The Spiral of Prejudice and
the Securitization of Migration:
The Complexity of Small Changes in
Italian Migration Networked Governance

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Abstract

The post-Cold War world has witnessed increased migratory movements. In many countries, prejudice has entailed negative developments in dealing with the phenomenon, spawning a series of insecurities and resulting in more irregularities that do not benefit either migrants or the established population. Italy is a crucial case study of how even the very definition of migration can be connected to discriminatory policies, such as the one based on the citizenship principle of *jus sanguinis*. A document analysis of how migration policies have evolved in the country and a process-tracing analysis of the role played by different actors in the governance of migration in Italy examine the complexity of small changes in the securitization of migration. The latter, due to its variety of components, can be referred to as a networked governance. Although it is true that the linkage between migration and insecurities in Italy did not suddenly happen in a single act, the idea that changes across governments have not mattered would be entirely misleading. Some of the policies enacted by different governments have actually entailed discriminatory practices, generating a spiralling of the securitization of migration and its related migration-crime nexus. The analysis illustrates that even small changes in migration policies attempting to remove prejudice from the equation can encompass crucial differences for the entire migration governance. Finally, it illustrates that a turning point in reducing insecurities would depend on the adoption of *jus culturae*, which can actually reduce the creation of irregular migration and insecurities.

1. Introduction

Following the end of the Cold War, the world has witnessed an increase in migratory movements. In many countries, prejudice has entailed negative developments in dealing with the phenomenon, spawning a series of insecurities and resulting in more irregularities that do not benefit either migrants or the established population. However, when it comes to analysing migration related phenomena, the dimension of security and insecurities has outclassed all others in recent decades, so much so that we have also seen the emergence of an entire new branch of studies: the securitization of migration. The latter serves the purpose of accounting for the shift in contemplation of the entire process, which has moved from the social, economic and political domains to mainly one of security, and the consequences of such a transformation. An inherent outcome of this outlook change is the increasing tendency to criminalize the act of human mobility across borders (Huysmans 2006; Huysmans and Squire 2010; Panebianco 2021) and to govern it in exceptional ways (Bello 2021; Salter 2008). A large number of analyses have illustrated that similar measures exist everywhere in the world, and not only in the

West, and have grown mainly since the end of the Cold War (Bello 2020; Bigo 2002; Huysmans 2006; Salter 2008).

While these conservative tendencies have increased, welcoming movements, solidarities and progressive politics have also flourished, as the literature has recently highlighted (Crepaz 2020; Della Porta 2018; Della Porta and Steinhilper 2021; Mitchell and Sparke 2018). Similar countermoves have been interpreted in terms of either desecuritization or countersecuritization (Balzacq 2010; Strizel and Chang 2015; Vuori 2010). The difference between these two approaches is especially useful in considering the effects they encompass: while desecuritization has the final aim of moving migration governance back into the social, economic or political domain to which it initially pertained, countersecuritization results in the spiralling of the phenomenon and the creation of more confrontational situations (Balzacq 2010; Bourbeau and Vuori 2015).

If the concept of countersecuritization certainly explains a key component that enables us to suitably understand how the securitization of migration escalates, it also considers that all accelerations need to start from a growing hostility between two parts. However, other theories (Maguire 2015) have explained that the securitization of migration is self-fulfilling and self-reinforcing and it does not always need an equally powerful opponent to speed up its dynamics (Bello 2020a). The securitization of migration has the power to self-accomplish its own initial prejudice: by declaring something as a threat -the *speech-act* that ontologically identifies the referent object "migration" a danger (Buzan and Waever 2009; Waever 1993)- and regulating it as such through policies (Panebianco 2020), it enables practices (Léonard and Kaunert 2020b) creating a climax of emergency that finally normalizes its treatment in exceptional ways (Salter 2008). The spiralling of the securitization of migration is not only due to the confrontation of two different groups with contrasting interests (Vuori 2010). What Bigo called the 'govern*mentality* of the unease' (Bigo 2002) is not only responding to the interests and mentalities of certain categories such as security professionals. All the actors called to govern or manage migration can enact a securitization of the field if their cognitions are prejudicials (Bello 2020a). If the actors who intervene to regulate human mobility are prejudicial towards migrants and migration, they will create a spiralling progression, which will further criminalize human mobility, propagate hostilities and socially construct it as a threat. As a consequence, prejudice truly matters on how migration is governed and becomes a crucial dynamic in the spiralling of securitization of migration and a crucial part of its way of configuring migration as a threat.

