills that are socially constructed as feminine (Datta et al. 2009).

A Masculinised Niche in the IDRL: Migrant Porters in Italy

In Italy, the growing employment of migrants in reproductive labour in the late 20th century has involved an increase of men in this sector (Sarti 2010). Taking up feminized domestic/care jobs is one of the few opportunities open to migrant men to achieve legal juridical status and overcome unemployment in the context of the current recession. Italian governments implement cyclical and massive measures of regularization targeting migrant live-in care/domestic workers

in order to compensate for the paucity of welfare state services (Bettio, Simonazzi, and Villa 2006). Migrant male domestic/care workers carry out a range of tasks, including elderly care, cleaning, gardening, driving, baby-sitting, health care assistance, and portering (Caritas DSI 2012). In Rome, the porter workforce has undergone a shift in terms of its ethnic composition. Our data indicate that, until the 1980s, porter work chiefly involved male internal migrants from Southern Italy. Since then, it has increasingly involved migrant men from India, the Philippines and Sri Lanka. As mentioned, men's entry into reproductive labour results from their location within networks of migrant kinwomen and networks related to Catholic parishes, which in Italy operate as informal recruitment agencies for domestic/care workers (Scrinzi 2008). Kin women and Catholic actors are determinant in providing Asian migrant men with the necessary paperwork to obtain visas – usually through family reunification – resident permits and authorisation to work.

In this context, religion and gender constitute major dimensions in constructing internal racialised hierarchies in the migrant population (Balibar 1988). One of the distinctive features of migration in Italy is the asymmetric gender composition of many migrant groups: some are predominantly male (those from Morocco, Senegal, or Pakistan), while others, where women migrated first, are highly feminised (those from the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka) (Grillo 2002). Catholicism and more broadly a Christian belonging are seen as important factors enabling smooth integration into Italian society (Garau 2010). Both women and men belonging to feminised migrant groups have been channelled into care/domestic jobs through transnational Catholic networks and Italian parishes (Scrinzi 2013). Women, and by extension men, from these migrant groups benefit from positive stereotypes and are largely 'invisible' in the private sphere of the home: they are perceived as a docile and useful presence, and are not considered as a

threat to public order (Calavita 2006; Gallo, 2014). Conversely, male-dominated migrant communities, particularly those from Muslim countries, tend to be stigmatised and constructed as dangerous and violent. They are viewed as illegitimately appropriating public spaces previously felt to be integral to local identities (Carter 1997). Since the late 1990s, intense media coverage of crimes perpetrated by migrant men has combined with the growing association of immigration with issues of ‘law and order’ in political debate, and the growing influence of the populist radical right party *Lega Nord* (Northern League). The representation of male Africans, Pakistanis and Romas as a threat to both Italian women and to national security has been consistently used to legitimise restrictive immigration laws (Woodcock 2010). A comparison can thus be drawn between men from the Philippines and Sri Lanka in Italy, and American Asian men in the US. Both groups are stigmatised but regarded as ‘safe’: their feminised masculinity can exempt them from being perceived as dangerous in public spaces and serves to justify discrimination against other groups such as Black men (Day 2006).

In Rome, household-based care/domestic service jobs function for Asian Christian men as a pathway to porter work. All of our informants had become porters after several years of experience as care-givers or cleaners. Porter work partly detaches migrant men from feminized ‘dirty work’, and represents an inroad to social mobility in terms of a regular contract and longer-term residence permit, better pay, and free accommodation, usually in a ground-floor apartment within the building. Porter work in Rome is also better paid than care/domestic jobs, with net (monthly) salary ranging from 900-1200 to 1600-1800 Euros. After taking up porter work, many of our informants eventually obtained Italian citizenship. This is an important step forward in terms of residential autonomy compared with live-in jobs. Free accommodation allowed our informants to move out of apartments shared with their wives’ kinfolk and reunite

their nuclear families. While their wives rarely gave up their own jobs, they often withdrew from full-time work to take up part-time occupations within the same building or neighbourhood. These changes gave our informants the opportunity to regain the role of (primary) breadwinner and a sense of status as a male householder.

