



MAGYC

Migration Governance and Asylum Crises

Working paper on the
construction of the
crisis-invasion discourse
by different
stakeholders in Italy

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MAGYC: The MAGYC (**M**igr**A**tion **G**overnance and **A**s**Y**lum **C**risis) project seeks to assess how migration governance has responded to the recent “refugee crises” and has since been influenced by it, and how crises at large shape policy responses to migration. This four-year research project (2018–2022) brings together twelve international partners: the Hugo Observatory from the University of Liège (Coordinator), Sciences Po, the University of Economics in Bratislava, the GIGA institute of Global and Area Studies, Lund University, the IDMC, SOAS University of London, the University of Milan, the Lebanese American University, the University of Macedonia, Sabanci University, IfPO/CNRS.

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2	June 2020	Version addressing the comments from the first annual review, namely: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An explanation to why the “crisis-invasion discourse” is important was included. • The sampling strategy used for data collection was explained. • Evidence/references were included throughout the paper. • The discourse analysis was strengthened.

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ABSTRACT

This working paper deals with the discursive construction of 'crisis-invasion' narratives in Italy in relation to the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers during the period 2012-2019. Drawing on a number of secondary sources, it seeks to reconstruct how different social actors (re)produce discourses that portray the arrival and reception of people seeking asylum as something invasive of and, thus, damaging to Italian society and natives. In so doing, it adopts a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective and identifies the argumentative strategies used to legitimize restrictive or exclusionary migration policies.

Introduction

In the last years, immigration in Italy has been marked by the debate on arrivals which followed the "Arab Spring", and those during 2015 and 2016 denoted by the expression "refugee crisis".¹ Hundreds of thousands of migrants fled from unstable countries and embarked on boats headed for Italy to seek asylum within Europe (Ambrosini, 2018; Paoletti, 2014). Yet, the total number of immigrants living in Italy has remained stable, while arrivals for other reasons (i.e. family reunification) have always exceeded those of asylum-seekers. In addition, as in the case of Italian migration policies in previous decades, also asylum policies have been rather improvised, being characterized by emergency procedures due to the chronic structural deficiencies of the reception system in Italy (Marchetti, 2014). In this regard, arrivals by sea and, then, settlement of asylum seekers in reception centres around the country have often been represented as an 'invasion' by both politicians and journalists, mirroring chronic public anxieties and security concerns (Colombo, 2018; Ter Wal, 2000).

In this paper, we call 'crisis-invasion discourses' those narratives and framings of events, processes and phenomena related to migration that have been used to describe various crises such as 'refugee crisis', 'migration' crisis', 'humanitarian crisis', 'crisis of the European border', 'crisis of the EU', 'crisis of the Schengen zone', 'refugee

¹ The use of the terms "crisis", "invasion", "emergency" throughout the text, as well as the adjectives "illegal" or "clandestine" describing immigration and immigrants, correspond to the way in which social actors talk to portray reality.

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reception crisis' (Agustín & Bak Jorgensen, 2019; Cantat, Thiollet, & Pécoud, 2019; Rea et al., 2019). Such discourses have also been linked to other crisis narratives such as the recent economic and financial crisis, mainly in Southern Europe. As regards the term 'invasion', we study it not only when it is used to represent specific migration phenomena (i.e. mass inflows), but also as a powerful frame device encompassing other negative representations against immigrants.

The rationale for examining the use of the term 'invasion' to describe migration to Italy and new arrivals in negative terms is that media and politicians have commonly employed it when referring to the so-called 'refugee crisis' (Ambrosini, 2018, 2019; Armillei, 2017; Bruno, 2016; Castelli Gattinara, 2017a; Ciabbari, 2020; Colombo, 2018; Paoletti, 2014; Ponzo & Pogliano, 2018). The fundamental assumption is that Italy is experiencing an 'invasion' of uncontrollable flows on a biblical scale, while extreme voices alert for the risk of replacement of the Italian native population by immigrants and their own traditions with different cultures. The term 'invasion' has certainly been only one of the various linguistic forms that serve to mobilize fears concerning national security (Marchetti, 2020), but it has been particularly influential on public opinion due to its connection with the first entry of new arrivals by sea (Bruno, 2016). In other words, the nature of new arrivals and media coverage employing images of boats full of people arriving to Italy with high frequency have been the basis of allegations about an invasion since 2015-2016, although statistics and real numbers show anything but an 'invasion' (Ambrosini, 2018, 2019; Ciabbari, 2020; De Haas, 2007). The term 'invasion' has also been very influential on citizens who have mobilized against migrants due to (the possibility of) new arrivals in their neighbourhoods. The term has frequently been used in slogans written on demonstrators' placards (Lunaria, 2017; Tronchin and Di Pasquale, 2017). What seems to be of great importance is that the former minister of the Interior Salvini, one of the most popular and influential politicians in Italy, often used this frame not only to shape public perceptions of irregularity, but also to justify restrictive policies that threaten the implementation of international conventions on human rights. This was, for instance, the case of the so-called 'Salvini decree' that permitted the closure of Italian ports in order to curb 'invasion' (Ambrosini, 2019; Cusumano & Gombeer, 2020). Similarly, the invasion frame has been used to legitimize local policies of exclusion of refugees or asylum seekers (Ambrosini, Cinalli, & Jacobson, 2020; Marchetti, 2020) or political agendas at the local level (Castelli Gattinara, 2016; Pettrachin, 2019).

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'Crisis-invasion' discourses have been often fuelled by events concerning political decisions on the governance of inflows, NGO operations, and the reception of new arrivals. First, such discourses have proliferated as humanitarian actions, and operations (Mare Nostrum and Triton) for the management of inflows received much criticism for being costly and incentivizing irregular migration (Castelli Gattinara, 2017b, 2017a; Ceccorulli, 2019; Colombo, 2018). Second, representatives of the populist Five Star Movement (M5S), right-wing parties, and sections of the media have also accused NGOs involved in rescue operations of working in collaboration with human traffickers, that resulted in the criminalization of humanitarian actors helping immigrants (Vosyliūtė & Conte, 2019). Third, allocation of asylum seekers and the establishment of reception facilities across Italy have also triggered much controversy because many local communities, mainly in Northern Italy, have refused to host migrants at reception centres (Ambrosini, 2019).

