The dark side of onward migration: experiences and strategies of Italian-Bangladeshis in the UK at the time of the post-Brexit referendum

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1. Introduction

The current era of globalization has strengthened and diversified patterns of international migration, making them increasingly complex. Recent literature suggests that to fulfil aspirations, migrants have been forced to undertake further migrations from their first destinations (Ahrens, Kelly, & Liempt 2014; Della Puppa, Montagna, & Kofman 2021; Mas Giralt 2016). In such cases, even well-off countries such as Germany, Spain, Italy, Netherlands, and Sweden serve as intermediate stops from where migrants move further to another country. For instance, Latin Americans have migrated from Spain to the UK (Mas Giralt 2016), Somali from the Netherlands to the UK (Van Liempt 2011), Iranians from Sweden to different countries, Nigerians from Germany to the UK (Ahrens, Kelly, & Liempt 2014), and Bangladeshis from Italy to the UK (Della Puppa & King 2019; Della Puppa & Morad 2019;

Morad & Sacchetto 2020b). Thus, the conceptualization of international migration as a simple bipolar origin-destination event is no longer valid.

Intra-European mobility of naturalized EU migrants has also increased in the recent years (Mas Giralt 2016). Data from the European Commission (2020) indicates that there were approximately 17.6 million EU-28 movers in 2018, of whom 12 million were of working age (20–64 years). These new migratory movements interweave internal mobility and international migration (Andrijasevic & Sacchetto 2016), extending the process of geographical settlement and social stabilisation of migrants in Europe from the Global South. Most of these movements are directed to former colonial countries, with which the migrants share linguistic, cultural, family, and social connections (Ahrens, Kelly, & Liempt 2014; Van Liempt 2011). In this context, European citizenship is considered by some as the ultimate goal of a rooting and stabilisation path in the country of citizenship acquisition. For others, however, it represents the access to renewed mobility and the possibility of undertaking a new migration (Carrillo 2015): a process known as onward migration (Della Puppa, Montagna, & Kofman 2021).

This paper documents the dark side of intra-EU mobility, captured in the onward migration of Italian-Bangladeshis to the UK. Specifically, we refer to the disillusions experienced by the Italian-Bangladeshi onward migrants in the very aspects that possibly led them to undertake the new migration in the first place (Della Puppa & King, 2019): the quest for upward social mobility, a more multicultural context, a better future for their children; the desire to be part of a larger diasporic community; the possibility of a lifestyle closer to Bengali cultural and religious inclinations; and the possibility of a more inclusive form of welfare. These disillusionments with their 'new' lives in the UK – what Sayad (1999) calls 'lies of migration'– highlight the omissions and ostentations associated with the destination country, which the Bangladeshis may have already witnessed during their first migration to Italy.

By analysing the downgrading of the socio-economic and cultural status of the Italian-Bangladeshi community in the UK vis-à-vis their position in Italy before relocation, this study makes a theoretical contribution to the literature on onward migration (Della Puppa, Montagna, & Kofman 2021). It adds, to the recent literature on the phenomenon of onward migration, the analysis on how naturalized EU citizens have become foreigners in the UK and how these new migration flows create a 'community-based segmentation' – in this case mainly between European-Bangladeshis and British-Bangladeshis. Furthermore, this study introduce the deepening of the new 'ethnic' stratifications under Brexit, created because of the perception of distrust – if not real hostility and discrimination – among the previous generation of migrants. Intra-divisions among the migrants and the perception of newcomers as the new scapegoats –

issues that have characterized the history of immigration in different countries, both in Europe and America – have been well addressed and analysed, in the sociological tradition (e.g. Merton 1972). The dialectic between the *established* and the *outsiders*, which is likely the underlying cause of prejudice, is supported by racial, ethnic, religious, economic, or cultural divisions, especially in case of power struggles between different groups within a single complex system. In our study, this system undergoes an intense political and legislative change that redesigns the positions and stakes of groups in the field of symbolic and material resources. That is, this perspective is a useful lens for studying the experiences of the Italian-Bangladeshi onward migrants in London, before and after Brexit (see also Sredanovic & Della Puppa 2020).
Furthermore, the article explores the potential strategies that Italian-Bangladeshis need to adopt to face their post-Brexit status, in case they lose the special rights granted to them by their EU citizenship. These include the loss of entitlement to benefits and welfare and the added obligation of renewing the residence permit. Thus, the research questions guiding this study are twofold: (1) What constitutes the dark side of Italian Bangladeshis' onward migration from Italy to the UK? (2) What strategies are they adopting to deal with the post-Brexit scenario? This article argues that naturalized EU citizens who have moved to the UK to secure better opportunities for their children perceive and experience a downgrading of their socio-economic and cultural status.
The next section discusses the limited existing literature on diverse migratory trajectories and intra-EU mobility. Subsequently, the methods and the context of the study are explained. The following section introduces the empirical findings, classified into three major themes. First, we analyse various narratives representing the dark side of the onward migration from Italy to the UK. Second, we discuss the hostility directed towards the onward migrants by the British-Bangladeshi community. Third, we describe the migrants' reactions to the post-Brexit referendum and the strategies they may adopt after Brexit.