These material and symbolic advantages should be understood in the context of the historical development of porter work in Europe. Rare studies have explored how portering is rooted in the development of urban residential areas in the late 17th century, and how, over time, it has come to stand for an (upper) middle-class ethos of the refined neighborhood (Stébé and Bronner 2010). During the 19th century, reproductive labour became increasingly feminized as its working conditions worsened. While a multitude of ‘maids of all work’ were responsible for all domestic chores associated with women’s so-called ‘natural’ attributes, male servants, such as porters, were fewer on the market and were seen as specialized workers. They represented a marker of modernity and status for their employers, symbolizing distinction from ‘the masses’ (De Villanova and Bonnin 2006). Male domestics were highly visible and publicly displayed – they wore liveries, for instance, and were selected based on their good looks – while non-skilled servants such as maids were ‘hidden’ in the home (Davidoff 1995). This gendered spatial dimension constitutes a feature of domestic service in many modern European societies.

Under the Fascist regime in Italy, porter work involved cleaning the common building areas as well as performing occasional tasks within residents’ homes. As a result, it was included in the category of ‘domestic economy’ along with feminised reproductive labour jobs. Within this, however, it belonged to the more valued masculinised sub-category of ‘security work’; this was due to the porter’s duties as superintendent of the building and the immediate neighbourhood. While other categories of domestic workers (mainly female) were prevented

from collective bargaining until the mid-1970s, the first national porters' contract was signed in the 1920s (Sarti 2010). The current national contract fixes the porters' working hours at 48 per week, but requires them to be available to residents for an additional 12 hours per week in case of emergencies.

According to our informants, porter work in upper middle-class areas of Rome is male-dominated, although there are some Italian women working in this niche. An internal gendered division of work exists between lower-level feminized porter jobs and masculinized ones. The latter are better paid and carry higher status. Most of the interviewed residents tended to associate female porters with lower-class buildings in suburban areas and with lower service standards. As in other feminized jobs, masculinity operates as a 'boon': male employees were seen as better than women, based on the social construction of 'naturally' male and valorized attributes (Williams 1995; Scrinzi 2010). Residents defined Italian female porters as noisy, moody, and inclined to gossip and intrusive behaviour. Conversely, the ideal porter was associated with masculinised characteristics of discretion and emotional self-control. Male porters were perceived to be endowed with the technical skills needed for maintenance work. They were also seen as capable of protecting the residents, if necessary.

Methodology

We draw from a wider study on migrant female and male domestic/care workers and their employers in Central and Northern Italy (1996-2012). The analysis is based on in-depth interviews conducted in Rome with 26 male migrant porters and 13 Italian employers (8 male, 5 female). The data were collected in four upper middle-class residential neighborhoods housing members of the high bourgeoisie (professionals, government officers and businessmen). The

migrant workers were from Asia (India, the Philippines and Sri Lanka) and were aged between 35 and 45. Most were married with children. All had high levels of education: eight held a university degree, three a master's degree, and one a PhD; the rest had high school diplomas. All self-identified as Christians: the majority were Catholics, but our sample also included Protestants, Evangelicals and Anglicans. Though the men frequently referred to their own denominations, they often asserted a common 'Christian' identity in tracing a distinction with non-Christian migrant religious groups in Italy. The interviews sought to understand how porter work affected their self-perceptions, family relations and longer-term migration projects. They also explored the men's work practices in terms of daily routines, skills development, and their interactions with the residents.

We joined migrant porters two to three times per week at different times of day in order to observe their daily professional practices. As our class background and nationality positioned us closer to the building's residents, we were sometimes asked to 'keep an eye' on the workers and to report any misconduct, which we refused to do. The recognition that the gendered dynamics underpinning migrant reproductive labour cannot be disentangled from the wider political and socio-economic contexts of data collection shaped our interest in collecting data on how anti-immigration discourses dominant in Italy shaped micro-level work relations.