By considering the Italian securitization of migration as a spiralling progression, such an analysis also speaks to those studies that have considered that migration policies in Italy have not completely transformed along with the changing of governments (Strazzari and Grandi 2019; Zotti and Fassi 2020) but that the relation has been far more complex, mainly between 2002 and 2019. Although migration is a matter which is regulated through national policies, its development indeed depends on a variety of actors, external and internal to the country politics; thus it is more correct to speak of a migration networked governance rather than a migration policy, in line with how a *networked governance* has been previously defined (Bee and Bello 2009).

An analysis of Italian migration policies will look for elements pertaining to the spiralling effect of prejudice in the securitization of migration and will explain the outcomes

in the Italian networked governance of human mobility. The study aims to apply the theoretical framework of the spiral of prejudice (Bello 2017; Bello 2020a) and will show that the only way to disentangle the migration-crime nexus is to operate at its root causes, mainly by removing prejudicial cognitions intervening in any of the steps that constitute the regulation of international human mobility in Italy. The current work will consider the role of prejudice in the securitization of migration to prove the complexity of small changes and variations in Italian migration governance. Hence, the article first elucidates the link between discriminations and the very categorization of migration to subsequently understand, in the second section, the usefulness of such a framework in analysing the securitization of migration and the complexity of small changes in Italian migration networked governance. Such a study can illustrate how, in a migration networked governance, nuanced variations in policies (*top-down moves*) are intrinsically connected with important transformations in practices (*horizontal moves*) and narratives[1] (*bottom-up moves*). Paraphrasing this, the goal of this examination is to highlight the role of small changes in migration governance in the securitization of migration and its related migration-crime nexus through both horizontal and vertical countermoves. In particular, the migration-crime nexus is a socially constructed connection between criminality and human mobility that political actors establish through speech acts, policies or practices (Huysmans 2006). By simply coupling migration and crime, or migration and security in speeches or policies, and by treating migrants as criminals in practices, politically relevant actors are able to depict migrants as criminals in the eyes of the general population. The article shows how such a connection was established through a networked governance of migration in Italy from 2002 onwards. It concludes the discussion by identifying the most relevant divergences within all Italian migration policies, from the initial Turco-Napolitano Law and the following Consolidation Act (Testo Unico) of the Discipline of Immigration and the Regulations of the Condition of the Foreigner of 1998 to the current Law 18 December 2020, which consolidates Lamorgese's Decree.

2. Prejudice and the Categorization of Migration: *Jus Sanguinis*, *Jus Soli* and *Jus Culturae*[2]

A vast literature on prejudice has long existed in social and political science (Allport 1954; Pettigrew and Meertens 1995; Dovidio 2001) and in its breadth has helped to discern several ways through which the phenomenon impacts everyday political and social life. To make a broad excursus[3], it is usually understood as a set of learnt negative attitudes or dispositions that a person can manifest towards others (Allport 1954), that are based on antipathies that precede actual experience (Pettigrew 1980) and can be associated with specific political

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[1] There are several different types of narrative that are relevant to analyse in the field, from grand narratives to meta-narratives to micro narratives (see for example Suganami 1999; Oppermann and Spencer 2018). In this text, when referring to narratives, they are analysed as *bottom-up moves* reflecting the literature of securitization of migration.

[2] After this article was already submitted to the journal, there were crucial developments in the Italian Parliament on the topic, with a discussion about the approval of *jus scholae*, which is substantially very similar to the *jus culturae* discussed here.

[3] It is impossible to do justice to the entirety of the relevant literature on prejudice, and this article only aims to apply the concept to the political analysis of how its spiralling in Italy has impacted the governance of migration.

conservative behaviours (Adorno et al. 1950). It can be expressed in covert or more blatant ways (Pettigrew and Meertens 1995) and can also represent a collective phenomenon that then historically develops in institutional forms of discrimination (Dovidio 2001). If as an individual disposition it can feed political extremism, understanding prejudice in its collective dimension helps disentangle how it mixes with policies in certain foundational ways. Historically it has been linked with the development of extremist politics and the collapse of the nineteenth-century international system (Polanyi 1944), an intellectual operation that has contributed to explaining 'why prejudice is a global security threat' (Bello 2017). Because it obviously refers to the discrimination of alterities, migrants are intrinsically amongst the most affected by the phenomenon.