2. Intra-EU Mobility of Naturalized EU Citizens

Multiple mobilities within the same migration trajectory have been conceptualized differently. For instance, transit migration refers to the movement of asylum seekers and irregular migrants to a destination context other than the one in which they find themselves (Collyer & de Haas 2010). Secondary migration has been used to discuss the trajectories of citizens from countries of the Global South who have stayed regularly and for prolonged intervals over time (but

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temporarily) in national contexts with advanced economies before reaching the final destination context (Takenaka, 2007). This approach is similar to the construct of ‘stepwise international migration’, which refers to a deliberate strategy adopted by migrants to accumulate the economic, social, and relational resources necessary to reach the ultimate destination of migration (e.g. usually in Europe and/or North America) (Paul 2011). The notion of multiple migration captures the experiences of migrants, who after residing in the first settlement, where they intersect with other spatialities and temporalities of migration (Ciobanu 2015; Morad & Sacchetto 2020a), move again to a second country for fulfilling their migration goals. They may thus migrate to several locations in their lifetimes (Ciobanu 2015).

Ossman (2004) uses the term serial migration to refer to the migration course of individuals who live for a significant period of time and achieve a good level of social inclusion in at least three national contexts and activate further international mobility to pursue better educational and professional opportunities for themselves or their family members. The term twice-migration was introduced by Bhachu (1985) – recently reused by other authors (e.g. Della Puppa & King 2019) – in his study on the migration of Sikh populations. The Sikh people moved to the United Kingdom in the early twentieth century (after leaving Punjab for Kenya and Uganda), following the independence of their former colonies. In other words, twice-migration describes a mobility that is directly linked to the consequences of British colonialism and is contained to the nations that belonged to the Commonwealth.

Specific to intra-EU mobilities, the term onward migration (Della Puppa, Montagna, & Kofman 2021; Mas Giralt 2017) refers to the process of migrants from a third country with a ‘naturalized’ status or a long-term residence permit in one country moving to another country without the second move having been planned at the beginning of their migration experience (see also Ramos 2018). The decision to move a second time is typically the result of a change in their socio-economic context and their subjective experiences. Within the framework of onward migration', intention is considered the second step, because it converts the aspiration to migrate again into actual onward movement (Paul 2011). Thus, the concept of onward migration supports the viewpoint that criticizes the conceptualisation of international migration as a simple bipolar event of ‘destination-origin’ (Ciobanu 2015).

The UK is one of the most popular destinations of intra-EU mobilities (Ahrens, Kelly, & Liempt, 2014). According to the Office for National Statistics (2021), approximately 3.6 million EU citizens were living in the UK in 2019, accounting for 5.5% of the total population (Vargas-Silva & Walsh 2020), although UK population estimates available until June 2020 reported the first-ever decline in EU-27 population, from 3.6 to 3.4 million (Office for National

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Statistics 2021; Vargas-Silva & Walsh 2020). The Brexit referendum has been reshaping not only the migration trajectories and the mobility practices of onward migrants and European citizens already residing in the UK but also their values and attitudes towards acquiring European and/or British citizenship (Botterill, McCollum, & Tyrrell 2019; Guma & Dafydd Jones, 2019; McCarthy 2019). Scholars often underline a combination of socio-economic and cultural factors that facilitate this intra-European mobility towards the UK. High unemployment, loss of jobs, and low wages are considered the most influential factors supporting onward migration (Ahrens, Kelly, & Liempt 2014; Mas Giralt 2016). Ahrens, Kelly, and Liempt (2014) note that formal and informal discrimination, in addition to education and language (especially providing English education to children (Morad & Sacchetto 2020b), could be other key factors. Some studies have also reported that the decision to relocate is supported by feelings of exclusion stemming from the increasing anti-migrant sentiments in some EU countries (Ahrens et al. 2014). However, very little research has focused on the post-onward migration experiences of these new EU citizens who have relocated to the UK – a gap that this paper intends to address.

