

London. South Kensington. Me and my friends are getting loudly off an uber, in a lonely street full of small white houses. There are other groups there. We are all looking for the same place. A house party. All we know is a postcode. This was roughly communicated previously at the pub. It could seem as if it was a very certain information, but actually it is the only one we all have. The rest is a complete mystery. No one really knows who organized the party, who's going to be there. There are only two other certainties: every one of us invited at least other two people and all the party will be formed by Italian speakers. If someone found itself there by accident and didn't know he was in London, he could easily think he has been teleported in Italy. No doubt about it.

If you are reading this, being from London and not being Italian, you would think this situation is weird, but it is not new or strange. First of all you have to know that something like this happens every weekend and that the party is not for students. Maybe it's a cultural thing to spend time all together, as if we were home, but these parties are always populated by 30 something professionals working in Canary Warf.

Since the 50s, Italians have been migrating to London in search of a new life and fortune. Right after the war, Italy was a destroyed country and many people decided to move in search of a place that had many more opportunities. Historically Italian immigrants, when moving to London, had just one destination: Clerkenwell. That was considered as the Italian area due to the presence of the Italian church of Saint Peter's. A small community started rising.

Watching the documentary "Influx" by Luca Vullo, a series of interviews to Italian immigrants in London analyses how it works to leave Italy, we can learn of many Italians that moved here to find a new life. In Italy we call this migration "fuga di cervelli", literally the escape of brains. Many qualified Italians prefer to leave the country because of the lack of opportunities. What is striking to learn from the documentary is that, once Italians move here, their entire way of approaching life changes. I can prove it on my skin as well. As Italians, we have an innate propension in not following rules, always bending them for our interests or feeling crushed by the system. Our system is so corrupted that, to obtain a good job, you always need to know someone that can help you. London has nothing of this kind. Italians leave to finally demonstrate what they value and to find a place where their skills are recognized. Many of those bankers I mentioned before wouldn't have ever made it in the Italian system. They would have needed to wait for the old bosses to retire in order see an opportunity, by the time this happened they would have been 40 and probably the replacement choice would have been directed on the wife's nephew.

We see this movement in the work sphere, but this even happens to a previous stage: university. There is a wide range of Italians that decided to come here to London to study what they love. If we have the economic opportunity to leave, we do it. Even if Italian universities are considered as the oldest and toughest in the world, we are actually aware that often they bring you to nothing. First of all, grades are not decided in a democratic way: there are many face to face exams and your name is always showing. If the professor hates you, you lost every chance to graduate with merits. And finally, even if you study books as big as "The Lord of the Rings", your skills can be reduced to be able to read a lot. No one actually really prepares you for a real-life job. No wonder 30 somethings studying in Italy still live with their parents. In London everything is different and honest. Exams are anonymous, no face to face exams in which the professor can judge you as a person and not on your skills, and all of this brings the absolute meritocracy all Italians are looking for.

Margherita, a junior architectural assistant, moved to London in 2014 to broaden her horizons. She stated "I like to change, just as breakfasts. If I always eat the same thing, I get bored". Milan had nothing left to offer her. She heard of the opportunities London offered from many of her high school classmates, so she applied for universities here. During our conversation, she told me she didn't even care to research the best schools she could apply to, she just wanted to leave the small Milan for better opportunities. "What do I like of London? Well, I love the freedom it gives me. Here I can be myself without prejudice. And I love my

independence. If I had stayed home my life would have been totally different, I wouldn't have grown." Margherita is from a small town just outside Milan, if she hadn't moved, her life would have been reduced to commuting to Milan and family life, she knew it and left.

As I mentioned before, we Italians are like a pack: we love to stay together, but Margherita isn't too sure of that. She had a very good experience during her time in London. In university and later at work, she often went around with people from many other European countries such as Spanish, Greek and also English people. "People are not like-minded due to their culture but for their personalities. People that have the same state of mind go on well together". This was her reply when I asked her about the fact that Italians always stick together. She believes that personalities are what make people a group, but isn't personality shaped from culture and on how you grow up?

Cultural aspects are important in creating a group, and Italians in London are doing it magnificently. At first, I thought that we hanged out all together for linguistic reasons, but that couldn't be true, considering we all live here and perfectly know English. We all grew up with the same modes of life, and it is difficult to abandon those habits. Not strange to believe, if we see how Italy is handling this Coronavirus emergency. Even if the government prohibited to go out, people are still on the streets doing underground aperitivi. Here the Italian community had to adapt to what the city offers and somehow the city had to adapt to what Italians wanted.

Clerkenwell lost its appeal for Italian immigrants, because Italian immigrants now have changed. If in the 50s people moved to find fortune, it is the definition of fortune that has changed. Italians aren't looking for a country that could offer "something" compared to the "nothing" there was after the war, now they are looking for the best chance. That is why the new borough for Italians is Kensington and Chelsea. Italians, that do come in London, aren't working class anymore, but they come from very wealthy families. They come to London for the chance of making their life even better than what it already is. The life style must not get lower and South Kensington is the right place for this to happen. Probably the English and the French already living here are still wondering why we chose this particular area.

In South Kensington specifically, there is a very normal English pub, that in the last years has been completely overtaken by the Italian population. The Anglesea Arms pub in Selwood Terrace is very anonymous and has nothing special. It doesn't serve anything Italian, it doesn't have any kind of food resembling an aperitivo, it even stinks sometimes, but still Italians love that place. We often compare it to those usual places we used to have in our small cities, where everyone meets up. In London, as well as at home, you kind of know all the faces but you don't really know the people. It is a way to be all together and somehow be at home. Riccardo, a Math PhD student at Imperial and founder of his own start-up, defined Anglesea as "home". "At Anglesea I can feel like I was in my favourite bar in Bologna, the only difference is how the wine tastes."