Taking a step further, it would be possible to even claim that migration itself as a label is both ontologically and epistemologically an effect of prejudice. The term 'international migration' is an act of socio-political engineering, a category invented to identify and consequently regulate a human action that relates to some basic human need, such as the choice of establishing a residence and possible movement somewhere else. In order to track its complexity, it could be useful to first despoil it of all the social constructions introduced by the political organization of life, to then consider the complexity of migration ontological entanglement with discriminatory securitizing moves. If tracked down to basic and constitutive elements, indeed one could ponder that persons have three main strategies at disposal regarding their residence: establishing it in a place that they consider safe and, possibly, to their liking; adapting their residence to new conditions if necessary; and changing it when the place proves to be no longer safe or to their liking. This moving of residency is identified with the term 'international migration' when the relative movement happens to cross another human socio-political invention: national borders. In such a light, the 'international migration' category is *ontologically* related to the creation of foundational boundaries ensuring control over the simple natural course of life on the planet.

Still, in this simplified description, it already becomes clear that the category of migration exists only as a consequence of the intentions to control who accesses certain privileges on a national basis. In fact, even if it is normally taken for granted that, when dealing with international migration, scholars, stakeholders and policymakers are considering the very human phenomenon of crossing physical borders, such an accepted fact is not entirely true. International migration does not always relate to the *physical* crossing of borders, but it does always encompass, instead, a form of human discrimination (Bello 2017). Due to human regulations and cognitive perceptions, the category of international migration goes far beyond the physical act of crossing borders. A clear example of a similar circumstance is that today it is practically impossible to establish a single definition which is valid for all cases everywhere. The same International Organization for Migration had to add a note to its web page 'Who is a Migrant?' to clarify that '[a]t the international level, no universally accepted definition for "migrant" exists'[4]. The status of being a migrant does not only depend on the physical act of, and the reasons for, crossing international borders. In certain countries, like Italy, one can be a migrant also without crossing international borders. A similar situation happens in all those countries where citizenship is based on *jus sanguinis* rather than on *jus soli*. Persons born in Italy of foreign parents will be considered migrants even if they have never crossed any international borders in their entire life. As a consequence, the category

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[4] See IOM Webpage 'Who is a Migrant' available at https://www.iom.int/node/102743

of migration extends beyond those persons who have crossed international borders to establish their life somewhere else from their place of origin or citizenship, if they have ever had one[5] in the first place.

In these countries, the institutional incorporation of persons who have never crossed international borders into the category of international migration stretches what is a physical event, 'the crossing of international borders', already ontologically constructed through the invention of the nation to discriminate who possesses certain rights, into an entirely subjective, epistemological, matter. It depends on both how the state and its apparatus understand 'who people are', and how the society perceives and socially (and cognitively) constructs them, rather than 'what they actually do'. In countries where *jus soli* applies, all those born there will be considered citizens. However, persons who were born of foreign parents in countries where *jus sanguinis* is the element that guarantees access to the 'body of the nation', will be considered migrants in such places, as happens in Italy.

In a similar contingency, persons who have never crossed the borders of the state where they were born, can also become 'irregular migrants' once they reach the age of majority, when their visa no longer depends on the family status. For example, visas cannot be granted if the person is unemployed and no longer attends the education system. This case is a very concerning situation for over one million minors in Italy. However, it is to be noted that, yearly, a number of these come of age and are no longer counted among Italian minors without citizenship. Therefore, the number of those affected by this policy is constantly underestimated.

For many years now, a political battle has been fought to guarantee what in Italy is known as *jus culturae*. Differently from the *jus soli*, *jus culturae* intends to connect citizenship not so much to the fact of being born in the country but to the fact of being educated in the culture of the country. Such a criteria would solve the situation not only of those minors who were born in the country (as the *jus soli* would do) but also of those who arrived in the country at a later age. To make a clear example from real-life, *jus culturae* would avoid the possibility of two sisters born of foreign parents, one having arrived in Italy at the age of two and the other born in the country, having different citizenships and different rights. However, despite the changes in governments, and a serious attempt to modify the citizenship law between 2015 and 2017, Parliament has been very resistant to addressing the current unequal treatment of *Italians without citizenship*, due to a tense political climate which the elections of 2018 made evident.

