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Migrants' Population, Residential Segregation, and Metropolitan Spaces - Insights from the Italian Experience over the Last 20 Years

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Abstract

Southern European studies of migrants' spatial distribution within metropolitan cities (MCs) are increasingly relevant to understanding residential segregation and marginalisation, particularly of foreign nationals. This paper leverages original and partially unpublished data to examine overall and foreign national specific segregation over two decades in Rome MC and Milan MC, the two largest Italian MCs. We introduce a 5-class concentric ring typology to describe and uncover geographical patterns within the MCs and focus on the spatial and temporal distribution of four selected foreign nationalities: Romanian, Bangladeshi, Chinese, and Filipino. Results reveal heterogeneity in overall and foreign national specific distributions over time both within and between Rome MC and Milan MC. Comparing across groups and MCs we identify similarities but also unique patterns. These results shed light on the peculiarity of the urban demographic Italian landscape and raise questions regarding recent theories about residential segregation in the urban contexts of Southern Europe.

Keywords: *Foreign population; immigration; residential segregation; metropolitan space; Italy*

Introduction

There is extensive literature on ethnic residential segregation due to its interrelations with socio-economic stratification and its consequences for social cohesion. Research on ethnic segregation in Europe is mostly devoted to Northern European countries (Kauppinen and van Ham, 2019; Malmberg et al., 2018; Rogne et al., 2020; Andersson et al., 2018) whereas research on Southern European countries is still sparse and fragmented, mostly due to data shortcomings (Benassi et al., 2019, 2020b; Galeano and Bayona-i-Carrasco, 2018; Mazza et al., 2018; Panori et al., 2019). The changing immigration landscape of Southern European countries, specifically the size and heterogeneity of the foreign national population, has generated interest in developing new theories to explain the divergent patterns of spatial displacement and segregation of migrants in urban contexts in comparison to those found in Northern European countries (Arbaci, 2019).

A distinctive trait of migrants' territorial patterns in Southern European countries, coupled with relatively low levels of segregation, is the high peripheralisation (Malheiros, 2002). The

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'urban diaspora' metaphor has been evoked to express processes of centrifugal expulsion from the city centres to metropolitan rings, reflecting urban marginality rather than upward social and housing mobility (Arbaci, 2019). These processes are principally associated with macro-structural factors representing peculiarities of the South European countries: for example, the familistic welfare regime; the policies adopted to rehabilitate the urban cores; and the housing market, dominated by owner-occupation rather than rental housing. The latter fosters low residential mobility and limits the process of substitution in the more working-class areas found in the peripheral belts surrounding large cities (Arbaci, 2008; Malheiros, 2002; Maloutas, 2004). However, as described by the 'contextual structural model' of White (1999), other forces are at play simultaneously: the socio-economic stratification of the population (see Tammaru et al. 2016, for an overview of the European capital cities); the characteristics of the foreign population, such as the migratory chains, the strength of the in-group social networks, and the ethnic specialisation in the labour market; and, individual characteristics, such as years since migration, family composition and, more generally, stage of the life course. Indeed, accompanying the increased size of the foreign population comes increased complexity: specifically, an increase in the heterogeneity of countries of origin and variability over time in gender and age/generation. Vertovec (2007) has synthesised this demographic complexity at the debut of the 'international migration turnaround' (King et al., 1997), captured in the concept of 'super-diversity'.

Based on partly unpublished data from population registers, this paper examines the residential segregation of migrants in two Italian Metropolitan Cities (MC): Rome and Milan. Our study presents a comprehensive picture of all foreigners' segregation and our specific foreign national groups (Romanians, Bangladeshis, Chinese, and Filipinos) in these two MCs between 2001 and 2020. Our main questions focus on change over time in the two MCs: (1) What similarities and differences exist in terms of overall ethnic residential segregation? (2) What similarities and differences are observed among the selected foreign national groups? Thus, this study examines whether the Italian case aligns with the 'urban diaspora' theory (Arbaci, 2019).

Study Areas, Data and Methods

Study Areas and Data

Rome and Milan are the two largest Italian Metropolitan Cities (MC) and are similar in the number of residents (Rome 4,288 million and Milan 4,162 million, as of 1 January 2020). The Milan MC has a much higher population density, having an area equal to about one third of the Rome MC (1981 km² vs. 5363 km²). Historically, the two MCs have always been attractive to internal migrants, and starting around the 1980's they also emerged as an important destination for international migrants (Benassi et al., 2019; Crisci, 2010; Casacchia and Crisci, 2006; Strozza et al., 2016). In 2020, there were 573,000 foreign residents in the Milan MC (13.8% of the total population) and in the Rome MC, 543,000 (12.7% of the total population).