3. Methods

Empirical data for this study consist of 76 in-depth interviews conducted between 2015 and 2019. Specifically, 35 Bangladeshis with Italian citizenship who were planning to move to the UK were interviewed in Vicenza, Venice, Bologna, and Padova. The remaining 41 interviews were conducted in London, Bradford, and Birmingham with Italian-Bangladeshis who had already relocated to the UK. The 76 interviewees were approached mainly through snowballing, with a variety of initial approaches to maximise participant heterogeneity. Some respondents were contacted via key informants and through networks of various Italian-Bangladeshi associations in both Italy and London. The respondents were mostly male heads of nuclear households, between 30 and 50 years of age, who had lived in Italy for at least 15 years, which is sufficiently long to acquire Italian citizenship and an EU passport – the keys to onward migration. We recognize that adopting this generational and gender perspective has limitations; however, this does not imply gender-blindness (any more than focusing mainly on women), and we remain sensitive to gender and generational dynamics in our ensuing analysis.

The interviews gathered narrative data on the following topics: social background in the country of origin; life and work in Italy; motivations and strategies underlying the onward move to the UK; housing, work, and family life in London; redefinition of their self-assigned

identities; relations with the British state (including welfare and education); and concerns and plans for the future. The interviews lasted between 50 minutes and 2.5 hours and were conducted in public spaces (such as cafes, bars, squares, and parks) or in the interviewees' homes. The interviews were conducted in Bangla, Italian, or English, according to the interviewees' inclination and the language knowledge of the interviewers. The interviews in Bangla or Italian were translated into English for the purpose of this contribution. All names used are pseudonyms.

4. Context

Bangladeshi migration to Western countries (mainly Europe) has its roots in British colonialism. This migration flow started in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with people coming from the Sylhet region. Bangladeshis were employed as peddlers or workers in hotels and restaurants from the 1850s onwards. However, the second phase of Bangladeshi migration to the UK started in the 1950s, when migrants who had already settled in the UK took advantage of the British government's new immigration policy and sponsored the migration of their family members and relatives to the UK (Gardner 1995). As a result, a large percentage of Bangladeshis (especially from the Sylhet region) migrated to the UK and settled mainly in Birmingham and Oldham, working as labourers in heavy industries (Gardner 2009). It is claimed that nearly 90% of the British-Bangladeshi population has Sylheti origins (Gardner 2009).

After the UK, Italy is the second largest destination for Bangladeshi migrants in Europe. The closure of the borders of some European nations in the 1980s, such as Germany, France, and the Netherlands, and Italy's flexible migration policy and periodic regularization procedures encouraged South Asian migrants to move there, in order to obtain permanent residency. This migration flow increased significantly once the majority of undocumented Bangladeshi migrants (approximately 3500) obtained a residence permit in 1990 under the Martelli Law (Morad and Sacchetto 2020a). In particular, the amnesties in 1990, 1996, and 1998 encouraged Bangladeshis to move to Italy (both from Bangladesh and other EU countries) to be documented (Morad & Gombac, 2018). This first generation of Bangladeshis in Italy participated in the local economy via the industrial and service sectors, working as unskilled and sometimes skilled labour in metalworking, tanning, chemical, or textile factories. More recently, some of them have found employment in the tourism and restaurant sector. Despite

their general urban, middle-class background, they usually remain in low-status jobs, mainly in the factories with a permanent contract.

After living in Italy for 15 to 20 years, once the Bangladeshis became Italian citizens (Della Puppa & King 2019), they started to move to other EU countries (mainly the UK) because of freedom of movement. It has been estimated that almost 30,000 Italian-Bangladeshis live in the UK (Chowdhury 2018). They are mostly concentrated in inner London boroughs, such as Tower Hamlets, Newham, Camden, and Southwark, which are traditionally populated by the British-Bangladeshi community (Alexander, 2011; Wessendorf, 2020).

However, the outcome of the so-called 'Brexit' referendum has deeply upset the onward migration of the Italian-Bangladeshis and their hopes of a new life in London. Given that such migrations are motivated by the need for welfare that is considered – rightly or wrongly – more inclusive (Della Puppa & King 2019), it is obvious that one of the main fears associated with the referendum is the possible exclusion of EU citizens from the system of benefits, which they were otherwise entitled to in London. In fact, it should be recalled that one of the pivotal issues in the electoral campaign for the Brexit referendum was specifically the use of benefits by EU immigrants and the so-called 'welfare shopping' phenomenon (Sredanovic & Della Puppa 2020). Here, it is important to note that a substantial number of EU nationals, with five years of residence in the UK, have the opportunity to apply for settlement and maintain all their existing welfare rights, as stipulated in the settlement status scheme – a programme through which EU, European Economic Area (EEA), and Swiss citizens and their family members can apply to continue living in the UK beyond 30 June 2021. In case of a positive outcome, applicants will obtain the so-called 'settled status' or, at least, the 'pre-settled status'.