In light of these preliminary remarks, the aim of this report is to survey the existing empirical evidence on the construction and reproduction of the "crisis-invasion discourse" in Italy with reference to the arrival and settlement of refugees since 2012. By focusing on the use of the frame of invasion and other anti-migrant discourses linked to or reinforcing it, this exploratory working paper will serve as a basis for future primary data collection and analysis in the context of Work Package 3. WP3 will provide a critical assessment of crisis narratives, and will encourage the deconstruction of mainstream representations and consideration of migration beyond the crisis. This report comes at a time when, in several European countries, and especially in Italy, there is a marked increase of anti-establishment parties, on the one hand, and social movements and mobilizations opposed to migrants, on the other. Hence, there is a wide-ranging question that of assessing how different actors, at different levels, apprehend ongoing migration-related phenomena in "invasion" terms; both cognitively, i.e. discourses supporting the frameworks within which actors perceive reality and act, and tactically, i.e. narratives enabling actors to justify their interventions and legitimize their position.

This review is conducted in five parts, as now specified. The second part presents the research questions and methodology employed. Then, some statistics and useful information are discussed in order to contextualize the debate. The fourth part of the paper describes the conceptual framework, and it provides an overview on how

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various actors construe the refugee crisis in 'crisis-invasion' terms. The paper concludes with some reflections and suggestions for future research.

Research Questions and Methods

The aim of this working paper is to explore what we have called 'crisis-invasion discourses'. By considering how various social actors discursively deal with the so-called 'refugee crisis', it seeks (i) to furnish better understanding of how actors at both national and local level, namely political parties and politicians, experts and intellectuals, local governments, national daily newspapers, television and local media, social media, social movements and self-organized groups of citizens have (re)produced such discourses, and (ii) to grasp their discursive and ideological underpinnings. By so doing, it shows how 'crisis-invasion discourses' play a central role in the legitimisation of restrictive migration policies, apart from manufacturing political consensus.

In this working paper we start by offering a statistical picture in relation to immigration phenomena in Italy. Rather than being the object of analysis, this data serves to show that representations of invasion are fundamentally flawed and deceptive. As public opinion is highly influenced by such perceptions, statistical evidence underline the importance of our effort to disentangle how such perceptions are created and which their discursive and ideological bases are.

In the analysis that follows we first provide an overview of scientific articles dealing with representations of the so-called 'refugee crisis' in Italy to show how 'crisis-invasion discourses' have been constructed in political and media discourses in this country. We draw on case studies employing discourse analysis, and academic works investigating the discursive construction of the 'refugee crisis' in Italy and the role of such representations in legitimizing policies and maintaining or gaining political consensus. Meta-analysis of the findings of various authors enables us to relate negative views on migrants and refugees to the implementation of policies both at the national and local level intended to cope with crises.

Second, we study the discursive and ideological bases of 'crisis-invasion discourses' in Italy by drawing on data (e.g. discourses, interviews, newspaper

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headlines) collected and/or analysed in different articles and reports from 2013 to 2019. In some cases where sufficient examples from political discourses or frames considered to have a crucial role in reproducing 'crisis-invasion' discourses were not available, we collected additional material from the personal webpages of specific politicians or from their speeches published in the press. Saying this, we do not claim statistical representativeness, but we consider that this work can furnish useful insights into how social actors construct their representations and narratives in order to influence the public opinion and achieve consensus (Van Dijk, 1997; 2018).

This working paper therefore adopts a critical discourse analysis (CDA) perspective. This academic approach makes it possible to study the discursive abuse of power (e.g. in racist discourse) and the way in which ideologies are expressed. In other words, this approach serves 'to decode relationships between language and ideology, and language and power, and is appropriate to 'account for the linguistic construction of national identity and the process of 'othering' (i.e. racism)' (Reyes, 2011, p. 785). Existing CDA-oriented work has shown that discursive practices and strategies have a significant role in legitimisation. Drawing on Van Leeuwen's (2007, p. 92) work, we consider a set of categories addressing legitimization in discourse: *authorization* (legitimization by referring to authority figures or tradition), *moral evaluation* (reference to a values system), *rationalization* (references to knowledge claims, to goals and uses of institutionalized social action), and *mythopoiesis* (narratives that reward legitimate actions). Other strategies related to those proposed by Van Leeuwen are taken into consideration. It is, for instance, *altruism* in the sense that actions are represented as beneficial for a group or society that is presented in need of 'our' help (Reyes, 2011, p. 787). *Cosmology* used to construct inevitability is another strategy when speakers refer to argumentation that implies inevitability (Vaara, 2014).

Statistical Data and Context Information

Immigration in Italy gained attention in the public debate in the late 1980s and early 1990s, when the country received increasing number of international migrants. It did not occur in a planned way; instead, it was spontaneously driven by labour market dynamics and favoured by ethnic networks and civil society. First arrivals used to find

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employment in the informal sector of the labour market and were regularised through amnesties, i.e. permission given to employers to legalise their migrant workers previously hired in an irregular manner. These regularisation schemes have been the pillar of Italian immigration policies (Ambrosini 2019), as from 1986 to 2012 over 1.8 million migrant workers obtained regular legal status. After almost thirty years of migratory inflows, the number of immigrants with regular legal status is about 5.2 million (2019)², whilst immigration is a stratified phenomenon. This means that out of 5.1 million migrants more than 1 million have obtained Italian citizenship (about 820,000 in the period 2012-2017), while there are almost two million migrants with long-term and one and half million non-EU migrants with short-term stay permits, enjoying different rights (and acceptance) within Italian society. Moreover, irregularity has characterised many immigrants' legal status in recent decades, whereas asylum seekers and refugees have constituted a growing legal status category since 2012 (see also Table 2).

Although popular perceptions suggest that Italy is subject to an invasion by male African migrants who are Muslims³, statistical data on the migrant stock with a regular legal status in Italy in 2017 show that the immigrant population consists mainly of females (52%) coming from European countries (50.9%, of whom 30.4% are EU citizens) (IDOS, 2018) with a Christian religious tradition (57.5% according to estimates, in comparison with 28.2% percent of Muslims) (CARITAS-MIGRANTES, 2018). Romanians are by far the most numerous migrant group in Italy, followed by Albanians and Moroccans (Table 1). Such trends have been largely stable over the past four years

² Dati.istat.it - ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics).

³ In regard to asylum seekers' demographic characteristics, the majority of them are men, while women represented only 16.2% in 2017 (Ministry of Interior). Asylum seekers come mainly from Nigeria (27,289 applications), Pakistan (13,660) and Gambia (9,040) (year 2016). In 2018, the immigrants entering Italy by sea mainly originated from Tunisia (5,181), Eritrea (3,320) and Iraq (1,744).