Gendered Racialisation and Space in Porter Work

It is in the context of widespread perceptions of immigration in Italy that we need to understand the gendered racialisation of porter work. Beyond the role played by kinwomen and Catholic networks, the overrepresentation of Asian Catholic men in porter work in Rome is driven by the gendered and racialised recruitment criteria used by the residents. As mentioned, porter work

entails taking care of the community of residents in the building – their families, visitors and clients – and of their material goods. Residents had a clear map representing migrant masculinities, which they used to rank potential employees. They expressed a preference for Asian Christian employees with previous experience of working within Italian households:

They should be *already* familiar with our family culture and needs, and with [a] neighbourhood like ours. We prefer Asian Catholic or Christian, as they adjust faster to our expectations: they have good attitudes and moral values. (Luciana, 49, resident)

In contrast, Muslim men from Northern and Western Africa, for instance – or those displaying minority religious symbols – were seen as unfit. Residents deemed common religious belonging to be an important part of a worker's ability to conform culturally, and to maintain the building's public image and reputation. Religious difference was positioned as a barrier to this.

A Muslim man with the tunic or bringing into the building a veiled wife would make us feel uncomfortable; they would not fit at all! (Marco, resident, 39)

Religion thus combined with notions of ethnicity to construct hierarchies of suitable/unsuitable workers. Drawing from a colonial repertoire constructing Asian men as effeminate, docile and submissive (Sinha 1995), Italian residents referred to a 'Christian Asian masculinity', marked by 'exoticised proximity' and 'inferiorised respectability'. The residents attributed to Asian

Christian men racialised and feminised qualities of docility, trustworthiness and ‘good manners’ which made them acceptable in Italian dwellings.

The relevance of gendered, racialised and religious criteria connects with the residents’ views that the porter is an important part of the building’s aesthetic, and a symbol of the social pedigree of its inhabitants. Unlike domestic/care workers, the porter also holds an important *public* role: he takes care of the *inside* while representing and embodying the building to the *outside*.

Residents negotiate the salary according to working skills, language, education, but we have to be satisfied with the appearance. Porters have to look good. If a Senegalese man applies for the job and he meets all the criteria we can consider him, but to be honest we prefer a Christian man from India, or Asia, they look better and have better manners. (Vittorio, 39, resident)

As the above interview underlines, ‘race’ and religion both constituted a basis on which to discard applicants who did not ‘aesthetically’ fit the public image that employers wanted their dwellings to project. The residents saw those men who did not meet the racialized expectations of a good-looking/well-mannered worker as spoiling the architectural beauty of their neighborhoods. The concept of aesthetic labour (Witz, Warhurst, and Nickson 2003, 36) – understood as a form of embodied emotional labour – is relevant here, as it focuses on the corporeal dimensions of service work relations. It refers to the ‘mobilisation, development and commodification of embodied disposition, capacities and attitudes’: these dispositions are already possessed by the worker, but employers commodify (the residents, in our case) them in

order to produce a specific style of service. In the case of porter work, embodied dispositions – capacities and attitudes – are racialised through essentialised notions of religion and gender. The qualities of gentleness, sophistication and trustworthiness that residents ascribed to Asian Christian men had a bodily dimension insofar as they were associated with perceived physical traits: fair skin, nice body shape, delicate face traits, no smell, gentle bodily attitudes and gestures. In the residents' words, these traits were contrasted with hyper-masculine and aggressive bodies ascribed to African and or Muslim men, or sometimes with rough behaviour and drunkenness ascribed to Latin American men. Porters were also expected to strike a balance between feminised and masculinised bodily dispositions. On one hand, they were expected to embody kindness and deference to residents and their visitors. On the other, porters were also expected to express masculinised bodily attitudes of physical strength and self-control in handling issues of building security, such as dealing with annoying visitors.