As a result, in Italy, and in many other countries where *jus sanguinis* applies, the phenomenon of migration is not only a real, physical situation entailing the crossing of borders. It is also evidently an institutional category that the state uses to differentiate between human beings; it discriminates unequally against those who come to reside in the country at a later stage and against those born and residing within its territory. In such countries, as in Italy, hence, migration is a discriminatory category *per se*, which denies the enjoyment of certain rights to some persons, and it is not only a definition that describes the crossing of borders: its usage extends far beyond this physical action.

For the state itself, the extension of the category of migration would stop here. However, from a socio-political point of view, it can be stretched further through specific perceptions, as people can perceive certain persons to be migrants even if they are not

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[5] The case of 'statelessness' indeed complicates further the definition of the problem.

migrants at all but are actually citizens of the state, with their Italian nationality stated on their passport. Such an occurrence can depend upon physical or cultural discriminatory elements. Citizens who represent a minority in a state can be cognitively placed in the 'migration' vessel by the vast majority of the population. A similar cognition explains why, if asked how numerous migrants are in the country, many would have an exaggerated idea of the state of affairs (Bello 2017; Blangiardo and Ortensi 2020; Diamanti 2019).

This first discussion of the very definition of migration sets out the reasons for which discriminatory acts seep into the core of all those elements that constitute the governance of migration and develop it into an excessively debatable political issue. An awareness of such prejudices, which are evidently at some of the roots of the means used to regulate human mobility, does not necessarily help disentangle the problem. Specific political interpretations actually prosper on discriminations and on marking differences and borders rather than fighting them. There are political beliefs that evidently question the idea that there exist universal human rights and that all persons are entitled to the same rights of a life with dignity. It is of course the case of far-right and sometimes populist parties (Geddes and Petracchin 2020), which, when they do not completely neglect human equality, position the applicability of these rights in specific territories as they come to be determined by national boundaries. In other words, far-right and populist organizations and movements, in the best of cases, would argue that migrants are entitled to certain rights (for example a life with dignity) within their homelands but not in other countries (Ambrosini 2020). This has been a typical discourse in Salvini's Lega, with the well-known slogan 'Salviamoli a casa loro' (Zotti and Fassi 2020).

Nonetheless, even leaving aside the case of extremist political movements and organizations, at the basis of the very idea of who composes the body of the nation there may be more prejudiced or more inclusive approaches (Bello 2017), which are reflected in the point in case of *jus sanguinis* versus *jus soli* citizenship laws, and all the mixture of law principles through which countries fall into mid-range positions. Some scholars have suggested that exclusionary politics is at the core of the formation of nation states (Wimmer 2002). Since the state has been defined as monopolist in the power realm by a variety of actors, and mainly as a consequence of globalization (Castles and Davidson 2000), migration has become an increasingly politicized matter of state and a core part of party politics and campaigns.

Igniting the nucleus of the identitarian machine of us versus them, migration is 'weaponized' (Greenhill 2010) and 'securitized' (Huysmans 2006) and normally dealt with through exceptional measures (Salter 2008). If the political and instrumental use of migrants as weapons was already a well-known fact in international relations, the securitization of migration has instead emerged since the end of the Cold War (Bigo 2002; Huysmans and Squire 2010), and the exception has been normalized particularly in our post-9/11 world (Salter 2008).

Italy in this sense is not any different from other countries and the changes of governments have not, according to some (Strazzari and Grandi 2019; Zotti and Fassi 2020), entailed particularly different politics. However, the relevance that prejudice plays in the governance of migration – understanding 'governance' as a process that leads to decision-making through the contributions of several different types of actors, including both state and non-state actors – is crucial in differentiating how the process can accelerate and create

a negative framework. However, the same can happen in the opposite direction to positively govern the phenomenon of migration. Specific cognitions (Bello 2020) can be at the very core of small changes in migration policies that can either intensify the migration-crime nexus or its deconstruction.