We use data on resident population by citizenship at four moments in time: in 2001 (census) and in 2009, 2015, and 2020 (population register on 1st January).⁵ We are aware that using the country of citizenship may entail some distortion due to the exclusion of those migrants who

⁵ Population data of the municipality of Rome from 2011 census was not used, because it underestimates residents by 150,000–200,000 units.



have gained Italian citizenship before or during the period of observation. However, the available data do not include the information about the country of birth, necessary to isolate those immigrants who have gained the Italian citizenship, for the period and the territories considered. Moreover, based on the theory of spatial assimilation intertwined with socio-economic integration (Gordon, 1964; Massey and Denton, 1985), prolonged residence and the consequent improvement of economic performances reduce immigrants' concentration. Therefore, immigrants who have gained Italian citizenship are more likely to have similar residential patterns to native Italians. Another related issue refers to mixed couples. Their effect on the level of residential segregation of minority groups has been studied by several international contributions (Ellis et al., 2007; Iceland and Nelson, 2010), while in Italy works on this issue are rare, being the phenomenon of mixed couples very limited in the past (the 2011 Italian census counted, at national level, a proportion of 2.4% of mixed couples). However, the results of a recent study by Benassi and Naccarato (2020) indicate that the increase in mixed couples is associated with the weakening of residential segregation. Previously unpublished data on the inner-city areas of the MCs come from the 2001 census and population registers of the two cities, and data on the outer-city areas (at the municipality level) come from ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics).

The administrative geographies of Rome and Milan coincide with their provinces⁶ which, in the Italian context, are intermediate levels between municipalities and regions. Therefore we developed a spatial typology that partitioned the MCs into five concentric sub-areas (Figure 1); thereby avoiding the traditional dichotomy of urban core versus hinterland, that could hide substantial variation in settlement patterns for all immigrants and for specific foreign national groups within the urban areas.

In the case of Rome, the sub-areas are determined on the basis of the aggregation of 275 elementary units: the 155 urban zones of the municipality of Rome (the *zone urbanistiche*) and another 120 municipalities of the Rome MC. The urban core is split into the city centre and the urban periphery. There are three "belts" determined by contiguity with the city of Rome: the First belt, an aggregation of the largely rural "zone urbanistiche" of the municipality of Rome located outside the Great ring road (*Grande Raccordo Anulare* or GRA) that surrounds the urban core; the Second belt; and, finally there is the Outer belt. The five sub-areas of the Milan MC are also an aggregation of 275 elementary units: the 88 NIL (*Nuclei di Identità Locale* i.e., local identity nuclei), functional areas of the municipality of Milan; and another 187 municipalities of the MC. The urban core of Milan is split into the city centre and the urban periphery, and the hinterland is divided into three areas: the First belt, formed by the municipalities contiguous to the city of Milan border; the Second belt, including the municipalities contiguous to the First belt; and, finally, the Outer belt.⁷

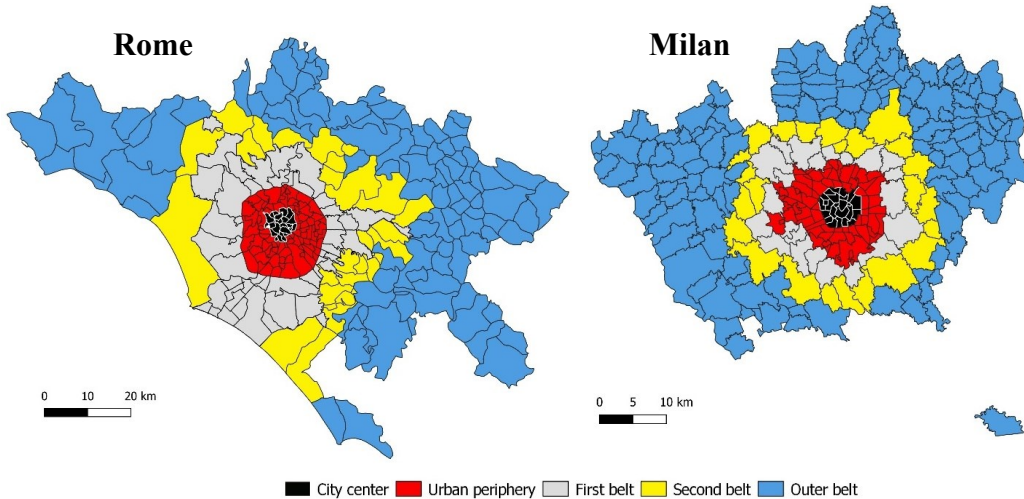
In this study, we focus on the settlement pattern of four foreign nationalities: Romanians, Bangladeshi, Chinese, and Filipinos. The four groups were selected to reflect their relative size within the Italian MC context (i.e., overall size and local representativeness), variation in

⁶ In the case of the Milan MC, the two provinces of Milan and Monza-Brianza were combined to preserve comparability over time. In fact, until 2004, Monza-Brianza province was part of the Milan province.