Table 1 - The composition of immigrant population in Italy (2018): the ten main nationalities

Rank	Country	% Residents in thousands	% on the immigrant population
1	Romania	1,190	23.1
2	Albania	440	8.6
3	Morocco	417	8.1
4	China	291	5.7
5	Ukraine	237	4.6
6	Philippines	168	3.3
7	India	152	3.0
8	Bangladesh	132	2.6
9	Moldova	132	2.6
10	Egypt	120	2.3

Source: *dati.istat.it*

Invasion is also considered to regard arrivals by sea. On the contrary, arrivals in Italy have taken place mainly in regular ways, as migrants have usually entered with tourist visas (when necessary), and then overstayed, often finding jobs in the informal economy. That is to say, arrivals by sea have never been the main entry channel (Ambrosini 2018). As Table 2 shows, most stay permits regard family reasons (reunification), whereas fewer foreign citizens obtain short-term stay permits. This category includes stay permit renewals or migrants arriving through fixed precise national quotas, according to the Italian law, not exceeding 30,000 people per year in recent years. It should be noted that for the 1.5 million of intra-EU migrant residents in Italy, it is not necessary to have any kind of stay permit.

Table 2 – Issue of new stay permits per year and reasons, years 2010-2017, Italy

Year	New Stay permits	% Work reasons	% Family reasons	% Study reasons	% Asylum or humanitarian protection	% Other Reasons
2010	598,567	60,0	29,9%	n.d.	1,7%	n.d.
2011	361,690	34,4%	38,9%	8,7%	11,8%	6,2%
2012	263,968	26,9%	44,3%	11,7%	8,7%	8,4%
2013	255,646	33,1%	41,2%	10,7%	7,5%	7,6%
2014	248,323	23%	40,8%	9,9%	19,3%	7,1%
2015	238,936	9,1%	44,8%	9,6%	28,2%	8,3%
2016	226,934	5,7%	45,1%	7,5%	34,3%	7,3%
2017	262,770	4,6%	43,2%	7,0%	38,5%	6,7%

Source: www.istat.it and various reports on non-EU citizens resided regularly in Italy

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The relatively high percentage of stay permits for asylum and humanitarian protection has been a new fact in the Italian reality since 2011 (Table 2). This trend followed the increasing number of arrivals after the Arab Springs (the so-called North Africa Emergency, *Emergenza Nord Africa*), and, then, during 2015 and 2016 (Figure 1 and 2), mainly due to the failure of some measures taken at the European level, as argued below. However, exclusive attention to the arrival of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers created confusion in public opinion about immigration issues that resulted in hostility towards migrants and refugees, as registered in various polls. According to Eurobarometer data, almost 35 per cent of Italians considered immigration to be the most important problem facing Italy in 2018⁴, being among the nationals in the EU most worried about immigration (after the Danish and Maltese). There has been an impressive increase of this trend in the past five years if one considers that the same percentage was 5 per cent in 2014, while it became five (25 per cent in 2015) or even over eight times higher (42 per cent in 2016) in two years.⁵ Such worries were also reflected in surveys conducted by the Pew Research Centre, which revealed that, in 2016, 65 per cent of Italians said that large number of refugees leaving Iraq and Syria was a major threat to Italy.⁶ Similar negative sentiments are confirmed by two other surveys conducted by the same organisation in 2017⁷ and 2018⁸. The first survey suggests that Italians, when asked about the type of threat raised by immigrants, said that immigrants increase the risk of terrorist attacks (50 per cent of answers) or/and are a burden on the economy because they take Italians' jobs (44 per cent of answers). The second reveals that 71 per cent of Italians consider that few migrants or none should be allowed to move to Italy. However, this negative attitude towards immigration seems to be often based on false perceptions. For instance, the Cattaneo Institute (2019)⁹ indicates that Italians are the most badly informed among all EU citizens about the actual percentage of non-EU migrant residents in their own

⁴ <https://ec.europa.eu/commfrontoffice/publicopinion/index.cfm/ResultDoc/download/DocumentKy/83548>

⁵ Source: Standard Eurobarometer 2005–2017.

⁶ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/16/european-opinions-of-the-refugee-crisis-in-5-charts/>

⁷ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/10/22/immigration-concerns-fall-in-western-europe-but-most-see-need-for-newcomers-to-integrate-into-society/>

⁸ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/12/10/many-worldwide-oppose-more-migration-both-into-and-out-of-their-countries/>

⁹ <http://www.cattaneo.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Analisi-Istituto-Cattaneo-Immigrazione-realt%C3%A0-e-percezione-27-agosto-2018-1.pdf>

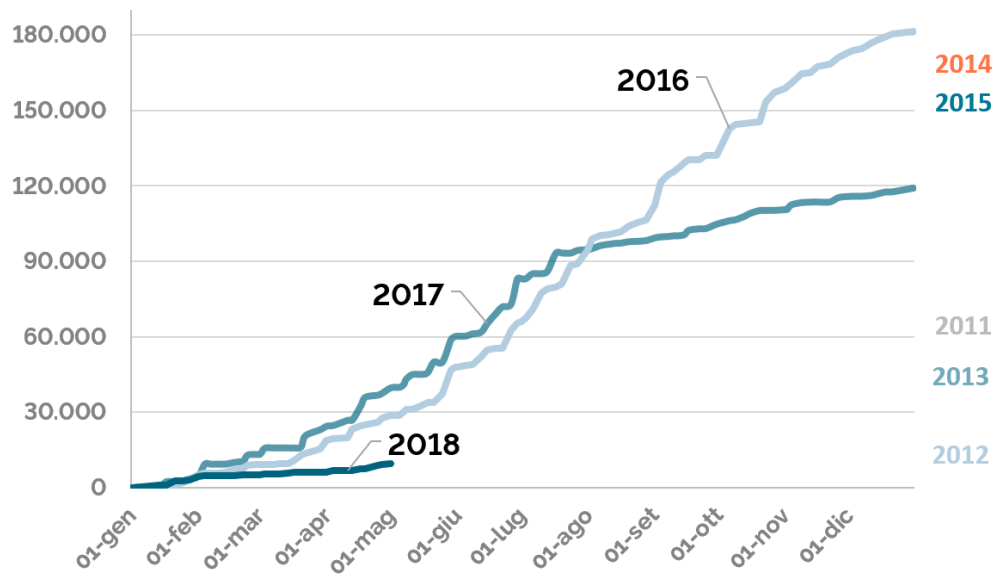
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country: Italians think that non-EU migrants represent 25 per cent of the total number of immigrants in Italy, while the real percentage is 7 per cent.