Indeed, the semi-public nature of the job defined the specific relevance of gendered and racialised norms constructing the workers' bodies. Drawing from Purwar (2004), we note the persistence of a gendered colonial repertoire around cultural and religious difference in shaping the somatic norms regulating the unequal access to workplaces. Porters had to comply with the symbols and aesthetic of respectability of the native residents occupying upper middle-class buildings. Further, the residents' gendered racialisation of porter work, as well as the criteria regulating the access of 'foreign bodies' to residential buildings, were informed by ongoing public debates on migration, sharply focusing on migrant masculinities. One criterion that residents adopted in recruiting porters rested on the ideological association between *visibility in public places* and *gendered notions of reliability*:

There are migrant men who are always in the street, drinking and trafficking, like these people from Africa or Latin America. This is not a good starting point to get a job in respectable buildings. You do not see Indian or Filipino men selling drugs in the streets! (Saverio, 55, resident)

As discussed, ‘hyper-visible’ men from certain migrant groups are stigmatised and their appropriation of public spaces is seen as deviant (Ehrkamp 2008). The residents explained their criteria for selecting suitable job candidates by expressing concerns about public security, and discarded candidates *a priori* who came from groups that were hyper-visible in the public space and considered ‘dangerous’. This echoes (rare) existing analyses of porter work in other European countries, which suggest that the role of porters as providers of security services has recently been (re)emphasised in the context of growing middle-class concern about racialized social unrest in urban spaces (Marchal 2006).

Asian Male Porters: ‘In-Between’

Özyeğin (2006, 64-5) notes that being a doorkeeper signifies being neither inside nor outside: the doorkeeper occupies a marginal position, belonging neither entirely to the apartment building (like the native residents do) nor to the squatter settlements inhabited by his migrant fellows. This marginality makes the workplace a space of subservience and containment, and yet simultaneously a space of autonomy from stigmatized urban spaces. Our data suggest that this threshold position occupied by migrant porters is deeply gendered. Porter work is spatialised in daily routines that simultaneously reflect a gendered distinction between private and public chores, on one hand, and a racialised class distinction between the residents and the employees, on the other. Social hierarchies are in fact reflected in the architectural placement of the

dwellings of residents and porters, with employment relations often being conceptualized in terms of ‘upstairs and downstairs’ (Özyeğin 2006, 47).

This spatialised ‘in-between’ nature of porter work allows for a complex and ambivalent construction of migrant masculinities. Residents’ aesthetic labour demands shape how migrant men craft their masculinity in order to fit into the workplace (Warren 2016). The porters capitalised on previous experiences as care/domestic workers in Italian families in order to legitimise their new positions, in a way that valued both the masculinised and the feminised tasks required of them. Their construction of their gendered subjectivity in the workplace involved two interrelated processes: first, the selective valorisation of feminised skills, acquired through previous reproductive labour experiences; and, second, a discourse distinguishing themselves from non-Christian migrant men, to assert their reliability in providing security services to residents. Both processes mobilise racialised notions of respectability and religious proximity/difference.

In the interviews, migrant men often put forward their skills in performing cleaning tasks and care services, stressing how they benefited from years of experience in household-based domestic service. Their appreciation of porter work drew less from the intent to fully disconnect themselves from ‘women’s work’, and more from the aim to capitalise on it by also transforming its meaning in their current working routines. As two of our informants stated:

When I started cleaning jobs ten years ago, I felt very frustrated. But now I think it has been worth it, it helped me to build good relations and to get this job. Now I have to do some of [the] cleaning but also have other responsibilities, I am repairing things, checking the environment, meeting clients and visitors and you get a chance

for a chat. Residents know that there is someone good out there, but that I could also enter their house to do some extra services when required. (Sebastian, 38, Philippines)

Being Catholic helped me to be accepted in Italy and to accept myself [in a] different kind of job, that I would have not done in India. My religion helps me to be more tolerant towards people, which is a basic [need] when you take up care jobs. God helped me in achieving a better job now, thanks to my sacrifices. (Philip, 41, Kerala)

Religion is mobilised by migrant porters not only as a positive marker of cultural proximity with Italian families, but also as a moral resource facilitating their inclusion into care chores and supporting them in coping with downward social mobility. They use religion in forging their subjectivities and in reasserting their dignity, and see it as a spiritual resource to cope with the hardship of migration.