⁷ While in the case of the Metropolitan City of Milan belt 1 includes the first ring of municipalities almost seamlessly linked to the urban core of Milan, in the Metropolitan City of Rome belt 1 is instead a part of the municipality of Rome, with a very low residential density, largely occupied by the Roman countryside (the *Agro romano*).

migratory history of each group (traditional flows versus more recent arrivals), and a desire to maintain sufficiently comparable numbers. We briefly profile each nationality group in turn.

Figure 1. The division of the Metropolitan Cities (MC) of Rome and Milan into sub-urban areas



The Romanians represent the largest foreign resident community in Italy (1,1 million residents in 2020) and in the Rome MC (168,000 residents), and the second largest in the Milan MC (51,000 residents). They are a very mobile community given their status as EU citizens (since 1 January 2007) that tends to migrate as a family (Barbiano di Belgiojoso and Terzera, 2018; Castro-Martín and Cortina, 2015; Vlase, 2013), and they have a relatively strong cultural affinity to Italians based on language and religion (Rimoldi and Terzera, 2017). The Bangladeshi community is rapidly growing in Italy, and it is the third largest group in the Rome MC (33,000 residents in 2020) and the eighth in the Milan MC (10,000 residents). The Bangladeshi are non-Catholic and their cultural heritage is very different from the Italians. Bangladeshi migration, at least in the early stages, was driven by male labour migration (Knights and King, 1988; Mannan, 2017), often by those in the service sector, especially commerce, including itinerant trade and catering. The Chinese community is the fourth largest foreign community in both the Rome MC (21,000 residents in 2020) and Milan MC (40,000 residents). The Chinese in Italy are representative of family-type migration, and they reveal a clustered but dispersed settlement pattern (Barbiano di Belgiojoso and Terzera, 2018; Carchedi and Ferri, 1988; Hatziprokopiou and Montagna, 2012). The latter pattern usually follows their businesses, traditionally devoted to trade and services, specifically restaurants and the textile industry (Ceccagno, 2003; Ganzaroli and de Noni, 2017). According to Pisati et al. (2022), in Milan, “*the percentage of Chinese residents in the neighbourhood is by far the most important predictor of spatial clustering for Chinese businesses*”. The Filipinos are a unique community. They have settled in Italy since the early 1980s, mainly employed in domestic and care services (Ambrosini, 2001, 2013; Barsotti and Lecchini, 1995). In the Rome MC, Filipinos were the second largest community, with more than 40,000 residents in 2020, and in Milan, MC were third largest, with 46,000 residents.