In the UK, Italian-Bangladeshis mostly work in part-time jobs at restaurants and grocery shops owned by the British-Bangladeshi. Some work as taxi cab drivers and some are self-employed – owners of Bengali clothing stores and Bengali restaurants (serving popular Bengali food items).

4. The dark side of onward migration

In this section, through the voices of the protagonists, we analyze the representations of their life in Italy, the reasons behind their experience of leaving Italy and undertaking an experience of onward migration to the UK, and, above all, the disillusionment experienced. by onward migrants with respect to the factors that led them to undertake this new migration.

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4.1. Reasons for onward migration to the UK

Bangladesh migrants who leave Italy to travel towards the UK consider several socio-cultural aspects and not just a single reason (Della Puppa & King, 2019; Morad & Sacchetto, 2020b). They mainly seek cultural reproduction for their second generation, which involves passing down Bengali traditions and providing a religious upbringing. Italian-Bangladeshis are concerned about their children growing up in an Italian cultural environment and increasingly becoming more distanced from their home culture and Islamic norms (Morad & Sacchetto, 2020b). The aspiration of educating their children in English is also a main driver of the intention to leave Italy because learning good English could offer them better prospects worldwide as well as in Bangladesh (Della Puppa & King, 2019). Further, the Italian-Bangladeshi respondents also describe the racial discrimination experienced in their daily lives in Italy, which brought them a sense of dissatisfaction. They felt that their citizenship status was only 'on paper' and that it had not led to any changes in their social lives (Morad & Sacchetto, 2020b). These aspects were highlighted by one of the Italian-Bangladeshis in London:

> My husband had a permanent job at the factory. We had no economic problems, but we moved to the UK to provide English education to our kids. We were also interested in the availability of greater Islamic culture in the UK, which we did not have in Italy. We were also worried about the future of our kids there in Italy. It is hard to find any foreign children working in a very good public job. But Bangladeshis who have been living here in the UK work in every sector here. (Rahela, London, 2019)

According to our findings, the UK is a preferred onward migration destination for many Italian-Bangladeshis because of its colonial legacy in terms of cultural and economic resources (Morad & Sacchetto, 2020b). Italian-Bangladeshis find the UK society to be more welcoming of migrants and more multicultural, thus permitting them to reproduce Bengali culture and Islamic norms for their children. Further, they consider British education as an avenue to increase their social status in their home country, as only high-class people seem to be able to afford it (Della Puppa & King, 2019; Morad & Sacchetto, 2020b). Respondents also described the UK as the perfect destination for securing better careers for their offspring, since they had observed that Bangladeshis were employed in almost all public and private sectors of the UK, like the native British.

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> Some areas of London are like our country [Bangladesh] with people walking on the street, wearing a *lungi* [Bengali dress]. Within walking distance, you will find a mosque and madrasa. That's why many of us think "Let's move to the UK to have a Bengali and Islamic environment". (Sayed, 2019, Venice)

In summary, with the UK being home to the largest Bangladeshi diaspora in Europe, it offers more opportunities in terms of practicing Bengali culture as well as enjoying religious freedom, thus motivating many Italian-Bangladeshis to undertake the onward migration to the UK.

4.2 Narrowing of the economic and social life

Migrants who have moved from Italy to the UK report a sense of having 'stepped down' in the labour market, mainly when comparing their current employment status to their earlier jobs in Italy, where they enjoyed good economic benefits because of a permanent position in factories or restaurants or as mangers or owners of small enterprises. In contrast, the working lives of the Italian-Bangladeshis in London are characterized by flexibility and insecurity in terms of schedules and locations, and they find the nature of their work to be generally incompatible with their age and social identity. Participants in London affirmed that they suffered a process of professional devaluation and de-skilling, and it had a negative impact on their salaries. For example, in the UK most are employed in part-time jobs within the Bangladeshi business community, and their salaries are very low. While the majority of our interviewees had a monthly income of between €1,500 and €2,500 in Italy, in the UK, their monthly income was between £700 and £1,500 (about €800-1700). A respondent interviewed in Bradford explained the situation in the following words:

> I really miss my Italian working life. In Italy, my job was in a factory where I had worked for about 14 years. When I was leaving, my monthly salary was €2,000. I used to work five days a week, and I had two days off. I had time to meet and chat with my friends during our Saturday and Sunday gatherings. Sometimes, after returning home from work in the evening, I even used to go to a bar to meet and chat with our friends. But I do not have this chance here in the UK because my job starts in the afternoon, and I come back at midnight. I am working in a restaurant, where there are no fixed working hours. My salary is £380

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> (€410) per week, and it's based on an 8-hour day, but often I have to work for 10 hours. Here, we work on Saturday and Sunday too. (Kamal, Bradford, 2019)

These problems can be attributed to the greater liberalisation of some segments of the British labour market, the hypertrophy of the service sector, and the drawbacks of the industrial sector, which characterize the British economy (Sassen 1988). May et al. (2007) wrote persuasively about a 'new migrant division of labour' in London and the UK that forced Italian-Bangladeshis to fit into a structural straitjacket as unskilled migrants, irrespective of their education and skills. Kamal's sentiments are echoed by many Italian-Bangladeshis who miss jobs that permitted them to have a social life in Italy. Moving to the UK has altered not only their jobs and sectors of employment but also the nationality of their employers (from Italian to Bangladeshi).