The search for a balance between feminised and masculinised tasks in their job is reflected in the ways migrant porters deal with occasional requests for baby-sitting or elderly care to be carried out in residents' homes. Porters were usually inclined to accept such requests, viewing them as a mark of their being trusted and considered members of the residents' community. Yet our data show that migrant porters also emphasised the occasional nature of these care tasks:

I am happy to work in one resident's house once in a while. But I cannot disappear from the building, in case someone searches for me or there is some work to be done. I cannot privilege one family over another, or they will complain. So I try to make clear that these requests can come once in a while and that there are different families to satisfy and the whole building to keep an eye on! (Andrew, 49, India)

Unlike domestic/care jobs, porter work does not involve an individualised relationship with one private employer; instead, porters must manage requests from multiple residents while also taking responsibility for the upkeep of common areas. Our informants discussed how, if a resident asked them to do work within their home which would interfere with or prevent the porter from accomplishing tasks related to the care of the building, they would legitimately refuse or postpone the resident's request. Importantly, this allows the porter to partly withdraw from 'personalistic' work relationships, while simultaneously maintaining a connection with individual residents and their families.

Our data also show that our informants associated a sense of social subalternity with feminised tasks performed 'in public', such as cleaning the common areas or collecting rubbish, and emphasised their masculinised administrative, maintenance or security tasks. This translated into a meticulous temporal and spatial planning of their daily routines:

I want to be ready with the uniform [on] by 8.30am, which is when residents go work and some clients come to the lawyer and medical offices in the second floor. The cleaning must be done by 7.30am at the latest. Then I just need to do some minor work at night and I can have my nap between 2pm and 3pm. During working time I welcome visitors, I do shopping or look after payments. If something breaks, I am

available, although I have to change clothes if it is a heavy job, but I do not care about this. I do not like visitors or residents to see me too often when cleaning, I feel less comfortable. But I can carry out the other work during daytime. (Ignatius, 51, Kerala)

Another porter told us:

When the ladies come down in the morning in their good dresses and I am there on the ground bent over the floor cleaning and sweating I feel embarrassed, and they do not like this image of me in common spaces. I feel more that they are looking at me ‘upside-down’ to remind me of my place here. I prefer to carry [out] my worst chores during the night and be more presentable during day time. (Tavish, 42, Sri Lanka)

Men organised their work in order to carry out feminised tasks in their buildings’ common areas during unsocial hours, so that their involvement in these chores could go unnoticed. This spatial and temporal organisation of work was deemed necessary to maintain their self-esteem and sense of masculinity, but also because the public exposure of their less valued tasks would compromise the official representation of their job as more skilled than feminised domestic/care work. Moreover, this would jeopardise the role of porters as a status symbol. ‘Being caught’ cleaning the floor would expose residents and visitors to the awkward image of a man engaged in ‘women’s work’. Employers stressed the importance of everything being ‘in good order’ by the time visitors began entering the building in the morning. This latter aspect points to the emotional and aesthetic labour performed by the informants, who felt it necessary to spatially

organise their working days in such a way as to reproduce the class status of their employers, and to avoid causing any embarrassment to them or their visitors.