Methods: segregation measures

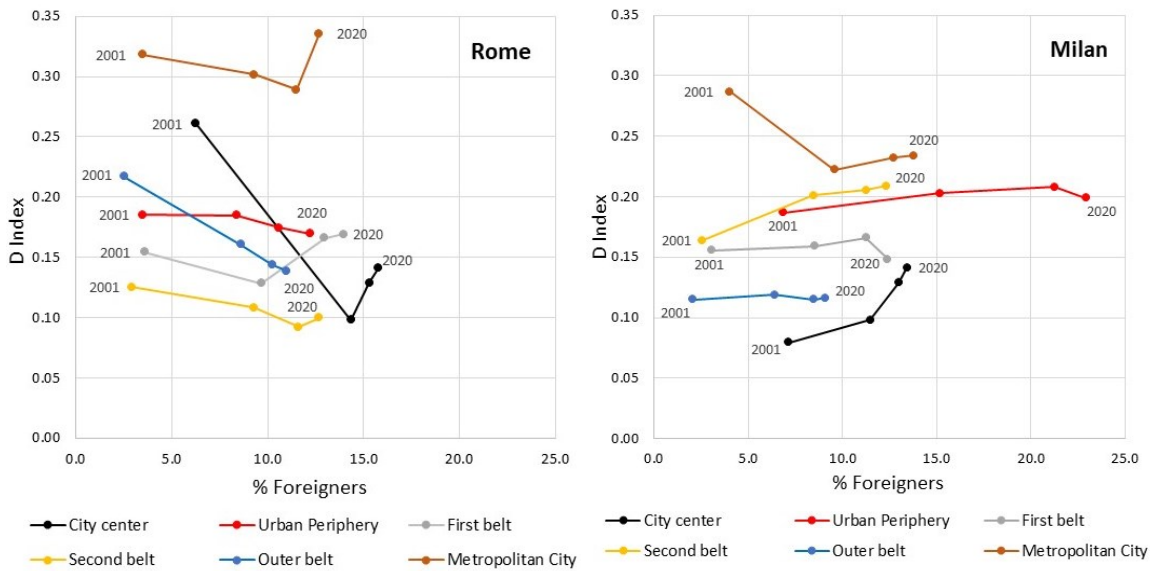
In order to detect levels and patterns of residential segregation, we used the Index of Dissimilarity (D) (Duncan and Duncan, 1955). D refers to the unevenness dimension of residential segregation (Massey and Denton, 1988) which is widely recognised as one of the most important dimensions of segregation. D says something about the level of the unevenness of spatial distributions and is relevant when seeking to obtain answers to questions such as: Is there a tendency, over time, for two population categories or groups to become more or less spatially divided? Is there a tendency, over time, for a population category to reinforce its spatial distribution? In the literature on segregation, D is widely used (Benassi et al., 2020a; Friedman, 2008; Iceland et al., 2013, 2014; Logan and Parman, 2017; Malmberg et al., 2018), especially in its classic form, comparing two population groups (i.e., two groups dissimilarity index). As explained by Mazza: “*although its sensitivity to random allocation implies an upward bias, especially when dealing with smaller spatial units, smaller minority proportions, and lower segregation levels (Mazza and Punzo, 2015), the dissimilarity index is still the most common measure of segregation*” (Mazza, 2020: 213)”. Values for D can vary between 0 to 1, where 0 means the absence of dissimilarity (i.e., no segregation) and 1 means perfect dissimilarity (i.e., maximum segregation). As suggested by many authors (see, for example, Brown and Chung, 2006), it is useful to mix global (e.g., D) and local measures in the study of residential segregation. One such local measure is the Location Quotient (LQ) (Isard, 1960). An LQ can vary from 0 to ∞ , and it is particularly useful when applied to the study of a metropolitan area where it facilitates the identification of spatial units in which a population group is under-represented ($LQ < 1$) or, conversely, over-represented ($LQ > 1$) (Benassi et al., 2021). We compute LQ for the four foreign national groups in relation to Italians, using the total metropolitan city population as a reference.

Results

In this section, we present information on the 20 years’ evolution of the share of foreigners (overall) and the dissimilarity index (D) across the five-class spatial typology of sub-areas for both the Rome MC and the Milan MC in order to identify possible patterns of segregation in terms of different urban gradients inside the metropolitan areas. The adopted partition of the territories in five sub-areas represents the subsequent phases of the urban development (urbanisation and suburbanisation) that occurred in the two metropolitan contexts over the last decades. Then we report and interpret the D values for the four selected foreign national groups, and finally, the LQs. The Rome and Milan MCs show different shares of foreigners at the sub-area level (Figure 2). The prevalence of foreigners is more homogeneous in the sub-areas of the Rome MC than in the Milan MC. For example, the per cent of foreigners ranges between 11% in the outer belt and 15.8% in the city centre of the Rome MC, and between 9.1% of the outer belt and 22.9% of the urban periphery of the Milan MC. During the first decade of the 2000s, the foreign population rapidly increased both in absolute and relative levels and in both MCs. Still, after the economic crisis of 2008, this growth began to slow down. At the same time, and after several decades of residential diffusion, some signs of re-urbanisation have emerged in the urban cores (i.e., city centre and urban periphery) of both the Rome and Milan MCs due to an increase in migration from other Italian provinces and to a decrease of moves towards the metropolitan rings (Crisci and Santacroce, 2019; Crisci, 2021). D has decreased in almost all spatial typology groups in the Rome MC, while in the Milan MC D has increased in the urban core areas and also in the second belt (Belt 2) but

remained somewhat stationary in the other belt. If focusing attention on the post-economic crisis phase in Italy (i.e., 2009-2020), then in both the Rome MC and Milan MC we observe that *D* grows in the city center, while the urban periphery shows a slight decline.

