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The new 'twice migrants': motivations, experiences and disillusionments of Italian-Bangladeshis relocating to London

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ABSTRACT

Taking our cue from an earlier study of East African Asians who 'onward-migrated' to the UK in the 1960s and 1970s, this paper looks at the more recent phenomenon of Bangladeshi immigrants in Italy who are onward-migrating to London. We seek to answer three questions. First, why does this migration occur? Second, how does the ethnic group we call 'Italian-Bangladeshis' narrate their working lives in London and to what extent do they feel 'at home' there? Third, what are the gaps between their expectations held before the move and the actual social and economic conditions they encounter in London? Empirical evidence comes from 40 in-depth interviews with Italian-Bangladeshis who have already onward-migrated or plan to. Most Italian-Bangladeshis move to London to escape socially limiting factory work in Italy, to invest in the educational future of their children, and to join the largest Bangladeshi community outside of their home country. In London, they describe feeling more 'at home' than in Italy, due to the size and multiple facilities of the Bangladeshi community, their lack of 'visibility' and of racialisation, and the greater sense of religious freedom. But their onward-migration experience has its more negative sides: the inability to access more than low-paid casual work in London's service economy, the cost of housing, and the difficulty of making social contacts beyond their ethnic community, especially with those they regard as 'natives', i.e. 'white' British.

Introduction

In her classic text *Twice Migrants*, Bhachu (1985) documents the onward-migrated community of East African Sikhs through their resettlement in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. She describes them as 'twice removed', having originally left the Punjab during the early years of the twentieth century as indentured labour to build the Kenya-Uganda railway, and thence to the UK in the wake of the Africanisation of the post-independence African countries.

Several decades later we observe another group of South Asian 'twice migrants', this time originating from Bangladesh and arriving in the UK via an intermediate migration to Italy. According to a recent article in *The Independent*,

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> The melting pot that is East London is gaining a distinctive new flavour – thanks to the arrival of thousands of Bangladeshi-Italian migrants fleeing economic stagnation in southern Europe. An estimated 6,000 such families have come to the UK over the past three or four years, the majority settling in East London … They are making their mark in the Tower Hamlets Bangladeshi community and beyond, opening coffee shops and forming their own welfare associations to welcome new arrivals. (Clarke 2015)

This intriguing historical parallel should not be overstretched, since there are significant differences. Firstly, the length of stay in the initial migratory destination has been up to 25 years in Italy, but it lasted two or three generations in East Africa. Secondly, there is a marked difference in the strength of connection to the original 'homeland': East African Asians in Britain generally have few links to the Indian subcontinent, whereas the Bangladeshis are still in touch with their country of origin and make regular visits. Thirdly, the respective onward migrants opted for different places of settlement in England. East African Asians mainly settled in suburban West London and in Midland cities, notably Leicester, whereas the Bangladeshis onward-migrating from Italy have targeted the traditional areas of Bangladeshi residence in inner East London, initially focused on Tower Hamlets, nowadays extending eastwards to Ilford (Bhachu 1985, 3–8; Carey and Shukur 1985).

On a wider plane, our study of Bangladeshis' relocation from Italy to the UK is part of an emergent literature on *onward migration*, which critiques the conceptualisation of international migration as a simple bipolar event – a move from country A to country B. Globalisation and globally networked migration trajectories give rise to a plurality of migration pathways which subvert the linear model of origin–destination. 'Onward migration' is our preferred term for the phenomenon that we explore with the Bangladesh–Italy–UK case, although there are several other terms scattered across the migration literature, including transit migration (Collyer and de Haas 2012), secondary migration (Bang Nielsen 2004), transmigration (Mueller 2004), stepwise international migration (Paul 2011), serial migration (Ossman 2004), as well as the older 'twice-migration' couplet (Bhachu 1985). Yet, few empirical studies have been conducted to explain why some immigrants choose to move to other countries instead of settling down in the first country or returning to their countries of origin.

Taking the case of Bangladeshi migrants in Europe, this study poses three sets of research questions. First, and most fundamentally, *why do they onward-migrate from Italy to the UK*? How do they articulate the mix of push and pull factors to frame their decision to move to another immigration country? Second, *what are their experiences of employment and socio-cultural life in the UK*? Do they achieve upward social and economic mobility, or is this an illusion? Thirdly, to the extent that there are ambivalences and disillusionments in their 'new' lives in London, *what are the negative aspects of their migration experiences*?

The rest of the article unfolds as follows. First, we sketch some necessary background about the European context of onward migration, and the specific history of diverse waves of Bangladeshi migration to the UK and Italy. A section on fieldwork methods then follows. Three main sections present our empirical findings, corresponding to the research questions posed above. The conclusion highlights the paper's most significant and original findings, evaluates their theoretical implications, and suggests avenues for future research, including the possible impact of Brexit.