In particular, porters emphasised their masculinised security-related tasks, suggesting that these were especially oriented towards female residents. Porters dispensed advice to female residents in their capacity as ‘men who knew the outside world’ and pointed out their duty to protect naïve and less experienced upper middle-class women without appearing too intrusive. One informant related the following incident:

The other day Madam Ludovica told me that she wanted to go to Piazza Vittorio to buy some Indian spices. I told her that the area is not safe for a woman like her. I have lived there for two years and I know what happens. I convinced her not to go and told her that I could ask some of my friends there to buy and deliver the things here. (Ignatius, 51, Kerala)

Ignatius makes explicit his own intimate knowledge and connections with the area in question – which is constructed as rough and dangerous because it is associated with the presence of stigmatised migrant men. These allow him buy what Madam Ludovica needs. Vis-à-vis female employers, porters capitalized on their status as experienced male migrants (as well as on their ethnic networks in the city) to emphasise their knowledge of certain rough and racialised areas of Rome, while at the same time sticking to the reassuring role of protectors. In similar instances, they were in a sense able to ‘control’ the movements of female employers, inferiorising them as naively lacking in the ability to traverse different neighbourhoods and ultimately preventing them from stepping into urban areas that contrasted with their lifestyles.

In emphasizing their role as providers of security services, migrant porters adopted a similar language to that of the Italian residents associating religious difference with insecurity. They capitalised on their religious background in order to assert their respectability and, in the process, their ability to perform security tasks:

With all that is happening in Rome, you have to be careful. Muslims are becoming extremists, streets are not safe as before because of terrorism. It is difficult to let them into your family life, isn't it? I am a good Catholic and I go in the same parish where some of the residents go, the priest has known me for several years... this makes a difference! (Neil, 35, India)

Like the residents, migrant porters contributed to racialise private and public places in and around the buildings where they worked, and to establish hierarchies between themselves and other migrant groups. One porter recalled the gestures and routines that were necessary to safeguard the building and its residents from potentially dangerous individuals or situations:

I saw a car with a strange-looking man in it for a few days. I wondered what was going on and called the police. It was August, when many thieves are around. It turned out that it was a Romanian man who had some legal history and, after following him, the police took him. The residents were very happy with my work, in these days there are many migrants who are not like *us*... even among the Europeans you see, like Romanians or Polish, you cannot trust them! But the residents know that with me the building is well protected! (Thomas, 42, Sri Lanka)

Porter work allowed migrant men to re-negotiate widespread discourses associating crime with foreign men, and with racialized ‘rough’ areas of the city. Like other informants, Thomas challenged the assumption that European migrants can integrate into Italian society because of their Christian belonging. In emphasising their crucial gate-keeping role in Italian dwellings, Asian porters were able to detach themselves from racialised representations of migrants as potentially deviant subjects and depicted themselves as guardians who were entitled to give advice and take the initiative to protect their employers. They stressed how their presence within the building required the complete trust of their employers, and how they reciprocated by guaranteeing protection for the residents on a daily basis. In their view, this privileged relationship of ‘reciprocity’ granted Asian men a higher status in comparison to their position as simple providers of domestic/care services. Rather than distancing themselves altogether from feminised chores in order to reaffirm traditional models of masculinity, our migrant informants valued the domestic nature of their jobs in so far as it reflected their role as carers/custodians of their buildings. The latter stood for their physical and symbolic proximity with ‘respectable’ Italian families and neighbourhoods, legitimising them vis-à-vis the wider Italian society.

Conclusion

This article analysed the social construction of migrant masculinities in the workplace, which for porters lies in-between the private and the public spaces of residential buildings. Porters’ capacity for moving between different private, semi-public and public places in their professional lives constructs gender at three distinct but interrelated levels, showing how reproductive labour is deeply entangled with the reproduction of their own subjectivities. Firstly,

their ‘in-betweenness’ refers to the negotiation of the men’s gendered selves. While earlier employment in feminized jobs within the IDRL questions their masculinity, porter work enables migrant men to emancipate themselves from demeaning and lower-value live-in elderly care and cleaning jobs. Secondly, being a porter impacts on gender relations within their own families: porter work grants residential autonomy and constitutes a step from feminized reproductive labour towards a better-paid job, enabling these men to enact the role of the male (primary) breadwinner. The reaffirmation of their role as the main family breadwinner is not located in the context of a male-dominated migration; rather, it is situated in a close relationship to feminised migration patterns, networks and professional trajectories. It is the men’s kinship connections and their previous involvement in feminised jobs which make them suitable candidates for porter work. Thirdly, our informants secure respectability through porter work in the eyes of the Italian residents, by dissociating themselves from stigmatised migrant masculinities.