Yes, good food and good wine are essential for a good life, according to Italians. Remembering the first trips I did to London more than 10 years ago, me and my family struggled to find good food. There were many fake Italian restaurants that served sticky and squashy pasta, it was outrageous. And this is where London started to adapt to its Italian population. London is considered as the 4th Italian city by the number of inhabitants; no wonder Italian restaurants flourish here. Giorgio Locatelli, with his Locanda Locatelli, can be considered as a culinary excellence with his one Michelin Star. There are many more Italian restaurants serving delicious food, such as "La Mia Mamma" and "La Pescheria" but other than that, they are a landmark for the Italian community.

"La Mia Mamma" restaurant is a family led place on Kings Road. They opened just a year ago, and they managed to become THE restaurant to go to. Their format is very simple and it works perfectly. They opened in Chelsea, knowing of the presence of many Italians in the area, but what is amazing is that every two months they change their menu according to what region they have chosen for the period. What is

even better is that the menu is studied and created by the “mamas”. Each region has its own mamma, that creates plates coming directly from the heart of Italian regional traditions. Krisha, the manager of the restaurant, said: “for us Italians, home means mamma, and mamma means food. Our restaurant doesn’t aim to fancy food, but to something authentic, we wanted to create a place that could feel like home.” The food is not the only thing that makes you feel at home, the atmosphere is what makes it even better. Once you enter this small restaurant, you can feel the heat and the love of the personnel. The air is filled with joy and music. “Here you can act as if you were at home. We sing, we dance and we play the tambourine. We are on the front line when it comes to make “caciara” and the clients are happy to follow. And yes, English people here look very shocked. They probably think they are living an Italian cliché.” Krisha was delighted to hear that I considered her restaurant as a landmark for Italians and she is happy to have given Italians a place to call home. “You know, even if we all left our country, we still love it and still love food. Italy is like this: you hate it and you love it at the same time”.

Now, should we raise a bigger question? All of this reflection on Italianism, can bring to the point: why do Italians always stick together? This pattern can be probably applied to many other European groups living in London. Should we ask ourselves if this is a greater problem that yet no one has analysed? We can all say that the world’s governments are acting way too selfishly. Everyone is focusing on nationalism: In the U.S.A., Trump is focusing on national economy and believes Mexicans must be segregated in their country by an enormous wall - welcome Berlin Wall II-. France voted a prime minister that believes in total racism - or is it Arianism?-. Italy itself voted a party that leaves refugees to die in the middle of the sea and hopes for the independence of the north - are we Winterfell?-. And isn’t it striking that also a country as open as the United Kingdom voted for Brexit? Is this a symptom of the total defeat of the European Union? Was it only a utopia that was destined to fail from the beginning? And is my previous discourse, on Italians living in groups, a small symptom of a bigger feeling?

Regarding Brexit, it is easy to make a parallelism with the Roman Empire. I am convinced that history can be the best place where to find wisdom and teachings for the future. When the Roman Empire was at its best, that was the moment in which Rome forgot to care and exactly when the suburbs of the Empire found a way to escape the dominion. The United Kingdom already exited Europe many centuries ago. Being so far away from the central government, permitted the island to regain independence. What happened with Brexit, it’s not so far away from history, still today the UK has taken advantage of being at the outskirts of the Union. This is the first step for the end of the European Union, now clearly a fantasy, and probably of Globalization too.

Why Globalization as well? The answer can be read between the lines of this article. People move, but still they want to be home. Maybe it is not only a characteristic of the Italian population, it is everyone’s. Just as Italians stay all together, Spanish do, and British want to. What a better way to obtain it if not by reducing the possibilities to move? We, young Europeans, still think that Europe and Globalization work, or at least they need to work. We are so used to feel the openness of opportunities, that it is impossible to think that closeness can be right behind a door.

I am not a politician or an economist, I am a thinker and a creative and as such I have found a possible solution to maintain London as it is. This idea stroke me right after the Mayor of London’s declaration right after the final approval of Brexit: “Tomorrow you will wake up in a European city, where hundreds of languages are spoken and every race, religion, class, country and culture is represented. London will always be European, and London will always be open”. London will always be open. This is the solution I am pointing to. Can London become a bubble? Is it possible for London to really remain as it is? Free to enter and free to move in? Is it really possible for Europeans to continue to study in London with accessible fees? But especially, can London be free of visas to permit the continuing mix of people to go on?

Margherita, when I pointed out this option replied: “isn’t it like being from the Lega Party in Italy?” She is not wrong. If we only consider the bright side of this proposal it is favourable for Europeans and for London, what about the rest of the UK?

We will not have an answer to what is going to happen to London until we see what the future holds for us. Of one thing we can be sure of, as Italians, fortunately we are of value, and hopefully we will always find a place in London, that for many of us has become our home.

Even if Globalization and Europe are collapsing around us, and creating tribal groups is a symptom of it, Italians will never stop to be, honestly?, everywhere. We are the country that best adapts around the world and our friendliness and joy will always open us new opportunities.

We will still sing in London’s restaurants, still monopolize pubs with no apparent reason and still get Ubers to a stranger’s parties, as long as it is of an Italian, because we trust our pack.