An analysis of Italian migration policies shows how even slightly different changes in migration policies, and more generally in a country's migration governance, can encompass crucial differences for the security of both migrants and the general population. In particular, prejudice can represent a key demarcating line in a country's governance of migration which, if not avoided, can contribute to generating a realm of insecurity that reinforces its own initial discriminatory elements and a securitizing migration-crime nexus. Prejudice can thus entail a spiralling of the securitization of migration, which does not benefit any non-violent part of the process but only strengthens aggressive politics. Both state and non-state actors feel called on to defend their positions, creating more fences and borders, through policies (Huysmans 2006), practices (Léonard and Kaunert 2020), and an array of discursive strategies (Bello 2020a), from speech acts to narratives. This work claims that small changes in Italian migration policies can crucially affect more general Italian migration governance, which happens not only to be exercised through top-down directives, but also through practices and narratives (Bello 2020b; Panebianco 2020; Léonard and Kaunert 2020b), which heighten the initial effects of migration policies.

3. The Methodological Description of How to Analyse a Networked Governance of Migration and the Spiralling of Prejudice

When it enters the gears of the institutional and governmental machine, prejudice can entail a spiralling progression that further boosts stereotypes and engenders new discriminatory attitudes, which end up spreading across societies and self-fulfilling negative expectations (Bello 2020a). That this spiral of prejudice takes place in Italy has been proved both in the analysis of the narratives that originate from the bad management of reception centres (Bello 2020b), and from the accentuation of exceptional measures that recent Italian governments have taken through law decrees, namely Salvini's security decrees in late 2018 and early 2019, which contributed to creating further situations of insecurity (Bello 2021). These decrees have evidently resulted in a series of inhumane practices, but they have also generated reactions from a part of civil society, who reacted strongly to the decisions to close ports to rescued migrants in the Mediterranean Sea (Panebianco 2021). Such studies all relate to how the way migration is governed in Italy can be framed in a broader scenario, too often creating practices that condemn migrants to vulnerabilities (Fontana 2021). Likewise, it has been emphasized how such politics has not happened in a vacuum but builds on already existing international trends (Strazzari and Grandi 2019). Others have instead illustrated the growing interconnection between international and domestic management of migration across different governments (Zotti and Fassi 2020).

This study employs a document analysis of all the migration policies and policy reports issued from 1998 to 2020, so from the Turco-Napolitano Law of 1998 to the most recent law 173 of 18 December 2020. It includes, therefore, an examination of 22 policy documents (see Annex 1) in order to identify relevant changes. For each of the changes introduced in the policies, a consideration of their effects on the networked governance

of migration is taken into account through the method of process tracing. 'Process-tracing might be used to test whether the residual differences between two similar cases were causal or spurious in producing a difference in these cases' outcomes' (George and Bennet: 6-7). Process-tracing is very helpful in identifying causal inference (Checkel and Bennet 2012). Particularly, it is valid in considering causal process observations (CPOs), and in validating hypotheses in multi-method research, such as this one that involves document analysis and outcomes of observed changes in terms of practices. Checkel and Bennet (2012) particularly stress that process-tracing can help identify the causal observation of the independent variables (the effect of changes in policies) and assess the effects on the dependent variable, which in our case is the changes in practices. Process tracing is used in this study's multi-method research in an interpretivist perspective. 'In an interpretivist perspective, process tracing allows the researcher to look for the ways in which this link manifests itself and the context in which it happens. The focus is not only on what happened, but also on how it happened' (Vennesson 2008: 233). Therefore, process tracing is valid in considering the outcomes that small policy changes have had for other actors involved in the process, to account for the effects on the networked governance of migration.

Indeed, although the competences for overseeing migration issues lie within the national policy framework, those concerning asylum are strongly dependent on the common settings established by EU regulations, even if their actual implementation is decided by the countries (Léonard and Kaunert 2020a). Without entering into the specificities of why demarcating a line between the two categories – migration and asylum – in real case scenarios is often impossible, as discussed at length in a different study (Bello 2017), the overcrossing of political responsibilities can often be used as a shield to escape criticism, but also to create opportunities for policy venues and venue shopping, which refer to the abilities and strategies that private actors use to influence the decision-making subdivisions of political institutions (Léonard and Kaunert 2020a).