Turning to refugees' arrival, not only were the numbers much lower than imagined, but most new arrivals intended to reach Northern Europe by crossing northern Italian borders. This has gradually changed since 2015 when EU Member States created a network of "sorting centres" in so-called "hotspot areas" (Campesi, 2018).¹⁰ According to this policy, characterized as a "turning point", all those reaching EU southern shores should be channelled to hotspot areas in order to be identified, registered and fingerprinted upon arrival. This constituted a precondition for asylum seekers' relocation in other countries, which has been another measure taken by EU institutions. Yet, only about 13,000 have been resettled, indicating the failure of the relocation policy. Without the possibility to leave Italy on their own initiatives or through the relocation mechanisms, new arrivals remained trapped on Italian territory and many of them opted to apply for asylum. Under such circumstances, the number of asylum applicants increased rapidly, whereas the number dropped again as a result of the decrease of arrivals by sea after 2017 (Figure 1 and 2). This was the result of legislative and international policy initiatives taken by the last two government coalitions. The first (under the Gentiloni government) concerned agreements between Italy and Libya aimed at limiting inflows, and measures hindering rescue operations by NGOs' ships. The second (under the government coalition between M5S and League) concerned laws which drastically limited the action of NGOs in rescuing migrants.

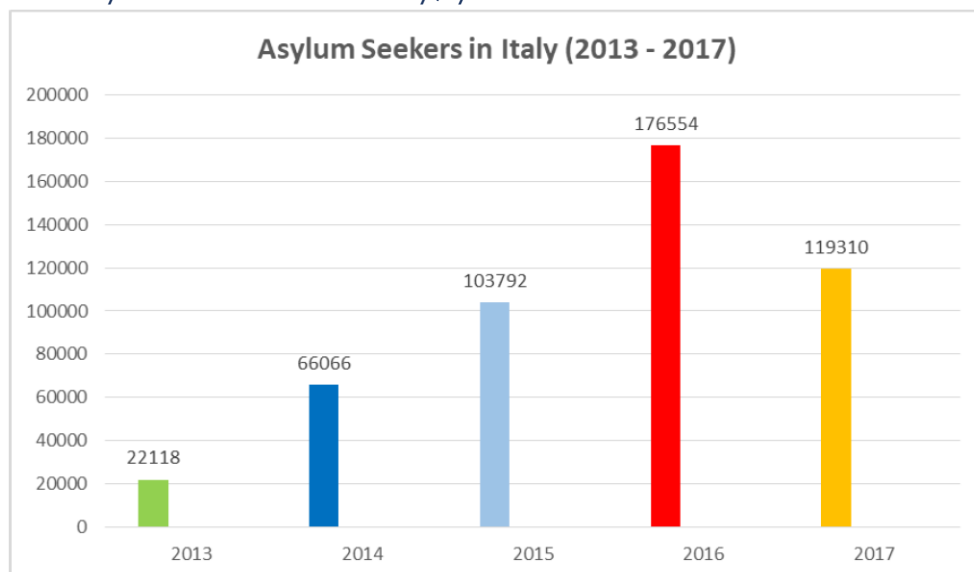
¹⁰ As regards those who reach Italian coasts wishing to lodge an asylum application, they are hosted in reception facilities, the so-called 'hotspot centres' (substituted the old CPAS, "First Aid and Support Centres" (*Centri di Primo Soccorso e Assistenza*), for a period that should not exceed two days, even it is not often the case. In these areas, new arrivals are given first aid and are identified. By the end of 2018, there were six hotspots: in Lampedusa, in the ports of Ragusa Pozzallo and Porto Empedocle, Trapani, Augusta and Taranto. In the second stage, the Italian reception system provides for the transfer of individuals who intend to lodge an asylum application to the "First Reception Centres" (*Centri di Prima Accoglienza*). In these centres, asylum applicants receive a residence permit of a period that should not exceed 30 days, although there is not a well-defined time limit. Across the Italian territory, there are 14 centres for this second stage. After the reception centre, asylum seekers who lack financial resources may move to the facilities of the SPRAR network (*Sistema di Protezione per Richiedenti Asilo e Rifugiati*) that constitutes the third stage of this system (Article 14 of Legislative Decree No. 142/2015). However, the distinction between first and second stage of reception sometimes disappeared due to the difficulty of managing big numbers of arrivals.

Figure 1 - New arrivals by sea, years 2012-2018



Source: Retrieved from <https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/media/img/fcm/1sbarchi.png>; UNHCR and ministry of interior, Italy

Figure 2 – Asylum Seekers in Italy, years 2013-2017



Source: Italian Ministry of Home Affairs

Overall, it is important to stress that the underlying assumption of an on-going invasion is statistically unfounded. Consequently, in the next sections, we explore how different actors have created 'crisis-invasion' discourses.

Constructing the Crisis-Invasion Discourse

Conceptual framework and ideological basis of the 'invasion' framing

Before we start our survey of recent empirical works employing CDA, we briefly define the term 'invasion', outline how it has been used in discourses in relation to immigration, and describe its ideological underpinnings. This last is a crucial task for the analysis conducted in the next sections, because 'crisis-invasion' discourses have been embedded in specific ideological dimensions.

The term 'invasion' has been generally used to describe the extent of an undesirable phenomenon, which in this specific case is the arrival and reception of foreign people in Italy. Invasion in military terminology indicates "an occasion when an army or country uses force to enter and take control of another country" (Online Cambridge Dictionary 2019) or "the act of entering a place by force, often in large numbers"¹¹. However, this term is also used in everyday discourses to indicate "an occasion when a large number of people or things come to a place in an annoying and unwanted way" (Ibid.) or "an action or process that affects someone's life in an unpleasant and unwanted way". It is also used in medical science to denote the attack of a disease or the entrance of bacteria into the body. Finally, we often observe that unwanted human mobility is framed by the media in terms of essentialist terms inherent to studies of ecology such as 'non-native' or 'alien'. In ecology, species that are not native to a specific location are called 'invasive alien species' (Lidström et al. 2015).

In political and media discourses the human body has been a source of metaphors useful for the analysis of social and political entities (Musolff, 2004). With reference to immigration, invasion has been largely used in the framework of so-called "body politics", that is, the metaphorical construction of the nation state as a human body that should be protected against the invasion or penetration of migrants (Rheindorf & Wodak, 2018). As argued below, this derives from the construction of "otherness", and the concomitant securitization of national and super-national migration regimes. Besides "body politics", Holmes and Castaneda (2016) point out that in the case of the recent refugee crisis the "house" has been used as a source of metaphors in

¹¹ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/invasion>

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relation to the arrival of migrants; Europe has remained with “open doors” or “open windows”.