Figure 2. Share of foreigners on total population and *D* values (foreigners vs Italians) in years 2001-2009-2015-2020. Sub-areas of the Metropolitan Cities of Rome and Milan

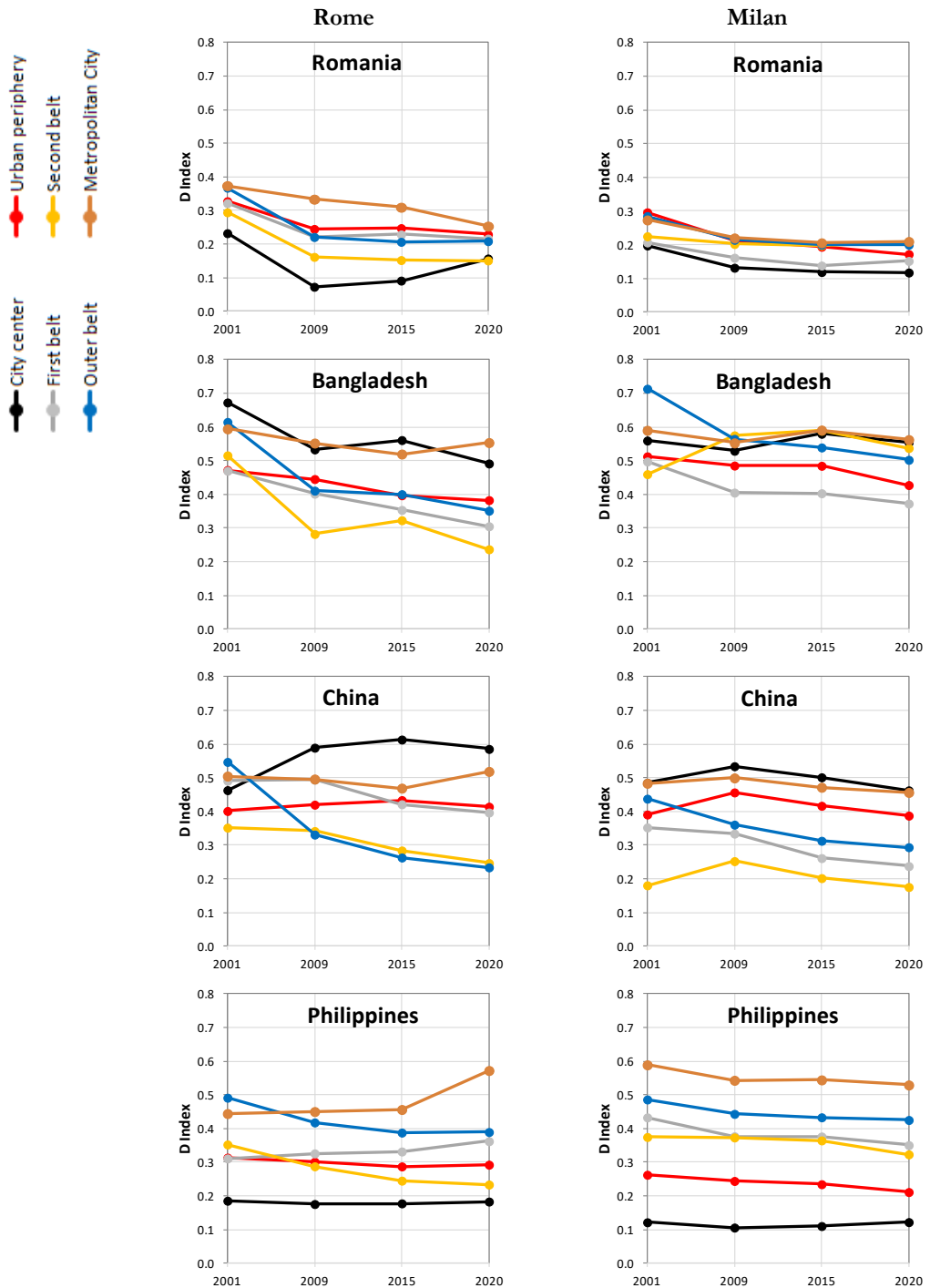


These general tendencies are possibly the result of differences in the trajectories of residential segregation of different foreign national groups. Indeed, each foreign national group that we examined reveals its own peculiarities concerning their demographic structures and profiles, migration strategies, and settlement models. These differences by foreign national groups become relevant in MCs where the number of groups is high compared to other contexts (Benassi et al., 2019). Figure 3 reports *D* for the four selected foreign national groups for both the Rome MC and Milan MC. Earlier, we noted these four foreign national groups represent very different cultures and ways of life and allude to the role these factors play in both the process of integration (De Santis et al., 2021) and spatial assimilation. We discuss each foreign national group in turn.

During the observation period, the value of *D* for Romanians shows different trends in the two MCs. In the case of the Rome MC there is a remarkable increase after 2009 in the city center while there is modest growth in *D* in the first belt of Milan MC after 2015. During the two decades, the value of *D* for the Bangladeshi decreases in all the sub-areas of the Rome MC while in the Milan MC the decline begins later, and at slower pace.