Evidently, such an intricate process further complicates – and obscures – all the nodes in the network of actors that intervene in the field. Indeed, if on the one hand the decisions are taken by political public actors at the European (asylum) and national levels (migration), these are then implemented by other actors. In Italy crucial roles are played by the prefectures, which are administrative offices that oversee the implementations of migration policies in provinces, and by managers of reception centres, whose activities strongly influence how migration is perceived in local areas (Bello 2020b). Such a situation resembles the networked governance model previously identified for the European public sphere (Bee and Bello 2009), a model that accounts for the intervention of actors at the horizontal level that implement and influence decisions, in addition to those who play a role at the different hierarchical levels (European, national and subnational levels). When it comes to migration networked governance, the EU is the supranational hierarchical level, the Ministry of the Interior is the national level and the prefectures play a role at the subnational level. However, horizontally, at all of these levels (European, national and subnational or local), organized interest lobbyists, civil society, and managers of reception centres all exercise an influence on how migration is governed.

The relevance that these different actors play in the networked governance of migration is also proven by the very fact that, after the notorious term served by Matteo Salvini in the Conte I government, the Ministry of the Interior passed to someone who had been exercising the role of prefect since 2003, Luciana Lamorgese, and since 2017 in the very relevant context of the city of Milan. Recently, it has been advanced that precisely such an appointment of a technocrat as Minister of the Interior was intended to reduce the politicization of the issue (Zotti and Fassi 2020), as also the national newspaper *Il Corriere della Sera* reported on 4 September 2019 (Corriere della Sera 2019).

Spawning a series of stereotyping narratives, which contributed to the migration-crime nexus to a greater extent, negative storytelling can be referred to as one of the main means of what in the literature is known as securitization from below (Bello 2020b; Ejdus and Rečević 2021). However, other changes in Italian migration policies have instead definitely affected governance in a different direction. Such shifts, actually, do not happen only towards a securitizing direction, entailing a negative framework for the management of migration, with the further creation of insecurities. The spiralling process can assume different directions, and small changes can also bring about crucial positive dynamics.

4. The Prejudicial Spiralling of Securitization in Italian Migration Policies and the Relevance of Small Changes

The *incipit* of the securitization of migration in Italy and its related migration-crime nexus started with the Bossi-Fini Law in 2002 (Law 189/2002). Law 189, strongly promoted by Gianfranco Fini, leader of the far-right party *Alleanza Nazionale* (National Alliance), and supported by Umberto Bossi, leader of *La Lega Nord* (The Northern League, which has now changed its name to simply The League to project itself at a national and not only at subnational level), introduced for the first time in Italy the criminalization of those who had travelled irregularly to Italy. It indeed entailed prison custody for those who were caught arriving in Italy without the proper documentation. This was evidently in contrast with the Geneva Convention, of which Italy is signatory. The Geneva Convention establishes that a person who declares they are looking for shelter for reasons of discriminations and risks to their own life in their country of origin, has the right to individual case treatment and, consequently, until the case is not solved by the state, cannot be considered an irregular migrant. In addition to this, law 189/2002 also limited the social protection that was initially guaranteed by the Turco Napolitano Law, and only accepted humanitarian protection, applied only for serious and exceptional personal safety reasons. As a consequence of the exclusion of social protection many more migrants who had travelled without the proper documentation could be considered irregular migrants and detained, enlarging the numbers of irregular migration in Italy because those previously considered refugees would become irregular migrants. Indeed, the law was declared illegitimate by the Constitutional Court (Corte Costituzionale), with sentence no. 222 of 15 July 2004.

Despite this, the law evidently worsened with the so-called Berlusconi Security Package in 2009, which protracted the custody of migrants in prison-like conditions to a maximum of 18 months, whereas in the Bossi-Fini Law, custody could be protracted for a maximum of 90 days. Therefore, the Bossi-Fini law and the Berlusconi Security

Package, rather than providing security for the country, created a migration-crime nexus in Italy, and the growing necessity for persons to hide and travel in even more concealed ways, thus substantially providing big profits for criminal organizations and human traffickers and smugglers. In the literature, some authors have highlighted that the 2003 EU Security Strategy did not consider migration as a threat (Ceccorulli and Lucarelli 2017), and others that it actually did so but not in direct ways, rather only as 'an absent presence' (Squire 2015). Whatever the uptake on this, it is possible to consider the Italian creation of a migration-crime nexus as one of the first of its type.