British-Bengali employers do not provide any fixed working hours or fixed days off (unlike their employers in Italy), and this has constrained migrant employees' social lives in the UK. Work-time flexibility implies that the migrants cannot manage their time to organize or participate in social events with relatives and friends arriving from Italy or those within Britain (Della Puppa & King, 2019). Khasru, who was a factory worker in Padova and is now employed in a British–Bangladeshi-owned grocery shop in East London, narrated his challenges:

> I would say in terms of working life and opportunity, for me, Italy was thousand times better. I had all the freedom, as Saturday and Sunday were my days off, and I could spend time with my family and friends. I received 14 salary payments in a year: 12 salaries for 12 months, and 2 for Christmas and annual leave. Here, we don't have this benefit because I am a temporary worker. Here, we don't have time to meet friends because everyone has different days off. For instance, one has Monday off, another one has a day off on Thursday, and another has another day. It also creates a distance between us and our kids. For children, the school weekend is Saturday and Sunday, but here most adults work on Saturday and Sunday. So, parents cannot spend time with the child and cannot meet their kids because of different schedules. (Khasru, London, 2019)

In the UK, the social life of migrants is confined to the Italian-Bangladeshi or European-Bangladeshi community. Unlike in Italy where they worked with native Italians in factories or restaurants, in the UK, they have little scope to meet with native white British people. This

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difference in social life is partly because of the vast contrast in the scale of the regions. Small north Italian industrial towns allow an intimate mixing of activities and social groups, while the vast metropolis of London has a more stratified and segregated social geography (Della Puppa & King 2019). This idea is captured in the long quote below:

> It is difficult to have English friends here, for several reasons. In Italy, I had many Italian friends because friendship began in the places we frequented together – there we had a workplace. Here, many of us are like me, we are mini-cab drivers, and the British do not do this. Among my colleagues there are no English people. Here in London, we do not work in industries or factories as in Italy. We go to work in the kitchen or as a dish-washer in a restaurant, and even there you don't meet any English people – they are out of our places; there are no chances to meet them. The British who do "quality" jobs in the city – in the evening, they take the underground and return home to their neighbourhoods, which are different from ours, and we never meet them. (Rintu, London, 2016)

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The narrowing of Italian-Bangladeshi migrants' social circles in London is also related to the specific characteristics of the neighbourhoods in which they are settled, which include Tower Hamlets, Newham, and further out in Redbridge and Dagenham in East London. These boroughs are characterized by 'super-diversity' (Vertovec 2007), with high numbers of 'old' and 'new' immigrants from many parts of the world (Catney 2018; see also Royal Geographical Society 2017) and only a minority of 'white British' (Peach 2006). While East London has played host to long-established immigrant communities from former British colonies, newcomers from many other parts of the world (such as Latin America, China, and Eastern Europe) have transformed the diverse ethnic and social character of these boroughs (Catney 2018; see also Royal Geographical Society 2017), taking it away from Bangladeshis' image of the post-imperial Britain that they sought.

4.3 Trapped in welfare dependency

In the EU, every European citizen who moves to another member state retains the welfare rights of a local citizen. Even the settlement status scheme gives them the opportunity to maintain all their existing welfare rights in the UK. None the less, studies show that EU immigrants are less likely to claim welfare benefits than the natives (Jakubiak, 2020; Wadsworth et al. 2016).

However, Italian-Bangladeshis in the UK have to rely on welfare benefits to survive economically (Oliver 2019), since they only have part-time jobs. Because they are unskilled, middle-aged, and not fluent in English, they are unable to secure a good full-time job with a high salary. Their situation is explained by Nazrul, a 47-year-old Italian-Bangladeshi who lived in Italy for 20 years and left a factory job in Milan to move to Bradford:

> Due to my language barrier and my age, I am not able to find a very good job in factories or British-owned organisations. I am now working in a Bengali restaurant owned by one of our *Sylheti* men. My salary is only £1,000, which is not sufficient to maintain my family here in Bradford. So I need to rely on benefits. (Nazrul, Bradford, 2019)