Bangladeshis in Europe: a community on the move

Moving on from Bhachu's monograph, existing studies of onward migration within Europe have been mainly on refugee groups (notably Somalis and Iranians – see Ahrens, Kelly, and van Liempt 2016; Bang Nielsen 2004; van Liempt 2011) or African economic migrants from countries such as Nigeria (Ahrens 2013) or Senegal (Toma and Castagnone 2015). More similar to our study are two recent analyses of onward migration of Latin Americans from Spain to the UK (Mas Giralt 2017; Ramos 2017). These studies reveal that onward migrations within Europe are driven by several motives: (i) overcoming barriers to employment and career progression; (ii) educational opportunities, including improving the education and life-chances of children; (iii) escaping racism, discrimination and islamophobia; (iv) diaspora-related motives – joining relatives, friends and larger co-ethnic communities; (v) social, political and cultural reasons, including the wish to be part of a more cosmopolitan, multicultural society. Later, we will see how the group we henceforth call the 'Italian-Bangladeshis' fit into this typology.

The story of Bangladeshi migration to the UK has been well-told by Gardner (1995, 2002) and Zeitlyn (2016), with special reference to the main diasporic community in inner East London. Very briefly, the migration started with the East India Company's recruitment of seamen from the Sylhet province of Bangladesh in the nineteenth century; over time, some of these seamen settled in British port cities, above all the London Docklands. A second wave of migration and settlement occurred in the postwar period, fuelled firstly by the demand for low-skilled labour in factories, catering and services, and then consolidated by family reunion in the wake of the Commonwealth Immigration Act (1962) and the Immigration Act (1971), and by marriage migration (Alexander 2013). By the 2011 census, people of Bangladeshi origin numbered 447,200, including nearly a fifth of the national total in the borough of Tower Hamlets (Zeitlyn 2016).

Bangladeshi migration to Italy is much more recent. A key trigger was a large-scale regularisation of 'irregular' migrants made possible by the Martelli Law of 1990, which attracted large numbers of Bangladeshis, including many who were already present in other European countries: a case, in the words of King and Knights (1994), of 'migratory opportunism'. The growth of the community has been extremely rapid: from around 4000 in 1990 to 70,000 in the early 2000s and an estimated 120,000–150,000 ten years later (Demaio 2013). Bangladeshi migrants in Italy were initially heavily concentrated in Rome, where they mainly worked as street-hawkers (Knights and King 1998) but, after the 1990s, they quickly spread to other parts of Italy, especially the prosperous North-East, where they found jobs in factories and workshops, creating their own ethnic enclaves or 'bangla-towns' (Della Puppa and Gelati 2015). At first, the Bangladeshi community in Italy was almost exclusively made up of men. However, women and children have become more numerous over time as a result of family-reunification migration (Della Puppa 2014).

This transition from a migration pioneered by men to one balanced over time by family formation is common to both destinations, Italy and the UK. In other respects, however, the two migrations are quite different. The longer history of Bangladeshi migration to London and the UK has created a more diverse population in terms of

class composition and cultural capital. Whilst wage-earners working in the low-skill industrial and tertiary sectors still dominate, there are also increasing numbers of middle-class households with higher education. Yet, 90% of British Bangladeshis still trace their regional origins to rural Sylhet (Gardner 2010). By contrast, the first generation of Bangladeshis in Italy arrived only since 1990 and remain in low-status jobs, despite their mainly urban, middle-class origins in different regions of Bangladesh (Della Puppa 2014; King 1998).

Methods

The empirical material for this paper consists of 40 in-depth narrative interviews with Italian-Bangladeshis: 20 were interviewed in London having already made their onward migration, and 20 were interviewed in North-East Italy. This latter group were Italian citizens who were actively planning to move to the UK. Fieldwork was in two phases: in Italy during 2010–11, and in London in 2015–16. Among those interviewed in London, some had already been interviewed in Italy five years before.

Respondents were accessed mainly by 'snowballing', starting from a variety of initial approaches in order to maximise participant heterogeneity. Some respondents were contacted via key informants and the networks of various Italo-Bangladeshi associations in both Italy and London. All interviews were with male heads of nuclear households, aged in their 30s to 50s, who had lived in Italy at least 15 years, long enough to acquire Italian citizenship and an EU passport – the key to onward migration (Della Puppa and Sredanovic 2016). We recognise that adopting this generational and gender perspective has limitations; however, this does not imply gender-blindness (no more than focusing only on women would do), 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; concerns and plans for the future. The interviews were conducted in English and Italian, according to the interviewees' inclination. Given the good knowledge of English of most younger, urban-educated Bangladeshis, and their many years of residence in Italy to learn Italian (often to a high level of fluency), these two languages functioned effectively for the interviews. Interviews and their recording were administered subject to the usual practices of informed consent. Interviewees' names are fictitious.