Indeed, the construction of a nation necessarily entails the existence of the “other” who may be often perceived as “unwanted” (Deutsch, 1966; Triandafyllidou, 2001). In this frame, nationals are considered to be a set of members connected with each other by a common political belonging: that is, they are insiders or in-group members who have more characteristics in common with each other than they share with another group of people (outsiders/ foreigners/out-group). In other words, this concerns a division or barrier in terms of “us” and “them”. “Them” are all those who are presumed to live in “our” national territory, while diversity does not necessarily imply racial and cultural variation, but can be about “their” extraneousness to “our” national space (Sayad, 1991).

The national level

The construction of “otherness” in Italy

In Italy, the construction of “otherness” has not only been the basis for the revival of the Italian nation and homeland; it has also induced a sense of superiority over poorer societies or countries (Dal Lago, 1999, pp. 10–11). This may legitimize the symbolic claim of dominating an area in which migrants are seen as a threat to the existence of a specific society (Ambrosini, 2018; Faist, 2002; Sayad, 1991).

Migrants have become “others” or been seen as a threat since the early 1990s, when mainstream media were used by political entrepreneurs and journalists as devices to represent immigration as a serious social problem (Dal Lago 1990, p.71; Maneri 2009; Ter Wal 2000). This entailed securitarian discourses in public debates, and created the perception that the migratory issue was a question of public order and a threat due to the high occurrence of criminal and deviant behaviour (Dal Lago 1990). Moreover, anti-immigrant positions were built upon cultural rather than racial difference, because immigrants were not considered to match with the Italian culture. In any case, the economic consequences of migration damaging Italians has been a recurrent issue in which the construction of ‘out-groups’ has been embedded.

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As regards the analysis of 'crisis-invasion' discourses, the representation of economic migrants, refugees and asylum seekers as invaders is first and foremost promoted by Italian political parties. Rather than being a new fact in Italian politics, it can be argued that it constitutes the perpetuation of anti-immigrant and emergency discourses shared by Italian political entrepreneurs since the early 1990s. Following the arrivals of Albanian migrants on the Italian coasts in the early 1990s and, later, during the summer of 1997, and following crimes committed by migrants, political entrepreneurs triggered debates on how to address illegal immigration and security problems connected to the growing presence of immigrants in Italy (Ter Wal, 2000). Public anxieties became widespread and political parties proposed immediate responses to illegal immigration who might destabilize the public order. Although such discourses were common among right-wing parties, there is no lack of evidence that leftist party representatives and governments also reproduced such kind of perceptions (Dal Lago 1999). Claiming an invasion can be considered a vote-winning tactic, since it is a strategy able to convince voters that their own point of view is adopted; a tool able to bring together public opinion at both national and local level (Idem, p. 116).

Political Parties

The mainstream left party Partito Democratico (PD), which led the governmental coalition from 2012 to 2017, was the protagonist in regulating immigration during "migration crises", i.e. the one after the Arab Spring and that of 2015 and 2016. Colombo (2018) argues that the ex-prime minister Renzi and PD ministers and representatives tended to avoid categorizations as far as possible. They adopted neutral language when talking about migrants in order to compensate for the controversial securitarian and humanitarian discourses adopted in the public debate. However, several legislative initiatives (e.g. the Minniti-Orlando decree) contained measures to deter immigration, thus reflecting aspects of the emergency and crisis-invasion discourses propounded by mainstream media (Dal Zotto, 2014; Castelli Gattinara, 2017a).

Asylum and immigration issues were among the factors contributing to the defeat of the PD, and the emergence of anti-establishment parties as protagonists of the Italian political landscape, namely the Five Star Movement (M5S) and the League,

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which have formed the government coalition since 2018. The populist anti-establishment M5S has criticised the PD for misgoverning arrivals of migrants in Italy and for obtaining poor results from negotiations with EU institutions (Castelli Gattinara, 2017a). Although they do not have a definite position on immigration and asylum issues, M5S representatives have often accused NGOs of collaborating with human traffickers and shared the political program of its governmental partner, the League, on immigration issues. In addition, Beppe Grillo, one of the co-founders of M5S, has often taken xenophobic positions on his blog¹².

As regards right and extreme-right wing parties, the League, headed by the former deputy prime minister and minister of the interior Matteo Salvini, has declared the battle against illegal migrants as Italy's priority. Having always been an anti-immigration party, the League has emphasized the importance of Italy's territorial integrity threatened by migrant invaders who put the country's sovereignty and security at risk. Another political party that has been overtly hostile to refugees and migrants is Fratelli d'Italia. Its leader, Giorgia Meloni, founded this new far right-wing party in 2012 in order to capitalize on the weakening of Berlusconi's party and to recover the heritage of the old post-fascist party Movimento Sociale-Destra nazionale. A third actor adopting anti-immigration stance is Casapound, which was founded in 2008 and participated in the national elections in 2012. It was born as a far-right social movement and organized several demonstrations against asylum seekers, humanitarian actors supporting migrants' rights, and Catholic institutions. To be noted is that there is a convergence between the League and Fratelli d'Italia, whereas Casapound explicitly supported Matteo Salvini at the last elections and, then, sympathized the coalition between the League and M5S (Ambrosini, 2019).

In the context of the recent refugee crisis, 'crisis-invasion' discourses have been principally propounded by right-wing parties, and at times by the M5S. They have been embedded within securitization arguments concerning the need to defend society and its institutions against collective threats. This entails four main dimensions: (1) worries about the economic consequences of the cost of rescue operations and accommodation of refugees; (2) threat of further terrorist attacks; (3) replacement of

¹² <http://www.beppegrillo.it/>

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native populations and traditions with those of migrants; (4) and anxiety about public health.

Migrants and asylum seekers are represented as invaders who threaten the well-being of Italian citizens, and especially those in economic difficulties or who suffer from poverty due to high unemployment rates in the aftermath of the economic crisis of 2008 (Castelli Gattinara, 2017b). On the one hand, this reasoning is linked to the cost of Italian involvement in maritime search, patrolling and rescue operations. On the other hand, it regards the cost of refugee reception, and, in particular, the daily allowance paid to every asylum seeker. Both aspects are typical in right or extreme right parties' discourses, usually expressed with the phrase "Italians first" (*prima gli italiani*)¹³ (Campomori & Ambrosini, 2020), and it implies an indictment of the capitalist system (Ter Wal, 2000). Politicians adopting such discourses based on nationalist ideology maintain that the priority is to solve the problems of and safeguard the rights of the Italians, rather than those of migrants, who are perceived as invaders of the Italian territory. In the current debate, such positions have been common among the representatives of the League, Fratelli d'Italia and Casapound (Ambrosini 2019). For example, the leader of Lega and ex-minister of the Interior Salvini declared in relation to the numerous arrivals of asylum seekers at the end of August 2016¹⁴:

"It's an invasion purposefully funded and organized. Some people need slaves at 3 euros per hour to replace the Italians and Sicilians who are forced to run away to work around the world".