Figure 3. D values in years 2001-2009-2015 and 2020. Selected foreign communities. (ref group: Italians). Sub-areas of the Metropolitan Cities of Rome and Milan.



In the Rome MC, dissimilarity for the Chinese reveals three different levels: an almost stable and high dissimilarity in the city centre, a medium and slowly decreasing (since 2015) level in the urban periphery as well as in the first belt, and finally, a decreasing and low level in the second belt and in the outer ring. In the Milan MC, the dissimilarity levels in the outer belt is higher than in the first and second belt, denoting a trend towards the emergence of noticeable clusters of Chinese outside the urban zones. Concerning the Filipino population, in the Rome MC, *D* modestly declines or appears stable in four of the five sub-areas, the exception being the increase in the first belt. In the case of the Milan MC, there was more stability in *D* over time across all area, with *D* highest in the city centre and very low in the outer belt.

The Location Quotients (LQ) for the four selected nationalities at the beginning (2001) and end (2020) of the study period are shown in Figure 4. During the observation period, the Romanians' residential pattern appears not to have changed in either MCs, as far as the dichotomy between the centre and periphery is concerned; that is, as of 1 January 2020 the Romanians were largely concentrated outside the city centre areas. In Milan, the Romanians settled in the north-eastern and southern parts of the MC, spreading to neighbouring municipalities by 2020 and as their population increased over time. In contrast, the Bangladeshi community's spatial footprint has been gradually shrinking within the city core of the Rome MC. In Milan MC, Bangladeshis are most recently concentrating in a few clusters within the urban periphery as well as in the outer belt. As far as the Chinese group is concerned, they had traditionally settled in the city centre but residential clusters (i.e., $LQ > 1.2$) are found in the urban periphery as well as the outer belts for both of the MCs. Lastly, the Filipinos reveal a spatial diffusion over time in both MCs. In the Rome MC, the diffusion from the city centre to contiguous sub-areas appears to have been rapid while in the Milan MC, a similar relocation process away from the city centre is evident, though currently mostly confined to the urban core (that is city centre and urban periphery).

The mapping of the LQs reveals different settlement patterns and trajectories across the four groups. Romanians are overrepresented outside of the urban center of the Rome MC, especially in the first and second belt, and underrepresented in the urban center. Moreover, this difference appears to intensify and become more distinct. Although there are variations in the local distributions across the spatial typology, the other three groups studied—Bangladeshi, Chinese, and Filipinos—present an opposite case, with an overrepresentation in the city center of the MCs and underrepresentation in the outer belts. This finding is consistent with prior studies of both Rome and Milan (Benassi et al., 2018, 2019; Brandi and Todisco, 2006; Casacchia et al., 2021; Mudu, 2013).



Figure 4. LQs for selected groups (ref. group: Italians), in the five belts of Rome and Milan, 2001 and 2020