Reasons for onward migration

Although there was a common, almost universal, element related to aspirations for upward socio-economic mobility, both for the migrants themselves and especially for their children, the evidence gleaned from the participants' narratives reveal a multiplicity of interlocking motivations for onward migration. Nevertheless, we choose to present our analytical findings under a series of individual factors, some of which correspond to the typology set out earlier. These factors are the product of collective narratives and more or less idealised representations reproduced between the Bangladeshi community in

Italy and the Italian-Bangladeshi community in London. At the same time, we recognise – and evidence this in the interview quotes – that migration factors are multiplex and mutually reinforcing.

Economic crisis in Italy and the future of the second generation

Many Italian-Bangladeshi onward migrants traced the reasons for their move from Italy to the UK to the post-2008 European economic crisis which was particularly severe across the southern countries of the euro-zone (Lafleur and Stanek 2017). Researchers have argued that immigrant workers are more harshly affected by an economic crisis because of their contractual vulnerability and concentration in certain areas of the economy such as construction and manufacturing, which have been badly hit by the economic downturn (Bevelander and Petersson 2014; Bonifazi and Marini 2014; Castles 2011).

However, for most of our participants, it was not that they themselves had lost their jobs in Italy due to the financial crisis; rather it was the wider, psychologically depressing effect of the crisis on future prospects, especially for the younger generation. With the long-term stagnation of the Italian economy, there is a widespread perception that Italian society is static, so that the possibilities for self-advancement, and the prospects of one's children for social mobility, are viewed as virtually zero. This pessimism is also widely felt by young Italians in general, who are also pushed to emigrate, as their for-bearers did, in order to find remunerative work elsewhere in Europe, and to escape the blockages confronting them in their search for a decent career in Italy (Gjergji 2015; Tintori and Romei 2017).

Even if the first-generation Bangladeshi immigrants in Italy still find themselves in secure, if dead-end, jobs, they absorb the depressive atmosphere of the country which, failing its own younger generations, certainly cannot offer anything better to the new immigrant-origin second generation. The following interview extract is a typical expression of this sense of hopelessness and lack of faith in Italy for the next generation:

> I chose to come to England because I thought first of all of the future. The future – not mine and of my wife, but the future of my children. Looking around in Italy … knowing that there is a crisis … I could not see any future for them in Italy, even young people [Italians] see no future in Italy … I was afraid for the future of my children. So I came to England for them, because I feel that there are better chances here. (Mukul, London)

English as key to the world

The attraction of London in terms of participants' investment in the future of their children is manifested in various ways. First, there is their dissatisfaction with the Italian education system. It is not that Italian schools and universities are inadequate in themselves; it is rather the impossibility to educate and socialise their children in the English language. English is not a language of wide usage in Italy, even at the university level. This is a major concern for Bangladeshi parents who, despite their low status in the labour market, are more orientated to a global, cosmopolitan future than most of the Italian population. Of course, they also have pride in their own language, Bangla, as a symbol of identity linked to the country of origin, whose very name means 'homeland of the people who

speak Bangla'. But they are historically, emotionally and instrumentally tied to the language of their former colonisers, not only because they know it already but also because of its symbolic and practical value as *the* global language, indispensable for a career anywhere in the world, including back in Bangladesh.

The above points are stressed in the sample quotes below. Rezaul opines, like many others, that with English, 'the world is open'; whilst Kabir points out that, with only Italian and 'a little bit of English', the options are limited.

> We come from a country where English is like a second language. Everybody speaks English, maybe a not-so-good English, but they understand and speak it. As a British colony, we are influenced by British culture. For this reason, if the children study in English and speak English, then the world is open for them. (Rezaul, London)

> Another reason, that is very important for me and for the Bangladeshi community, is English: for my daughter's future. If she will study and grow up in English she will be able to work here, in Bangladesh or all over the world. But if she stays in Italy she learns only Italian, just a little bit of English … . (Kabir, London)

Through these and many other quotes like them, interviewees clearly understand that the expansion of opportunities for the social and economic advancement of their descendants can only take place in an international labour market beyond Italy. They visualise a geographic mobility that transcends national, even European borders. In addition, speaking English is a symbol of status distinction in Bangladesh, so for their children not to speak English diminishes their social status back home. Doing a university degree in Italy, without much exposure to English, prevents the second generation from accessing this global social recognition and mobility.