Apparent in this excerpt are various discourse strategies designed to manufacture political consensus or emphasize political attitudes (Diamanti & Pregliasco, 2019; van Dijk, 2004). Salvini contends that migrants' arrival is an invasion that serves the interests of those who profit from cheap and exploited labour. The portrayal of migrants as 'slaves' is promoted by those actors arguing that mass inflows serve the needs of the capitalist system to employ new cheap labour (e.g. Open Society Foundations funded by G. Soros, see Rea, Martiniello, Mazzola, & Meuleman, 2019). At the same

¹³ This expression often accompanies the logo of Lega in election posters (Appendix - Photo 1). It has also been used by exponents of M5S when promoting for instance benefits for Italian citizens (i.e. reddito di cittadinanza – citizenship income introduced by decree no. 4 of 28 January 2019).

¹⁴ Public talk transcribed from video published on Matteo Salvini's Facebook page, "Matteo Salvini in Sicily: it's invasion!" retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=10154036149053155>

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time, Salvini builds on the juxtaposition of 'us' (Italians and Sicilians, because Sicily has been the region that has received the biggest number of people rescued in the Mediterranean and suffers from unemployment) and 'them' (migrants). The difficult situation of the former is dramatized by the use of verb 'run away'. Salvini thus employs constructive strategies (Reyes, 2011) by creating an 'out-group'; but, on the other hand, his proposals can be seen as altruistic (slaves) as it refers to a system of values that considers the exploitation of migrant workforce as unethical.

Worries about the economic consequences of the cost of reception have been also common among representatives of M5S who have mainly focused on the operation of non-governmental organizations in rescuing refugees at sea and those involved in the reception system (Ambrosini 2019). M5S representatives have repeatedly shared extreme right-wing parties' positions against the role of NGOs in rescue operations. They have talked about "maritime taxis", in the sense that NGO members are connected with human traffickers and transport illegal migrants to Italy.¹⁵ At the same time, they have criticized former government coalitions for being too generous with daily allowances for refugees, since Italian citizens suffer from economic hardship. This view has been promoted with the use of another slogan, that of "hospitality business" referring to NGOs' "fake solidarity" towards migrants, since their goal is profit-making. An example of such discourses is provided by a television broadcast on TV7 to which the leader of M5S Luigi Di Maio was invited. Talking about immigration he said:

Our enemy is not at all the immigrant. Our enemy is the business around immigration, which causes dysfunctions in Italy. There are three things to do immediately: close the reception centres, like the CARA of Mineo, which are enormous: four thousand migrants in a municipality of three thousand citizens. We've already created a reception plan (of refugees) for small reception centres managed by the state; no more Cooperatives or NGOs that profit from them.

Definition of the enemy is part of the "othering" process (Reyes 2011). In the above excerpt, Di Maio presents as the enemy, not the migrants themselves, but the

¹⁵ This representation has evolved over time, and recently another slogan has been added: that of "pirate ships". This has been frequently used by Matteo Salvini to describe the arrival of vessels that illegally approach Italian coasts to disembark migrants. This representation is far from reflecting reality, considering how the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea defines piracy. <https://www.ilpost.it/2019/06/30/sea-watch-pirata/>

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phenomenon of profiteering from economic activities related to the reception of refugees. This perception may legitimize actions against those that make profit from migrants, i.e. third-sector organizations. Although immigrants are not directly targeted in this discourse, the frame of invasion is implicit in the phrase that more 'migrants' live in a locality in which there are fewer 'citizens'. This creates a contrast between 'immigrants' and 'citizens' (Italians) that can legitimize (local) policies of exclusion (Ambrosini, 2013; Ambrosini et al., 2020), and produce 'illegality' in everyday life and 'deportability' (De Genova, 2002).

Representations of NGOs as "maritime taxis" or "pirate ships" add another element in relation to the entry of potential terrorists into Italy. Concerns over terrorism have been raised by anti-immigration parties around Europe since the 2000s (Vertovec & Wessendorf, 2010). Terrorist attacks in various parts of Europe and arrests of migrants suspected of being associated with terrorism in Italy have fuelled political parties' allegations of links between illegal migration and terrorism (Diamanti & Pregliasco, 2019). For instance, following the arrest of four migrants accused of receiving funding for the purposes of international terrorism, Matteo Salvini stated that "for the umpteenth time, the link between clandestine migrants and terrorism is confirmed"¹⁶ (31 May 2019), or that "immigration is the Trojan Horse of terrorists"¹⁷ (22 January 2015). Invasion by potential terrorists therefore becomes another argument of those who maintain that immigration is a problem, and that uncontrolled immigration is favoured by irresponsible NGOs which are connected with human smugglers and subjects affiliated to terrorist organizations in Africa and Asia. Once again, the division and rejection of immigrants is constructed through what some of them probably could be ('terrorists') and the devious way they act ('Trojan Horse'), thus evoking fear and anxiety in citizens' mind in order to legitimize actions or gain consensus.

The invasion of illegal boat people is also linked to the deterioration of cultural integrity and identity of Italians (Ter Wal, 2000). This representation has traditionally entailed images of a united Italian nation that is challenged by diverse cultures. Representatives of right-wing parties have expressed anxieties about the future of the

¹⁶ <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/terrorismo-arrestati-due-etiopi-e-due-somali-finanziavano-1704502.html>

¹⁷ https://www.repubblica.it/cronaca/2015/01/22/news/terrorismo_gentiloni_rischio_infiltrazioni_da_immigrazione-105499647/

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next generations, which will be contaminated with cultural traits that clash with those of Italians. New arrivals may thus harm cultural and religious features of Italians, because the former will impose their own ones. Being Muslims and coming from countries which share different cultural traits, migrants are seen as a threat to national culture and the Italian way of life (Castelli Gattinara & Bouron, 2019; Colombo, 2018). Analysing the communication strategies of Salvini, Diamanti and Pregliasco (2019) refer to the 'invasion' frame that is recurrent in the former vice prime-minister's discourses, and they argue that other types of threats can emerge from this frame. Consideration of one of the interviews that the authors cite (RTL 102.5 radio station, 21/09/2015) shows how he is alarming listeners in relation to the eventuality that school classes may be overcrowded with migrant students:

Journalist: all this invasion (you are talking about), independently from who is responsible for it is then causing a large mixture of peoples.

Salvini: This is a problem of numbers, not of race. Only idiots now distinguish people according to their skin colour. My son goes to the public high school in Milan, there are foreign children from China, from the East, from South America. However, if there are six, seven, eight children from other countries who speak languages in a class of thirty children, it is a positive contamination. If, as in Brescia, out of 30 children, there are two Italians. This is not integration, it's another matter.