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Our empirical findings also underline the fact that Italian-Bangladeshis are forced to take part-time jobs to qualify for welfare benefits. With a full-time job in a British-Bangladeshi restaurant or supermarket, individuals do not earn enough to meet their family expenses; moreover, they do not qualify for social security benefits (Oliver, 2019). The dismantling of the British welfare system, initiated by the Thatcher government and accelerated by the Blair government, and the increasingly exclusionary migration policies have resulted in the right to welfare being replaced with the obligation to workfare (Montagna 2021). That is, the state imposes participation in a labour contract, often unfair and oppressive, as a necessary condition of state support, and this extends state control into all spheres of everyday life (Brown 2015; Wacquant 2009). This step curtailed both the economic contributions, disbursed in the form of benefits, and the eligibility criteria. For example, to receive the income-based jobseeker's allowance (JSA), the income supplement benefit, which, at least until Brexit, the EU citizens – such as Italian-Bangladeshis – are entitled to, applicants have meet the following criteria: they must reside in the UK for at least 3 months; demonstrate that they want to be established in the UK; be over 18 but below the retirement age; actively seek work; not be a full-time student; and, most importantly, work less than 16 hours a week.

Masud reports that his hourly wage is so low that the only way to satisfy the needs of his family is to work less and access benefits instead of increasing the number of working hours.

> Now I have a part-time job... Honestly speaking, I am not willing to do a full-time job… because if I do a full-time job, I get maximum of £1,200 or £1,300 [per month], but I have to pay the rent that is £1,000... and how can we live on £200? And if I do a part- time job, I can get £600 or £700, and I get rent benefit. I would like to work full-time... but I couldn't

> support my family with my salary. If I work full-time, I have to pay everything, but if I don't work full-time, they [benefits] will help me. I don't like it because I feel I cannot be totally responsible for my family; I also feel that I am not honest with this country. I feel I always have to hide something from society, the people, the state, the council... I don't like to depend on someone else. For example, if I earn £700 – it is just an example – they will help me with £900, but if I earn £715, for £15 I will lose £900. (Masud, London, 2017)

Masud's words highlight how he feels trapped in a condition of dependence with little hope of improvement. Further, he is unable to meet the material needs of his family without depending on welfare, a situation that influences his daily conduct, his expenses, the hours he works, the size of his family, and the size of his flat. These limitations have a negative impact not only (and most obviously) on the economics of household but also on the self-esteem and sense of identity of the migrant.

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4.4 Back to being a foreigner

To fully examine the downside of onward migration experienced by the Italian-Bangladeshis in the UK, it is necessary to consider their relations with the traditional Bangladeshi community, who originally migrated from the Sylhet region and have lived and worked in the UK for generations. More than 90% of the British-Bengali residents in the UK are from the Sylhet region (Gardner 2009), while the newcomers (Italian-Bangladeshis) are from different districts of Bangladesh (Morad & Gombac 2018). Onward migration contributes to the creation of a 'community within a community' (Della Puppa, Montagna, & Kofman 2021), especially against the backdrop of Brexit and despite the existence and basic functioning of the already mentioned settlement status scheme. Respondents often reported being at the receiving end of mistrust, distrust, and even direct hostility from the British-Bengalis. In the words of one of the interviewees:

> I don't know where the problem lies, but they did not accept us. When I first came from Italy, I went to the NI [*National Insurance]* office to get my national insurance card. As I can't speak English very well, I did not understand what the officer told me, but then this officer called another officer who spoke Bengali. But I was surprised to see that she was speaking with me in the *Sylheti* dialect. The woman asked me in front of the officer "Why

> are you people here?" I wanted to say something like she is Bangladeshi, and I am also Bangladeshi. If she lives in the UK, what's the problem if we live here. But I did not answer from the fear that maybe she will be angry and make it difficult for me to get my NI card. (Dipu, London, 2019)

These hostile sentiments may partly stem from the persistent anti-migrant media campaigns that characterize the British public discourse and the British political agenda that represents newcomers as parasites feeding on British welfare (Antonucci & Varriale, 2020). Such rhetoric is likely to have influenced even British citizens belonging to 'ethnic minorities'. When viewed from this lens, the divide between the two sections of Bangladeshi migrants may be seen as a conflict between British citizens and the citizens of southern Europe (or more generally speaking, European citizens). It seems that the British Sylheti community is somehow afraid of new EU migrants, and to prevent such migration, they voted for Brexit (Wessendorf 2020). While it is difficult to determine if the narrative below accurately expresses the voting sentiments of the majority of the British-Sylheti community, it does reveal the climate of hostility perceived by the Italian-Bangladeshis in the UK:

> Their attitudes are very negative. They recognised us as refugees. The attitude is as if we create a lot of trouble for them. They don't like that we are coming here. That's the reason why they are supporters of Brexit. They think this is their country – they are British, and we are refugees. (Majid, London, 2019)

This division within the Bangladeshi community in the UK potentially exposes the chauvinistic disposition of the Sylheti faction. Compared to other districts of Bangladesh, the Sylheti region has witnessed accelerated development (Gardner 1995). This is mainly due to the distinct political and fiscal regime that the region historically enjoyed under British colonial administration. This naturally gave rise to privileged ties between the colonial motherland and the district. Both these factors fuelled emigration from Sylhet to the UK. Given this political and cultural context, the 'community segmentation' discussed above can be seen as a wider dichotomy between the Sylheti (whose migration history is oriented towards the UK) and the rest of the Bangladeshis (whose migration has been more varied).