A way out from the factories

Participants reveal that, as migrants of colour in Italy, they feel discriminated, especially in the labour market where they are systematically classified as unskilled workers and channelled into the more strenuous, unpleasant and lowest-paid jobs, deprived of concrete possibilities of vertical mobility. Being Italian 'on paper' does not constitute a sufficient condition to escape the structural and informal discrimination that many migrants still face. Formally granted citizenship is actually considered by participants a 'third-class citizenship', whose lower status is embedded in multiple areas of social encounter – in the colour of the skin, the accent, the surname, all those elements that 'betray' the Bangladeshi origin, most of which are not erased by the passage from the first to the second generation.

> If you live in Italy, but you come from the Third World like me, you will always be a third-class citizen with a third-class citizenship … I'm only Italian in the documents, and my daughters will always be the daughters of a Bangladeshi worker. (Sarif, Italy)

Another participant found that Italian society was still unprepared to 'accept' people from different national, cultural and ethnic origins, and expressed his aspiration to live in a more inclusive, cosmopolitan context. He was especially concerned about his son, whom he wanted to spare the humiliation of growing up in a society where he will always be identified as a 'foreigner', a 'migrant':

> My son was born here, he's got the Italian citizenship. He feels Italian. Recently, I got him into a guitar school. The secretary woman told somebody on the phone: 'An Indian boy has come to take lessons'. My son, eight years old: 'Why did she say I'm Indian? I'm not Indian!' Look: he is Italian, he feels Italian, but his colour says he's Indian. It is so painful. What can I do as his father? (Zaeed, Italy)

We are reminded here of a parallel example from Andall's (2002) study of the second-generation African-Italians in Milan, and the difficulty they encountered throughout their daily lives in confronting the cognitive dissonance displayed by local Italians in trying to piece together two apparently conflicting images of 'blackness' and 'being Italian'. One revealing example she gives is when the young subjects of her research arrive at the airport and show their Italian passports: the Italian passport officer looks first at the passport, then at the person standing in front of him, then back at the passport, clearly having difficulty in processing the reality of a 'black Italian' (2002, 400).

For our participants, this resistance on the part of Italian society to recognise immigrants with qualifications and skills as high achievers – they are merely seen as 'third-class citizens' and 'low-class migrant workers' – is no longer acceptable; but their only alternative is to move on to societies which are more open, transparent and meritocratic.

Feeling 'at home' far from home

As the preferred onward-migration destination for Italian-Bangladeshis, London is represented – not without a certain amount of idealisation – as the global, multicultural, cosmopolitan city *par excellence*; as an environment full of opportunities which allows people from every country in the world to enhance their capabilities and potential. This representation of the British capital is linked, in the interviewees' minds and narratives, to two main tropes – London's historic role as the capital of Empire and hence of institutions and values that are nostalgically imagined still to exist; and secondly to its image of multicultural tolerance, creating a society where national origin, ethno-racial identity, religion and culture are not sources of stigma and devaluation. It is almost as if, by onward-migrating to London, they recover their 'natural place' in the global Bangladeshi diaspora, rejoining the well-trodden paths of language, commercial ties and cultural imagination established under the British colonial empire (Hansen 2014). In the narratives about life in London (both real and imagined), several themes were recurrent: meritocracy, the sense of 'feeling at home', and pragmatic things like education and welfare. We take each in turn.

Meritocracy

This theme has already been introduced in the sense of a lack of meritocracy in Italy, especially in the labour market. The other side of this coin, extolled by nearly all interviewees, was the deep-rooted belief in London as the place where you can achieve what you deserve according to your skills, aptitude and qualifications, irrespective of race, religion, nationality, etc. Here is one particularly passionate excerpt on this topic:

> There are 600,000 Bangladeshi living here [in Britain]. There is a big, big community, here in Tower Hamlets. There are three Bangladeshi members in the British Parliament, I mean from

Bangladeshi origin. In local council there are Bangladeshis, Africans, British … all together. While in Italy you will remain always *extracomunitario* [migrant coming from a 'third country']. You have got Italian passport, OK, Italian people is good and nice, but it is very difficult to have an institutional role, to have high-status job. There are no policemen of migrant origin. Here, look, the policemen are black, Chinese, Bengalis … In Italy none from our country has a good job, only *operaio* [factory worker]; while here, if you have studied as a doctor, you'll be a doctor. If my son gets good results at the university as a doctor, hospitals will contact him: 'join us' … The important thing is you have a good brain, good qualifications … But in Italy … I don't think this is possible … Here there is multiculturalism, all the cultures of the world. It is normal. Here we are 'invisible', while in Italy we are like in the zoo, you know? (Shaheen, London)

'Here is almost Bangladesh'

The type of representation illustrated in the previous quote is often attributed to the legacy of British colonialism and to the long migratory tradition that links the Indian subcontinent to the 'mother country' and has led to the creation of the oldest and largest Bangladeshi community outside of Bangladesh. For these reasons, London is perceived as a 'homeland outside the homeland' or 'Bangladesh in Europe' – an environment where you can feel at home and live in accordance with what interviewees regard as the 'Bengali culture and lifestyle'. In the two interview extracts below, East London is seen as 'almost Bangladesh' (the first quote), and in the second quote as not only 'like Bangladesh' but 'better than Bangladesh'.