If the Bossi-Fini Law and the Berlusconi Security Decree were responsible for the migration-crime nexus in Italy and the growing insecurity in the country, with the next governments things did not always improve. In 2015, Renzi's reception decree unpacked a series of institutional problematic practices, although mainly in order to respond to the pressures coming from the European Union as a whole and some EU member states in particular. Such requests were mainly due to the need to manage the exceptional peak in arrivals. Although migration is regulated through national policies, its development depends, indeed, on a variety of actors, external and internal to the country politics (Bello 2017; Léonard and Kaunert 2020a; Strazzari and Grandi 2020); it is thus more correct to speak of a migration networked governance rather than a migration policy (Bee and Bello 2015). The most important consequence that Renzi's reception decree had was on the practices it allowed in reception centres (Bello 2021). Indeed, Renzi, with the aim of increasing room in reception centres for migrants, made it possible to convert any for-profit businesses that included allocation services (B&B apartments, hotel, small farms, etc.) into an extraordinary reception centre (CAS).

Before Renzi's reception decree, according to the Turco Napolitano Law and the Consolidated Act, the establishment of reception centres was limited to organizations which could prove adherence to an entire set of criteria. Such requisites slowed down the selection process of the state, but guaranteed that these places would all include the needed best practices to deal with migrants and refugees. Indeed, before the Bossi-Fini Law and Berlusconi's and Renzi's respective decrees, and thanks to the Turco Napolitano Law and the Consolidated Act of 1998, Italy was able to develop an excellent network of receptions centres (SPRARs), as these were already constructed on the basis of well-pondered limitations and practices evinced from other European countries which became net immigrant recipients long before Italy. Therefore, the creation of CAS centres jeopardized the excellent settings of the Italian system of reception created by the Turco Napolitano Law and the Consolidated Act. The idea was to use these extraordinary reception centres only for the peak of arrivals. Nonetheless, the CAS extraordinary reception centres became the rule and not the exception in the system, hosting the vast majority of migrants (Italian Chambers of Deputies, 2019b). The evident mistake in Renzi's decision was to consider that he could increase rooms in the reception system using a cheap measure. Instead of increasing human resources in the state apparatus to deal with the growing exigencies of the receptions system, and providing more funds for the centres already experienced in dealing with integration, Renzi's reception decree lowered the standards of the Italian reception centres.

However, it was only in late 2018 and early 2019, with Salvini's decrees, that the situation deteriorated, producing important insecurities, as a consequence of his evident

prejudicial approach towards migrants and diversity more generally. The problem of Salvini's decrees was not only the closure of ports to those boats which had rescued persons seeking refuge but, most crucially, also the decision to cut funds for SPRARs and to suspend the integration services for those whose refugee status was already recognized. Such a decision entailed very negative practices: many refugees with their status already recognized (and so not individuals in irregular situations) were obliged to leave SPRAR centres and were left to wander the streets. Entire families became homeless after the closure of some important SPRARs. A decision of this sort evidently created a lot of insecurities for both those refugees left unprotected all of a sudden and for citizens, who had to witness an increase in squatting in their districts (Bello 2021; La Repubblica 14 June 2019).

Insecurity in the field of migration has willingly been used as a seed in an attempt to generate an electoral yield for the party *La Lega* (The League). However, the political strategy has not been so advantageous to *La Lega* itself as it was for its direct competitor, the even more far-right Italian politician, Giorgia Meloni. It has actually polarized the debate to an extent that has only created more resonance for the even more extremist far-right politics of Fratelli d'Italia, which is now, according to opinion polls, the most popular Italian party, with over 20% of the vote share (Demos 2021).

When she took charge, Luciana Lamorgese gradually removed all those elements that have entailed the creation of a nexus between migration, insecurities and crime. In October 2020, she issued a new decree which encompassed migration and other domestic issues, thus strategically removing it from the 'security domain' where first Bossi and Fini, then Berlusconi and then Salvini had placed it. The decree was then converted into law by Parliament on 18 December 2020 (Law 18 December 2020 n. 173). In addition to this, the website of the Ministry of the Interior now refers only to the Consolidation Act (Testo Unico) of the Discipline of Immigration and the Regulations of the Condition of the Foreigner of 1998, which followed the Turco Napolitano Law in 1998, and to Gentiloni's Inter-Ministerial Decree of 21 July 2017. Therefore, it does not make any reference to any of the decrees that were previously identified as problematic for the positive development of migration, particularly because they included discriminatory elements (Bello 2021). To consider that these political decisions played a minor role is very misleading, because they can be key to stopping the migration-crime nexus and the scapegoating of refugees and migrants by part of unscrupulous far-right leaders. The consequences in practices and attitudes are already visible: Demos' data show that prejudice diminished from 46% in September 2017 to 27% in September 2021 and the favourable position towards receiving immigrants in Italy has also importantly increased (Demos 2021). Indicative of how the general feeling of Italians has depended also on the policy decisions is the fact that in 2015 and 2016, 72% and 73% of those interviewed were favourable to *jus soli*. This went down to 59% in 2017 and has now returned to a very high level: 75% of those responding to the surveys.