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5. Italian-Bangladeshi strategies to cope with the post-Brexit scenario: from returns to internal/international mobility

Italian-Bangladeshis in the UK rely heavily on welfare support benefits to meet their material needs and those of their families. However, the benefit dependency has proved to be a trap that they find difficult to escape from. The prospect of the UK's exit from the EU is perceived as a threat by the Italian-Bangladeshis.

One of their main concerns with the outcome of the referendum is the possibility of their exclusion from the system of benefits that EU citizens can access. In the EU, every European citizen who moves to another member state enjoys the rights of a local citizen (from the perspective of welfare protections). In fact, as mentioned earlier, one of the issues in the election campaign for the Brexit referendum was the so-called 'welfare shopping' (Ambrosini & De Luca, 2019). The UK government favoured the imposing of some restrictions on the access to welfare by European citizens (Alberti 2016). Now, with the imminent exit of the UK from the EU, the Italian-Bangladeshis are worried about losing their rights and, consequently, the economic support to cover their housing costs and the costs related to their children. The exit is likely to make their daily life less affordable in a state characterized by a high cost of living (such as London):

> We take the benefits from the Council, but we will have problems in still receiving these facilities, because, after Brexit, they will stop helping Europeans, and we are Europeans, Italians, because we have European citizenship, and it will limit the benefits. London is very expensive. [...] Of course, if you have the benefits for the children, for the rent, for the family, if you show that you have a part-time job... the Council gives you more than 1,600 pounds (€1800); therefore, if you earn 800 pounds (€900) with your part-time work, you can survive. But if they block benefits... (Ripon, London, 2017)

Uncertainties associated with the aftermath of the referendum have led many to reshape their mobility and permanence plans or to develop strategies to deal with the consequences. For example, some intend possibly to return to Italy, if (in the future) they no longer have the right to welfare protections or find themselves once again to be 'in the context of immigration'. However, other Italian-Bangladeshis are determined to remain in the UK, having invested in the future of their children. In fact, one of the interviewees confirmed the perception of Italy as

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a country in which no upward social mobility is possible for the young in general (and for those of migrant origin in particular):

> Even if Brexit comes, I won't go back to Italy because there is no good job for my kids there. I don't want my kids to still work as blue-collar workers. I always want to go back to Italy, but on vacation. (Rumon, London, 2017)

Those who have decided to stay do not exclude the possibility of further migration mobility within the UK, in order to be able to achieve the aims that originally prompted the overseas onward migration. This success of this strategy depends on the migrants' ability to find an urban context with a lower cost of living than London or the other English cities. However, Brexit has also pushed many to consider further international mobility towards another EU country, in order to take advantage of the acquired EU citizenship. Two respondents highlighted this sentiment:

> If the government stops the benefits for families and the housing benefits, even if I work full-time, it will be very difficult to stay in London. Maybe outside London, it is not that expensive. In the last year alone, a lot of my friends have moved from London to other cities or towns, because there you can have (for £500 or £600, €560/€670) a three, four room house, with the same salary, approx. (Hassan, London, 2017)
>
> I think to change, to go to some other country, within Europe, no problem, because I have the EU passport: Germany, Sweden, Holland... higher life than in Italy and, with the EU passport, no problem. (Abul, London, 2017)

Finally, some respondents who have lived in the UK capital for several years plan to acquire British citizenship to enjoy the post-Brexit civic conditions and social rights. The possession of a European citizenship may work in the favour of such migrants, as it may reduce the time needed. In fact, by the time of writing this article, several respondents had pledged their allegiance to the Queen and the State and had acquired third citizenship (see also Sredanovic & Della Puppa 2020).

6. Conclusion

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This article offers a novel perspective on intra-EU mobility by analysing its 'dark side' – the disillusionment experienced by onward migrants with respect to the factors that led them to undertake the new migration – and specifically focusing on the post-onward migration experiences and strategies of the Italian-Bangladeshis who have relocated to the UK.