Here there is no difference from Bangladesh … If you go to Whitechapel, you find everything. If you don't want to speak in English, it doesn't matter – 99% talks Bangla. Here there are music, arts programmes, so many things … Every week you get some minister, artist, politician or great man from Bangladesh. They come here. Here is almost Bangladesh. I feel at home, here you find everything. (Rashid, London)

Here you can find … the best foods from Bangladesh, fruit, fish … the best of everything … In East London there's our community everywhere. But here it's better than Bangladesh. In my country, for example, there is a lot of corruption, there is much mess. Here no: the laws work, you can walk down the street without anyone who 'breaks your balls' [Italian saying]; it is clean, there is no chaotic traffic like in Bangladesh, houses are better. (Rintu, London)

Another product of what Hansen (2014) calls the 'post-imperial formation' is the sense of admiration that citizens of the ex-colonies have for London. Despite the historical reality that the British Empire has dominated and exploited the subcontinent and its peoples, laying the foundations of economic dependency and subsequent mass emigration, it also provided the base for an administrative, legal, educational and political system. In this way, it has shaped the aspirations and the imaginaries of generations of Bangladeshis, for whom London became 'the dream'. For those who made it to Italy, the dream became closer and within reach:

The British have dominated and exploited my land, I know that, but my generation has not personally experienced this. We have only seen the progress of the British. This is what we have felt. And what you feel yourself is what matters most … The British have been more than 200 years in Bangladesh. The British administrators were a model … They are a legal reference point for us, 99% of Bangladeshi law is still modelled on the British one.

> Anything in Bangladesh makes you dream of England. Then the children of rich people, ministers, important people, politicians, successful entrepreneurs, have studied in England, in London. For us Bangladeshis, London has always been a dream. (Apan, London)

The dream is realisable through the acquisition of Italian citizenship which, for them, has a dual function: it allows them to stay long-term in Italy, and it also gives them the right to travel, live and work anywhere in the EU (Della Puppa 2016).

Religion, education and welfare

There are also some more specific aspects of 'feeling at home' in London and 'not at home' in Italy – chief amongst which is religious expression, seen by the participants as very important for their self-ascribed membership of their community. Hence, a move to London enables them to reveal their religious affiliation more freely in the public sphere, to enter a larger community of the faithful, and to ensure a 'religious education' for their children. In Italy, especially in the wake of the emotions created by recent terrorist attacks in several European cities, politicians and many public commentators read the social and religious dynamics, especially at the local level, as a 'clash of civilizations' (Ambrosini 2013; cf. Huntington 2002): Islam is seen as fundamentally incompatible with Italian society. This can lead to a latent conflict which surely influences the choices of Italian-Bangladeshis and their families:

> Yes, sometimes [I go to the mosque]. But not much … not much now. Because I am also scared. Every day the newspaper says … 'Muslim terrorists, Islamic terrorists', [so] I am a bit scared of going to the mosque … What does it mean, this fear? I am scared that if I go to the mosque maybe police will stop me and create problems. (Masud, Italy)

Several interviewees-related stories about the difficulties of getting permissions from local authorities in Italy to build a mosque, and harassment from local police around the mosque itself.

> For example, in Italy, in Vicenza, we had bought a space for a mosque … [But] every time, the municipality changed the conditions to use this space. At first, for example, they asked for two toilets and one for the disabled. We hadn't managed to do this. But it was just an exercise to obstruct the mosque because they were not well-disposed towards foreigners, especially Muslims. Even if we had built three bathrooms, they would find another quibble, you understand? Or on Friday, the day of communal prayer, there were always police checks; never a good situation. Here [in London] it is different. Here we can send children to study religion, here there are possibilities. (Faruq, London)

Although Faruq's comments largely speak for themselves, we make two contextual remarks. The first is to clarify that the municipality's stance, which Faruq interprets as obstructionist, was probably no more than an application of standard gender and health-and-safety rules for toilets in public buildings. On the other hand, the police presence outside the mosque on prayer days is a more credible critique. Both play into a long history of 'mosque conflicts' in Europe which have been well documented (e.g. Cesari 2005; Saint-Blanc and Schmidt di Friedberg 2005). Our second remark is to pick up Faruq's view about the much better possibilities for educating children in a religious way in London/UK, elaborated in more detail by another participant, interviewed this time in Italy:

> [In London] my fellow countrymen go to study the Koran; there are even *madrassas* [Islamic religious schools]. We think that London is better … because we are Muslims and religion is important for us, so I fear for my children … how to find the way to God. Here … it is difficult. So I am thinking of [going to] London, because in London there is everything. (Mintu, Italy)

Here we see an interesting parallel with Bhachu's study of the onward migration of East African Sikhs to London, where they found a more congenial setting to express their religiosity (1985, 166).