In this example, Salvini employs what is called 'construction of generalization through personal experiences' (Reyes 2011). The journalist invites him to comment on the case of a school in Brescia considered as a good example of integration although it has large numbers of migrant students. Salvini constructs generalizations by referring to his personal experience as a father whose son goes to a school where there are other migrant students. According to him, this could be a good example of 'contamination' among children. This form of positive self-presentation is typical among 'denials of racism' in discourses where 'speakers individually resent being perceived as racist' (Van Dijk, 1992: 89). However, the final phrase of his comment alarms listeners because Salvini builds on the juxtaposition of 'us' (Italians) and 'them' (migrants) through the use of numbers (two Italians and twenty-eight immigrants). As already said, numbers are commonly used as a means of legitimization (Vaara, 2014). The expression 'is another matter' indicates something different from integration or

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from a positive mixture; something dangerous for Italian schoolchildren's cultural integrity. In any case, it becomes obvious that, in this speech, he counterpoises two generalisations.

Last but not least, asylum seekers and refugees are positioned as invaders, in that they are bearers of dangerous diseases that can be transmitted to the Italian population. This discourse has been occasionally adopted by extreme right wing parties. Recently, Matteo Salvini has argued that "the right to health care is guaranteed to all people, but to immigrants (is guaranteed) the record in tuberculosis and scabies"¹⁸. According to him, it should not be excluded that these diseases can be connected to mass immigration and disembarking of migrants from African countries that do not share the same hygienic-health conditions as in Italy. Although such allegations are not confirmed by any statistical evidence, as Pasini and Merotta, 2018 show, it can be argued that they serve to activate feelings such as fears related to public health.

Overall, debates on how to cope with the so-called "refugee crisis" have progressively evolved into a conflict among political parties around asylum and migration governance. This became even more evident after the defeat of the PD in the elections in 2018, and the emergence of an anti-immigrant government coalition. The electoral triumph of the League and its leader Matteo Salvini in the European elections of May 2019 also demonstrated that the League had been able to capitalize on its crisis-invasion discourses, obtaining the role of that political actor able to resonate citizens' voices. In this context, such discourses have been used to legitimize a series of policies reflecting repressive logic against migration.

As regards NGO rescue operations, one of the actions taken by the Italian government in 2017 - consistently with the framework of EU policies on externalization of migration governance outside the EU territory - was the establishment of a new memorandum on cooperation with Libya. This agreement provided that the Libyan authorities would prevent sea crossings by efficiently guarding their borders and coasts. Another point regarded the functioning of the NGOs involved in migrants' rescue operations at sea. The Italian government invited third-sector actors to sign a

¹⁸ http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/topnews/2019/06/01/salvinida-migranti-record-tbc-e-scabbia_0f1d5eea-f30d-42e6-99fa-3028f78617ba.html

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code of conduct in order to prevent possible cooperation between NGO rescuers and human smugglers as controversial news reports had insinuated. In addition, the former government coalition between M5S and League voted measures (Salvini decree I and II, Law no. 132/2018) sanctioning NGOs rescuing people at sea with heavy fines (from 150 TEUR to 1 MEUR). Italian authorities have also taken the decision to refuse ships carrying rescued migrants entry into Italian waters, while NGOs boats involved in search or rescue operations could be confiscated. In particular, the Minister of the Interior acquired the power to bar migrant rescue boats from docking in Italian ports, or limit their transiting or anchoring in Italian waters for security reasons if the rescue operation is considered a possible crime in that it facilitates clandestine immigration.

Recent legislative measures have also signified the further decline of the Italian reception system. The former government coalition ruled by the M5S and the League promoted an amendment excluding asylum seekers from the SPRAR network¹⁹, thus making CAS centres the only facilities that can host them. This amendment also limited a series of services offered in the CAS centers (psychological and medical assistance, Italian language lessons, orientation to the labour market), as well as the payment that covers asylum seekers' daily needs, namely from 35 to 20 euros per day.

Mass Media

Mass media play a crucial role in the production of narratives on public issues, comprising those that regard immigration (Pogliano, 2016). Not only do contributions by the media entail reproduction of images and perceptions with regard to certain

¹⁹ The SPRAR centres are small reception facilities or private houses aiming to offer not only accommodation, but opportunities for integration. Local authorities are responsible to run this network projects, together with NGOs and associations on a voluntary basis. In particular, local governments have to propose a reception project and formally submit it to the ministry of interior so that they host asylum seekers. In 2019, only 1,825 municipalities (out of a total of more than 8,000) host SPRAR centres, most of which are concentrated in the Southern Italy where local authorities have seen it as an opportunity for economic development, mainly job creation (Ambrosini 2019). Although the ministry of interior encouraged municipalities to adhere the SPRAR network, resistance of local authorities and public opinion (mainly in Northern Italy) led to the lack of reception structures. In front of the increasing number of arrivals and the scarce willingness of some local governments to run such programs, the Italian Government created an extraordinary network of reception the so-called CAS (Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria). It was represented as an emergency response to the need to find accommodation for the increasing number of new arrivals. CAS centres are managed by various private actors (mainly NGOs, but also hotel owners and other conventional employers), bypassing local authorities. Yet, the whole planning has been at times demonstrated to be inadequate, while occasional cases of opaque accountability or collaboration with criminal organizations discredited the whole reception system (Ibid).

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events, but they actively take part in the process of social construction of reality. King and Wood (2001, p. 2) suggested that media information and images may condition "migrants' eventual experience of inclusion or exclusion".

A look at the academic literature on media and immigration in Italy reveals that most scholars have paid attention to the role of mass media in representing immigration as a social problem and the way in which media have criminalized migrants, producing "otherness" (Binotto, Bruno & Lai 2016; Dal Lago 1999; Maneri 1998; Pogliano 2016; Ter Wal, 2000). These works suggest that media have a share in depicting migration as a phenomenon entailing risks for the Italian society, by using linguistic and metaphorical aspects (i.e. invasion), arbitrarily hierarchizing everyday events with a certain logic, and negotiating meanings and opinions by public actors. The capacity of the media to do so derives from their quasi-monopoly in articulating symbolic power (Thompson, John, 1995), which enables them to set the agenda.