Our data show that migrant men working as porters do not disdain feminised tasks altogether, but rather appreciate the possibility of moving between the gendered private and public dimensions of their work. Rather than being conceived as a barrier to the forging of adult masculine identities, the capacity for moving between these two gendered poles is appreciated by these men not only in terms of acquired skills and experience, but as an inroad to wider societal acceptance. The relationship between migrant men and reproductive labour is therefore ambivalent. In the context of our research, Asian men reinvented themselves as subjects who are knowledgeable about Italian families and their domestic cultures, and who used this knowledge to mediate between the demands and expectations characterising the social life of the buildings they worked in. In doing so, they could transform their domesticity into a more masculine capacity for wisely managing their interactions with their Italian employers, and more broadly

their place within the immigration society. The article has also shown how both Italian residents and migrant porters activate categories of gender, ethnicity and religious difference in order to construct the job. In this respect, the article contributes to debates on the sex-typing of jobs, by considering how these interplay with processes of racialisation. On one hand, our findings point to the role of religion and gender in the racialisation of migrants, particularly Muslims, in contemporary Europe; on the other, they point to the use of gender as a marker of ethnic boundaries. The Italian residents recruit their employees and appropriate their aesthetic and emotional labour based on essentialist ideas of gender, cultural difference and religion (Anthias 1998). In turn, the porters co-opted the residents' discourse associating religious difference with public (in)security, and activated racialising and gendered constructions to assert their professional competence. Asian porters deployed strategies including the spatial and temporal organization of their work in order to preserve their sense of masculinity. They also asserted their respectability and distanced themselves from stigmatized migrant groups through emphasising their security-oriented chores.

Finally, the article has engaged with the literatures on the geographies of reproductive labour, and on masculinities and place. Porter work involves both feminized and masculinised tasks of reproductive labour, and is performed across the public and private spaces of residential buildings. Our findings point to a neglected dimension of reproductive labour, focusing on reproducing the local community beyond the private sphere of the family. Porters are in charge of reproducing the wider community of residents in the building: this work has a strong class dimension. This 'in-between' nature of porter work enables migrant men to avoid the personalised relationships which are characteristic of household-based feminised reproductive labour. We consider multiple levels of spatialisation of masculinities, showing that wider societal

processes of racialization shape how reproductive labour is spatialized: the public roles of Asian migrant porters in upper middle-class residential areas involve a racialized aesthetic of reproductive labour. Simultaneously, work practices and relations contribute to constructing particular gendered and racialised private, semi-public and public places in and around the home. The residents construct the urban space in racialised ways, establishing gendered hierarchies between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ migrant men and between ‘respectable’ and ‘dangerous’ areas of Rome. Asian migrants too co-opt dominant essentialist discourses on cultural difference to their advantage and contribute to reproducing a racialised map of migrant masculinities in Italy, which reflects the racialised construction of urban space in Italian cities; this defines a ‘spatial politics of difference’ (Ehrkamp 2008, 118) which is closely articulated with the gendered distinction between private and public spaces. The criteria for the recruitment and acceptance of racialised (Asian Christian) male porters in the workplace are premised upon broader public discourses depicting migrant men visible in urban spaces as objects of public concern and scrutiny. This analysis thus connects different gendered spatial dimensions of migrant male reproductive labour, related not only to the workplace but also to the construction of wider urban spaces.

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