Finally, the UK is seen as a more attractive destination than Italy by virtue of its more generous and efficient welfare system, considered more 'inclusive' than the 'Mediterranean' welfare regime of Italy, characterised by a dual reliance on family and charitable organisations (Esping-Andersen 1990). The benefits regime in Britain offers insurance against redundancy and periods of unemployment, and a better chance to meet the wider welfare needs of families. Put simply:

> In Italy, if you work, you have everything; if you do not work, you have nothing. Here, instead, if you work, good; but when you lose your job you have benefits. (Janan, London)

We found that the Italian-Bangladeshis are careful to register their presence with the appropriate authorities in London, in order to be sure to qualify for their welfare entitlements. However, there is also evidence of their *unrealistic expectation* of what the British welfare state can offer them, and this is part of the less-positive side of their migration experience, which we examine next.

The down-sides of onward migration

Not all aspirations before onward migration were matched by the participants' experiences in London. Some quality-of-life aspects were not improved; disappointment and frustration resulted. Three main areas of negative outcome were narrated: work and their control over time; housing; and social life, especially contacts with 'native' British people.

Work and time

For the first-generation onward migrants, the idea that a move to London would improve their labour-market position and boost their income proved often to be a myth. It is true that, in Italy, their jobs as factory workers were physically arduous, socially unrewarding and not well-paid; but on the other hand these jobs generally carried a 'regular' contract, fixed hours, a steady income, and a recognised social identity as a family breadwinner. Moreover, their Italian lives, through work and neighbourhood relations, involved daily interactions with colleagues and nearby residents, based around a stable routine of work shifts and days off, which gave them opportunities for family time and other forms of sociability.

By contrast, the working lives of Italian-Bangladeshis in London are marked out by flexibility and insecurity in terms of time schedules and locations, and the type of work is generally considered inadequate for their age and social identity; typical jobs being mini-cab drivers, security guards, and dish-washers in restaurants. Participants in London generally say they suffered a process of professional devaluation and de-skilling. An example:

> Here, I worked in restaurants as dish-washer. The work was very hard and my boss didn't behave well with me. I also worked in a fast-food, washing chicken. I also didn't like it. All the time, ten, eleven hours washing chicken or cleaning the floor. My job in Italy was better: I worked in a factory, full-time, long-term contract, good salary, fixed working shifts, I felt fulfilled. I liked it much better than the jobs I can find here. Now I work as a security guard in supermarket. It's OK, better than dish-washer or in the fast-food. (Kobir, London)

This, then, is the picture that is constantly portrayed by onward migrants: a bottom-up testimony of the ruthless liberalisation of certain segments of London's labour market, especially jobs in catering and other labour-intensive services, and the reliance on migrant workers for these unskilled and low-paid jobs (May et al. 2007). Such jobs are easy to find – easier to find than jobs in Italy nowadays – but they are insecure and often pay below a living wage, insufficient to maintain an entire family in London's high living-cost environment. This has negative impacts, not only and most obviously on the economic front of household budgets, but also in terms of migrants' self-esteem and sense of their own work identity. Below, Masud points out that, even working 50 or 60 hours per week, he cannot earn enough to cover the needs of his family. His alternative, which diminishes his sense of self-worth, is to strategically work fewer hours per week in order to qualify for welfare assistance. But then he becomes 'imprisoned' in a condition of dependency on benefits with little chance of improvement.

> 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 £1200 or £1300 [per month], but I have to pay the rent that is £1000 or £1100 … 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. So it is better for me. But I don't like this system. Because 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 to the society, to the people, to the state, to 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. So I must not work more than 29 hours per week, because even if I work 50 or 60 I couldn't pay everything for me and my family. (Masud, London)

Many participants commented on their loss of control over time. Switching from a factory regime in Italy into the highly flexible service sector in London led to a fragmentation of both time schedules and work locations. In Italy, industrial production was organised on weekly shifts planned each month which often coincided with those of their compatriots. Interviewees reported that their working routine in London does not provide them with structured schedules and fixed days off; rather, it is 'just-in-time' labour, in different locations that are conveyed the night before or immediately upon receipt of a telephone call. Therefore, the heterogeneity and uncertainty of times, places and work commitments make meetings with compatriots and the creation of friendship networks much more difficult in London.