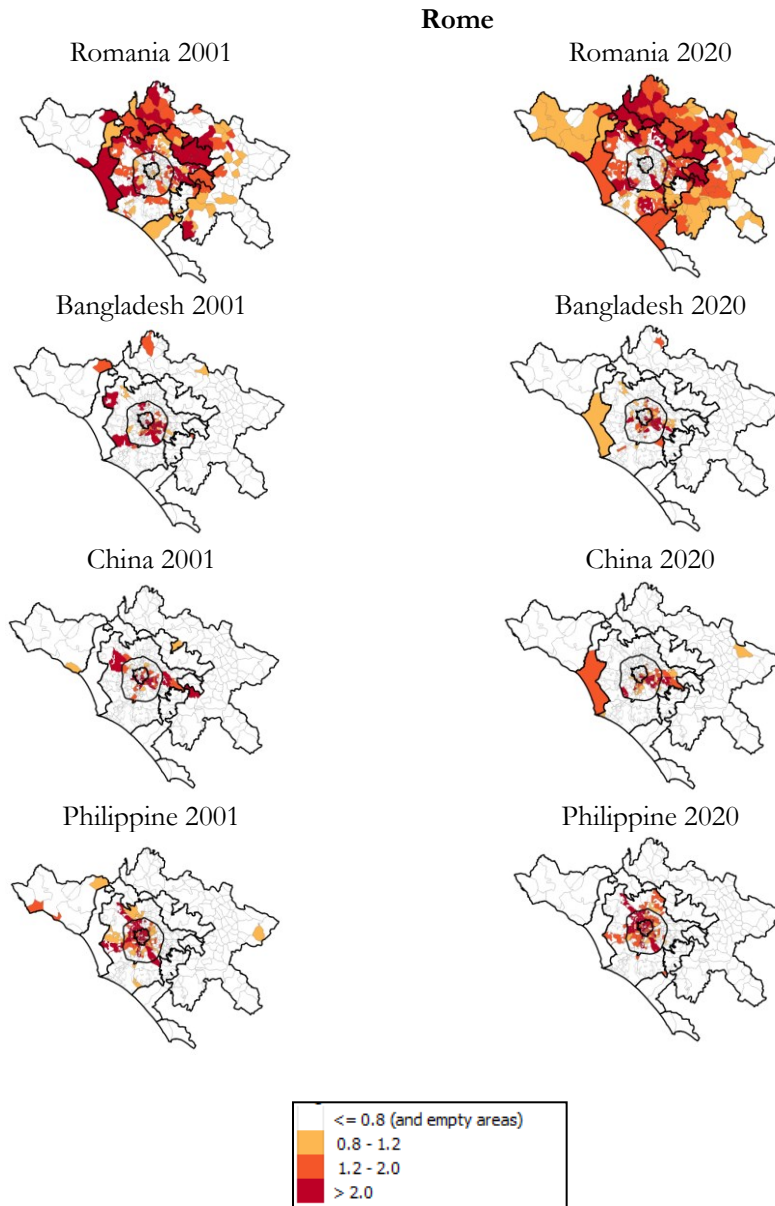
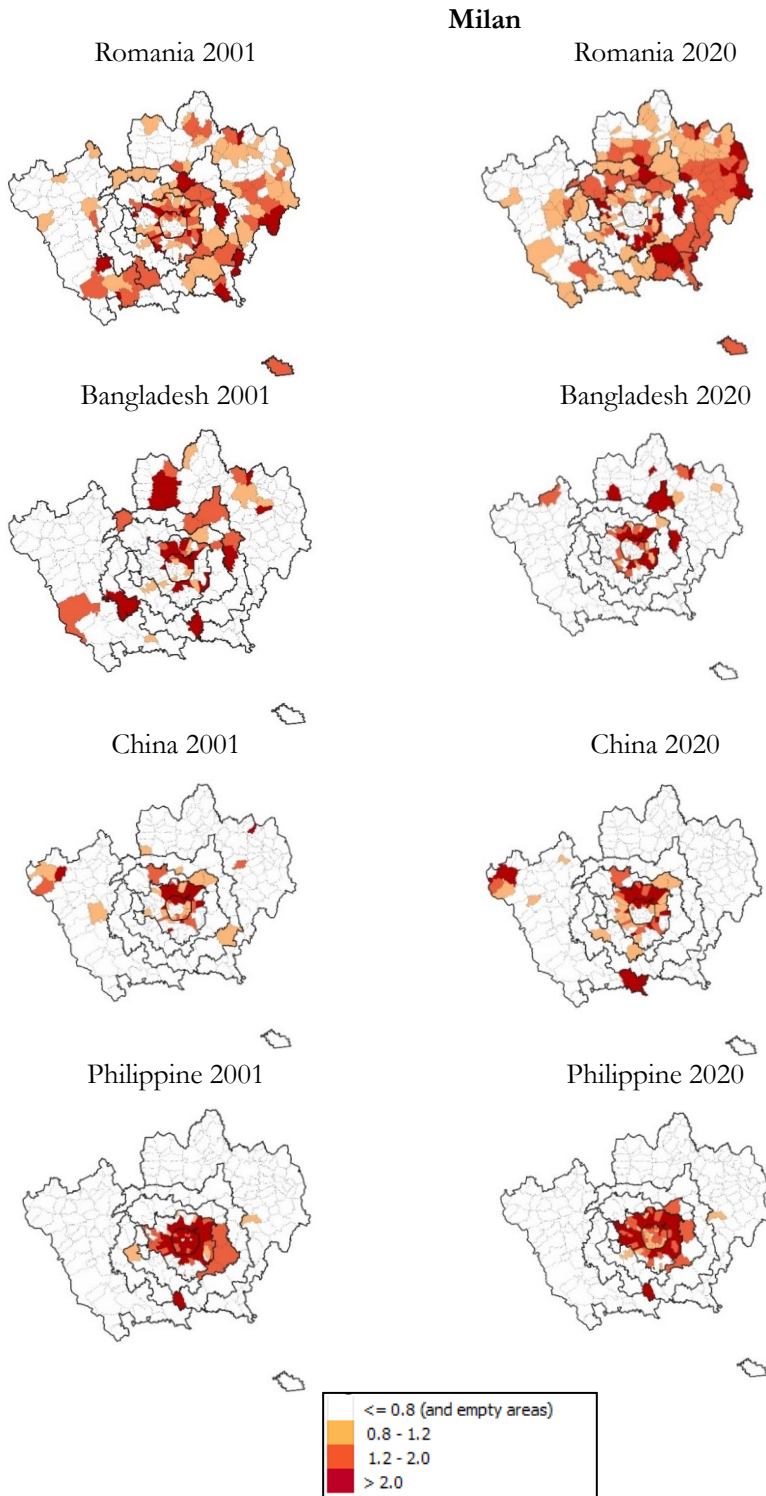