In terms of the first research question – the experiences of Italian-Bangladeshis in the UK – this study sheds light on a number of adversities endured by the migrants, including a socio-economic and cultural downgrade in the UK society compared to their previous position in Italy. First, many Italian-Bangladeshis feel downgraded in the labour market on comparing their employment status in the UK with that in Italy. This can be explained by the professional devaluation and de-skilling that occurs on account of onward migration. Second, unlike in Italy where the migrants interacted with native Italians via work, in the UK, their work and social lives are confined to the British–Bangladeshi-owned enterprises and European-Bangladeshi communities. Third, onward migration has essentially converted these Italian citizens into foreigners in UK society: they are not fully accepted by the British-Bangladeshi community that often treats them as foreigners. Thus, according to the constructs proposed by Sayad (1999), one may argue that the Italian-Bangladeshi interviewees have experienced 'triple absence' and 'double betrayal'.

Their first sense of absence is linked to Bangladesh: the country in which they were born and socialised and which they feel they have betrayed by emigrating. The second sense of absence is associated with Italy: a country in which they spent much of their lives, where they acquired citizenship, and then had to finally leave behind. This departure could have given rise to feelings of a second betrayal. Lastly, their lack of a sense of belonging to the UK can be deemed as the third absence. In the UK, they have been subjected to different forms of exclusion: labour segregation in the so-called 3D jobs, welfare dependency, narrowing of their social lives and, above all, exclusion from the diasporic community of British-Bangladeshis – or, as they say, the *Sylheti* community.

Furthermore, since the Italian-Bangladeshis are unskilled, middle-aged, not fluent in English and, above all, living in a country whose labour market is characterized by an intense liberalization of some segments and a hypertrophy of the tertiary sector to the detriment of the industrial one (May et al. 2007), they are not able to secure good permanent jobs or high salaries. When they lived in the small cities and towns of Italy, their routines were characterized by stable, shift-based working rhythms that allowed regular free time for family and associated life. However, in the UK, where their employment is limited to precarious, low-skilled jobs with unsocial hours, their family and social lives have been disrupted (Della Puppa & King,

2019). It should also be underlined that Italian-Bangladeshis in the UK are compelled to work in part-time jobs to qualify for and maintain welfare benefits. Since – owing to the complete transition from welfare to workfare (Brown 2015; Wacquant 2009) and the tightening of migration policies (Montagna 2021) – they cannot work for more than a maximum number of weekly hours, they feel 'trapped' in a condition of dependence on welfare with little chance of improvement.

The study findings with regard to the second research question explore the strategies developed by Italian-Bangladeshis to deal with the possible consequences of Brexit on their EU citizenship rights. Specifically, they fear a potential loss of rights, both in social and identity terms. Although the settlement status scheme may allow them to achieve the so-called 'settled status' or 'pre-settled status', the process, none the less, constitutes a retreat to the condition of 'foreigners' from which they thought they had emancipated themselves with the acquisition of European citizenship. Despite the opportunity to apply for settlement and maintain all their existing welfare rights in the UK, they are burdened with fear and concerns, especially over economic and material aspects, such as exclusion from the benefit system.

The majority of them moved to the UK to secure a future for their children (Della Puppa & King, 2019; Morad & Sacchetto, 2020b), which in turn would improve their chances of upward social mobility. However, Brexit has them forced to further reconfigure their strategies and reactivate different degrees of mobility in order to avoid the loss of social rights (access to welfare, the status of citizens) or material resources (housing and better working conditions) acquired over time in Europe. On the one hand, some are willing to leave the UK, reactivating an international migration mobility. This is tendentially oriented towards countries of central and northern Europe, which are perceived as less affected by the economic crisis and where the welfare system is considered more inclusive and society more multicultural compared to Italy. Conversely, there are those who are determined not to be excluded a second time from the UK and plan to move within the country to less expensive urban contexts than London. This would allow them to live without public welfare support. It, certainly, implies a laborious and tiresome redefinition and redesign of their social strategies and lives that was not foreseen before the relocation from Italy to the UK and possibly contributes to the ambivalences and disillusions that constitute the 'dark side' of the onward migration. However, for now, these are only hypothetical scenarios and aspirational horizons. How these conditions will change, what role their Bangladeshi origin will play and, above all, what weight their Italian citizenship will carry – in social, material, symbolic, and identity terms – in the post-Brexit scenario remain to be seen.

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Among the issues to be deepened in future research, we highlight the following: the "feeling foreigner again", as migrants in the UK, as one of the dark side of onward migration experience, while they have left Italy also because of experiences of racism; the social and migration trajectories of those who faced with the dark sides of onward migration decided to return to Italy; the effectiveness or otherwise of the daily strategies to face the dark sides of the onward migration practised by the Italian-Bangladeshi in the UK after Brexit, including the reactivation of further internal or international geographic mobility.

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