> In Italy, generally there are two days off: Saturday and Sunday. Sometimes you have to work on Saturday morning, but then it is off. But here you are always working, many shifts, many things to do, everyone is busy, everybody has different working shifts, there are not public

place to go, to meet people. While in Italy, I remember, every town has got its own square where people went, gathering … Not here. Here we feel lonely. (Uddin, London)

Housing

For many Italian-Bangladeshis, moving to London also resulted in a significant deterioration in their housing situation. The neighbourhoods in which the 'historical' Bangladeshi community in London is concentrated, and where the Italian-Bangladeshis have settled too, are located in some of the most deprived boroughs of the city – Tower Hamlets, Newham and Redbridge (Peach 2006). In Italy, too, they had lived in working-class areas, but mostly in small towns in apartments which were fairly large and spacious, having been built during the 1950s and 1960s – a time which corresponded both to the postwar economic boom and also to the 'baby boom' when families were larger (Della Puppa 2015). In London, participants and their families live in traditional working-class neighbourhoods, but often in small apartments in poor condition, for which they manage to pay the rent only thanks to government subsidies, as noted above. Another interviewee reinforces the contrast:

In Italy, we had a very good and big home. We had a lot of square metres, big dining room, big bedrooms. Here, on the ground floor, we have a kitchen and toilet, on the first floor two small bedrooms and a bathroom and that's it. (Rahman, London)

Narrowing of social life

The combination of participants' residential situation and working conditions in London leads to a decrease in opportunities for socialising. In fact, social life is narrowed at multiple levels. Unsocial hours of work and scattered work locations disrupt family life. Opportunities for socialisation within the ethnic community are also limited, due to the nature of the work done. Finally, there is an almost total lack of relations with the 'native' population. This contrasts with the situation back in Italy, where participants recall the daily interactions between Bangladeshi immigrants and Italian work colleagues, with the parents of their children's classmates, as well as contacts with neighbours during free time and at special festivals and celebrations, facilitated by the widespread presence of squares and parks in their small towns of residence (Della Puppa 2015). Now, Bangladeshi onward migrants say that, in the few years since they arrived in London, they have not built any significant relationships with the local population, especially those 'white British' who are not members of 'ethnic communities'.

Part of the difference in the nature of social life is because of the vast contrast in scale between North Italian small industrial towns with their intimate mixing of activities and social groups, and the vast metropolis of London with its more stratified and segregated social geography. The long quote below reveals a sensitive appreciation and awareness of these differences.

It is difficult to have English friends here. For several reasons. In Italy I had many Italian friends because friendship began in 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 isn't any English. 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 … English people 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 go underground and return home in their neighbourhoods, which are different from ours, and we never meet them. Then, there are the lower-class British workers, manual labourers for example, who spend their time between home and the pub, but we don't go to the pub and so we don't meet them […] For the new generation of Italian-Bangladeshi, our children, who will grow and study here, it will be different; maybe they will know professionals, officials, at the university, or the workplace, as colleagues. But we, as the first generation of Italian-Bangladeshi in London, we low-level, we do not have the opportunity of these meetings. We hang out only between us. (Rintu, London)

The narrowing of the social circles of the Italian-Bangladeshis in London is also a product of the specific areas they have settled in. These inner-East-End neighbourhoods are characterised by 'super-diversity' (Vertovec 2007), with high rates of 'old' and 'new' immigration from many parts of the world, and only a minority of 'white British' (Peach 2006). It is moreover interesting to observe how the participants, aware of the complex history of migration into the East End of London, nevertheless internalise the post-colonial distinction between citizenship and ethno-racial origin and distinguish between 'white British' and the British citizens with a different ethnic origin:

I had a lot of Italian friends. But here I don't know any English people. Also because, look around here: there are no English, I mean white English. All the people come from other countries or, at least, they are British, but from other origin. So I don't have the opportunity to meet white English people, maybe just in some public offices. (Musharat, London)

Conclusion

This paper has made a contribution to the under-researched theme of onward migration within the ever-more complex global map of international migration. Like Bhachu's (1985) pioneering study and other, more recent studies of such hybrid and twice-migrated Asian groups (e.g. Herbert 2012; Mattausch 1998), our research further contributes to building an awareness of diversity among minorities and not assuming a homogeneous South Asian migrant presence in Britain.

In terms of empirical evidence to answer the three main research questions set out in the introduction, the general picture distilled from the interviews with 40 Italian-Bangladeshi (would-be) onward migrants is clear. Common to virtually all interview scripts were the aspiration to build a better future, especially for the next generation, and the desire to become part of a much larger Bangladeshi community, set within the more receptive multicultural and religion-tolerant society of London and the UK. This first key finding resonates with most of the other limited number of intra-European studies of onward migration, especially those of Danish and Dutch Somalis (Bang Nielsen 2004; van Liempt 2011) and Nigerians migrating from Spain and Germany to the UK (Ahrens 2013). The priority given to English-language education at the secondary and tertiary levels stands out as a consistent narrative theme amongst the Italian-Bangladeshis, but it can also imply a sacrifice for the first-generation onward-migrants, who have to take a hit in terms of their job status and income security.