Figure 4. Continued



Discussion and Conclusions

Over the last two decades, the foreign population in Italy has greatly increased, especially in metropolitan cities (MC), and its distribution in the urban landscape compared to the native population varies by context. By adopting a long-period perspective (2001-2020) and a spatial typology based on the use of concentric rings, this paper has analysed trends in ethnic residential segregation in the two largest Italian MCs, Rome and Milan. Our goal was to (1) highlight similarities and differences between the two contexts with respect to intensity and characteristics of segregation across a 5-class spatial typology, and (2) detect similarities and differences in settlement patterns of selected foreign migrant groups. As measured by the dissimilarity index (D), the overall segregation level mostly declined in the Rome MC in contrast with the modest increase observed in the Milan MC. Focusing on the period following the 2008 Great Recession, there is evidence of a reversal in the segregation trends, especially visible in specific sub-area levels with the MCs. For example, we observe an increase in D for foreigners in the city centre of the Rome MC and in the first and second belts. In the Milan MC, we find a similar change in segregation trajectories in the city centre and in the second belt.

We argue that any spatial comparison between the Rome MC and Milan MC needs to take into account relevant territorial differences in the urban structure, indeed, a large part of the Rome MC is rural with a low population density while, conversely, the whole of the Milan MC is a densely inhabited and industrialised area, almost without significant variation. The characteristics of the territory within the MCs intertwine with the population size, growth rate, and migration histories of each foreign national group and thus, the patterns of segregation will differ by group. For example, for three of the selected groups— Bangladeshi, Chinese, and Filipinos—we found relatively high levels of segregation with hints of a decline over time but an uneven decline across the MCs.

There are spatial typology classes with over representations of specific foreign national groups, often concentrated in central city or urban periphery, areas where employment and strong ethnic networks can be more easily found. Particularly in Milan (Pisati et al., 2020), a model characterised by *heterolocalism* (Zelinsky and Lee, 1998), carrying out businesses in the centre city and residing in the suburbs, does not appear to be present. The fourth foreign national group we studied, the Romanians by contrast have very low levels of segregation, levels that have declined since 2001. The territorial pattern of Romanians may not be only the result of the assimilation process; in fact, Romanian migrants are more likely to settle directly in the hinterland, rather than move out from the urban core, like the Italians. In considering the peri-urban location of Romanians, several factors seem particularly relevant and differentiate them from the three non-European nationality groups. These factors include the labour market, implying a more flexible residential localisation among the core and rings, and the widespread ownership of a car, essential for commuting to the urban core and useful for periodic mobility to the country of origin (Crisci, 2010). Mostly in the Rome MC - with a huge territory, low density, and low accessibility to public transportation in peripheral areas – owning a private vehicle can moderate the effects of spatial segregation and social exclusion.

On the whole, migrant distributions in both the Rome and Milan MCs do not follow the “belt effect” (Arbaci, 2019) detected in some large South European urban contexts such as Athens and Lisbon (Arapoglou, 2006). In the latter cases, the spatial peripheralisation of migrants is extreme, with evidence to suggest the jumping over the intermediate belts to relocate to the

outer belts. In many neighbourhoods of the urban periphery of the Milan MC, where the social housing buildings are largely diffused, the proportion of foreigners is very high (20-25%). More detailed data, by census tract, would be useful to analyse socio-economic variability within each urban typology and verify if and why the settlement of migrants, especially those from low and lower middle-income groups, has occurred in the old working-class neighbourhoods in both Rome and Milan. Due to the incomplete availability of data, the paper has the limitation of not considering among migrants those who have acquired Italian citizenship. Due to data availability, the paper has the limitation of not being able to identify migrants that acquired Italian citizenship. Future directions for this research should explore a focus on selected years and territories, to dig deeper into the question of whether there are differences in the residential patterns of migrants that have gained Italian citizenship and those who have not., Such research would be able to test the strength of the assimilation theory or, conversely, that of cultural heritage and identity by country of origin.

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