5. Conclusions: The Complexity of Small Changes in Italian Migration Governance

An analysis of the spiralling effect of prejudice in Italian migration policy and the networked governance of migration shows that the only way to disentangle the migration-

crime nexus is to operate at its root causes by ensuring that discriminatory cognitions do not intervene in any of the steps that constitute the regulation of human mobility. As this paper has shown through a document analysis of policies and a process-tracing analysis, the politicization and consequent criminalization of migration in the country have happened through the role of an array of actors, both internal to the state and external to it, acting at different levels (supranational, national and subnational) in dealing with migration. Although it is true that in the past it was possible to discern that the link between migration and insecurities in Italy did not suddenly happen in a single act, the idea that changes across governments have not mattered would be entirely misleading.

An attentive analysis of Italian migration policies and their consequences for practices in the broader governance of human mobility in the country, illustrates that small changes have had a huge impact on daily life and the creation or the dissolution of social tensions. For this reason, it is claimed that in Italy it is possible to identify a networked governance of migration, which connects the development of policies with certain practices in reception centre management and the development of prejudicial ideas that spread through narratives, thus heightening and reinforcing the process of securitization. Such a networked governance of migration has contributed to spiralling prejudicial dynamics and thus reinforcing the migration-crime nexus, for which the analysis presented in the previous section was able to identify an increasing securitization of migration for the years 2002-2018 in Italy. Some of these policies have actually entailed discriminatory practices that have generated a spiralling of the securitization of migration and its related migration-crime nexus. The aggravation of the nexus between migration and crime has been *in crescendo* in Italian migration policies, being orchestrated initially through the Bossi-Fini law, escalating through Berlusconi's security decree, being mismanaged through Renzi's reception decree, and finally spiralling as a consequence of the intended securitizing moves of Salvini's two Security Decrees.

As a consequence, the spiralling of prejudice in Italy has had its exaltation in the populistic rule of the domain enacted by Matteo Salvini when he was Minister of the Interior during the Conti I government. Such a twist was particularly achieved through a series of acts serving the purpose of generating more insecurities for both migrants and the rest of the population and self-fulfilling the 'threat of migration'. Salvini's security decrees were therefore an unscrupulous means to contributing to insecurities for everyone in order to capitalize this in a general feeling of unease that would boost votes for the League party, which made the scapegoating of migrants the core of its campaign. However, if the aim was to politically profit from such aversion in terms of votes, Salvini miscalculated its effects, which were much more beneficial to the most extremist far-right party, Fratelli d'Italia, which has evidently gained political power, than for La Lega. The consequences of this technique of governing the issue were crucial in the development of more hostile attitudes in the general population.

As elucidated through the process-tracing analysis and the document analysis presented in this article, the Conte II government appointed a prefect, Luciana Lamorgese, and not a political leader as Minister of the Interior, possibly to counteract such political use of the migration issue. This appointment was then renewed in Mario Draghi's government. The dismantling of the migration-crime nexus by Luciana Lamorgese through the decree then adopted by Law 173 of 18 December 2020 is already playing an important

role in the entire governance of migration in Italy, as shown by its effects on practices. As highlighted in the previous section, prejudice has decreased importantly in the country from 2017 according to recent data, lowering from 46% in September 2017 to 27% in September 2021. However, the volume of irregular migration and the migration crime nexus which is constructed through legal dispositions would decrease further if *jus culturae* became a reality.

Such evidence proves that small changes in migration policies become very relevant in more general networked migration governance and can create a spiralling process either in a negative securitizing direction or in a positive one, as claimed by the framework of the spiralling of the securitization of migration (Bello 2020).

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