A second key finding focuses on the role of citizenship. Getting the Italian passport after 10 or more years of continuous residence, Italian-Bangladeshis have a kind of

'citizenship to go' (Della Puppa 2016) or 'motility' (the potential for mobility; Kaufmann, Bergman, and Joye 2004) which allows them to leave the country and explore new horizons. Here again we see parallels with Somalian and Iranian refugees onward-migrating within Europe, but there is less similarity with the Nigerian and Senegalese cases (Ahrens 2013; Toma and Castagnone 2015) where onward-migrants were often moving to escape vulnerability and (semi-)irregularity to places where they hoped to achieve a better legal and socio-economic status.

If the UK, and London especially, seems to be the main target for intra-EU onward migration (see Lafleur and Stanek 2017), based on a buoyant economy, multicultural society and already-existing ethnic communities, this constellation of pull factors also has its darker components. This was our third highlight-finding. London's burgeoning economy and employment market exemplifies the 'Sassen thesis' of an increasingly polarised income distribution and division of labour characteristic of the 'global city' (Sassen 1988, 1991). This trend towards inequality emerged particularly strongly in London after the turn of the millennium and was closely associated with labour-market deregulation and large inflows of labour migrants from both within and beyond Europe. May et al. (2007) wrote persuasively of a 'new migrant division of labour' in London, and Italian-Bangladeshis were more or less forced to fit into this structural straightjacket as unskilled migrants irrespective of the education and skills they brought with them. They are part of a new reserve army of migrant workers condemned to a precarious economic existence as casual, just-in-time labour with little or no social protection or pension entitlement. Whilst some may become small-scale entrepreneurs (Clarke 2015 mentions Italian-style café owners), they are a tiny minority; in contrast to the successful business and professional achievements of the earlier Asian onward-migrants who arrived from East Africa around 50 years ago (Bhachu 1985, 33–35).

What do our research findings imply for the theorisation of migration? We suggest two sets of considerations. The first is that onward migration questions the conventional construction of migration as a process to be viewed through a bifocal lens of national origin and destination. The reality is that migratory journeys are multiple, iterative and fragmented, involving steps and stages. Return migration turns origins into destinations, and onward migration turns destinations into new origins, subverting the 'origin–destination' optic that frames much thinking about migration and its consequences. Onward migration also lends support to Wimmer and Glick Schiller's (2003) critique of 'methodological nationalism', multiplying the national container-spaces which govern the institutionalisation of migration and rescaling transnational dynamics into their transregional expression in Sylhet, North-East Italy and the East End of London. Our study also speaks to the plea by King and Skeldon (2010) for a more subtle blending of the binary concepts of international versus internal migration. Bangladeshis moving to Italy migrate inter-continentally; those onward-migrating to London migrate both internationally and internally, within the free-movement territory of the EU.

The second set of theoretical considerations concerns the drivers of onward migration: to what extent are they similar to those that triggered the original departure from the homeland? One of the enduring 'truths' of migration is that (refugees excepted) most migrants move for economic reasons – to access a better material life for themselves and their families. This applies to onward migrants, too, but the mechanisms and aspirations may vary at the different steps along the way, consonant with the 'migratory career'

framework proposed by Martiniello and Rea (2014). Whilst some participants initially had only Italy in their sights, but then decided to onward-migrate to London as a reaction to their frustrations with life in crisis-era Italy, others had always aspired to eventually settle in the UK, driven by their imagination of a better life in the old colonial metropole. Having already moved once, they deployed their 'migratory knowledge' (Ramos 2017) or 'migration capital' (Kaufmann, Bergman, and Joye 2004) alongside the trump card of Italian citizenship (Della Puppa 2016) to enhance their – and especially their children's – future well-being and life-chances. However, as we saw, the 'rational choice' of economic motivations for onward migration can involve compromises – in this case mainly expressed as an inter-generational trade-off between their children's better education and career opportunities and, on the down-side, the first generation's diminished quality of work, lower real wages and cramped housing.

A brief epilogue. In her journalistic report, Clarke (2015) quotes a British-Bangladeshi community activist: 'These people are truly European. It is much easier for them to integrate'. Our interview evidence questions this statement, and the statement itself prefigures the next stage of their lives – in post-Brexit Britain. How will their Italian passports and their Bangladeshi heritage fare in whatever scenario emerges from the UK's tortuous struggle to negotiate its schismatic relationship with the EU, as well as the country's internal debate on the status of already-resident EU citizens? This is the next stage of our research.

Disclosure statement

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