National daily newspapers and television in Italy have represented arrivals and settlement of refugees and migrants as a substantial risk for the Italian society. A series of reports on how migration is covered by mainstream media since 2012 give insights into how news items on migration reproduce invasion and crisis discourses (Associazione Carta di Roma, 2014; Barretta, 2015, 2019; Barretta & Milazzo, 2016; Milazzo, 2018; Osservatorio Carta di Roma, 2013). The analysis of media news in these reports is based on five narrative thematic sections: (1) arrival and reception; (2) inflows; (3) society and culture; (4) terrorism; (5) and criminality and security.

In the aftermath of the Arab Spring, the arrival of migrants by sea attracted media interest. News coverage was often accompanied by reportage making assumptions about a possible "explosion" of mass migration from Arab to neighbouring countries and Europe, with talk about "migratory bombs" (Osservatorio Carta di Roma, 2013). Although migrants were initially perceived as poor people in difficulty or at risk, and viewed in paternalistic terms, emphasis on security threats connected to refugee arrivals, and worries about invasion of clandestine migrants increased over time. Such scenarios were based on alleged high numbers of migrants entering the Italian territory illegally. It should be noted, however, that even if arrivals have almost always been perceived as an emergency, 'invasion representation' was less present or absent following dramatic events, like the shipwreck of Lampedusa in 2013. In such

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cases, even media disseminating anti-immigrant discourses used to limit hate speech (Associazione Carta di Roma, 2014).

The academic literature on the representation of migrant arrivals in the mass media suggests that 'crisis-invasion' discourses have been reinforced, since television and press have continued to focus on new arrivals, representing them as invaders forcefully entering a territory perceived as "ours" (Binotto, Bruno, & Lai, 2016; Bruno, 2016). Besides the accounts of shipwrecks and deaths, images and narratives of clandestine arrivals embodied the risk of violating uncontrollable maritime borders. Bruno (2016) underlines that this narrative had great symbolic power in provoking fears and anxieties among the public, since media seemed able to detect those illegal subjects remaining invisible to the police authorities. The repetitive broadcasting of images of illegal migrants reaching Italian coasts, and rescuers and authorities assisting them tended to provide didactic images of what constitutes immigration. In this context, Italians are faced by invaders wanting to "conquer" their land. One telling example of a crisis-invasion narrative linked to arrivals is the following title of a report by the Association Carta di Roma (Barretta, 2015): "Invasion is at our doors, one million refugees are about to leave Libya". In this headline, the newspaper uses the metaphor of the home to alarm readers about the forthcoming – according to their journalistic sources – arrival of mass inflows. This causes emotions such as fears and concerns about the future of immigration in Italy. Moreover, the title cites an exact number to reinforce the narrative of an 'invasion'.

According to Barretta (2015), the focus of newspapers and TV news broadcasts on immigration has gradually changed since 2015, emphasising more refugee settlements and less their arrivals. The public debate has been mainly concentrated on the governance of asylum seekers, and the predominant frame has been the widespread fears and anxieties about the consequences of immigration, thus constructing boundaries between "us" and "them". There have been many media reports of uprisings by local communities against possible invasion following the launch of SPRAR projects or CAS centres close to their homes (Lunaria, 2017; Tronchin and Di Pasquale, 2017). Over time, criticisms against unsuccessful migration governance by the left government coalition, and anxieties about the problematic integration of migrants have become more common. Some of the newspaper headlines in relation to the arrival of asylum seekers in Italy have been alarmist,

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presenting new arrivals as threats. In some cases, direct use has been made of the frame 'invasion' and the risk that it entails for local communities that will be overcrowded by African people. In other cases, fears are invoked through the use of catastrophic future scenarios with the use of numbers ("Refugee emergency will last twenty years"), whereas headlines report anti-immigrant voices of citizens who demonstrate against the arrival of refugees:

"Risk of invasion by immigrants: Lombardy and Veneto region close"

"Refugee emergency will last twenty years"

"In this way, we have chosen to become Africa"

"Uprising in Trevigiano (northern province), protests in Crema and Brescia, evidence of intolerance: no refugees here"

'Crisis-invasion' narratives in the media have concerned another issue: that of migrants' integration into Italian society and their interaction with Italian culture. Intolerance of the "diverse" and worries about the prevalence of new cultural behaviours opposite to Italian ones frame discourses of this kind. In particular, Western society is represented as being threatened by Islamic expansionary tactics, whereas integration seems impossible because new arrivals refuse to adjust to new societies and desire to impose their own lifestyles. This is typically reported in studies on immigration discourses, suggesting that perceptions based on prejudiced judgments of immigrants' ability to integrate in the host society legitimize repressive policies and rigorous controls (Van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999). Religious belonging thus seems to be the main source of exclusion in local communities (Barretta & Milazzo 2017): "In Lodi, female Muslim patients will be treated by female doctors and nurses" is only one of the newspaper headlines on invasion by Muslim refugees (Milazzo 2018). This example is representative of the role of some newspapers in building the juxtaposition 'us' (Italians, Catholics) and 'them' (migrants, Muslims) by referring to integration. The headline aims to create distinctions between Muslim migrants and native Italians, and the success of the former in imposing their cultural traditions and not respecting the norms in the host country.

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The fourth dimension of the xenophobic media narrative contributing to 'crisis-invasion discourses' regards fears of terrorist attacks and the settlement of possible terrorists in Italy. Following tragic acts of terrorism around Europe and arrests of migrants suspected of belonging to Islamic State or al-Qaida, some media claim that there is a clear link between terrorist attacks and Muslim immigration, assuming that the Islamic religion and the propensity to become a terrorist are positively correlated. According to Milazzo (2018), newspaper articles stoking fears of terrorist invasion in Italy revealed "the regions at terrorism risk", or claimed that immigrants fund Jihad and contribute to the expansion of the "Islamic network in Italy". In a similar way, media warned about the possible radicalization of extremists in Italy, making an explicit connection between the arrival of migrants and their infiltration in terrorist cells. Some news stories insisted on the illegal immigration effects on the second and third generations settled in Italy, because new arrivals may induct young Muslim migrants into jihad, forming new militants. *Il Giornale*, a conservative newspaper, stated that "Even the pope admits the risks of terrorist infiltration with immigrants" (Barretta 2015, p. 18), whereas another title referred to "Weapons and Koran: Islam will conquer us in this way". Once again, this kind of news coverage and opinion articles draw on nationalistic ideology and distinguish people between migrants and natives. The use of weapons by migrant terrorists and following the Koran's dictates are highlighted as the means by which immigrants could hit, thus emphasizing the assertion of a threaten to the integrity of the Italian state and culture. The use of the military term 'conquest' allows journalists to legitimize positions on the dangerousness of the entire migrant Muslim population. The Pope's position serves as a 'voice of expertise' (Reyes 2011) coming from the 'opposite side' in order to strengthen the newspaper's standpoint, .

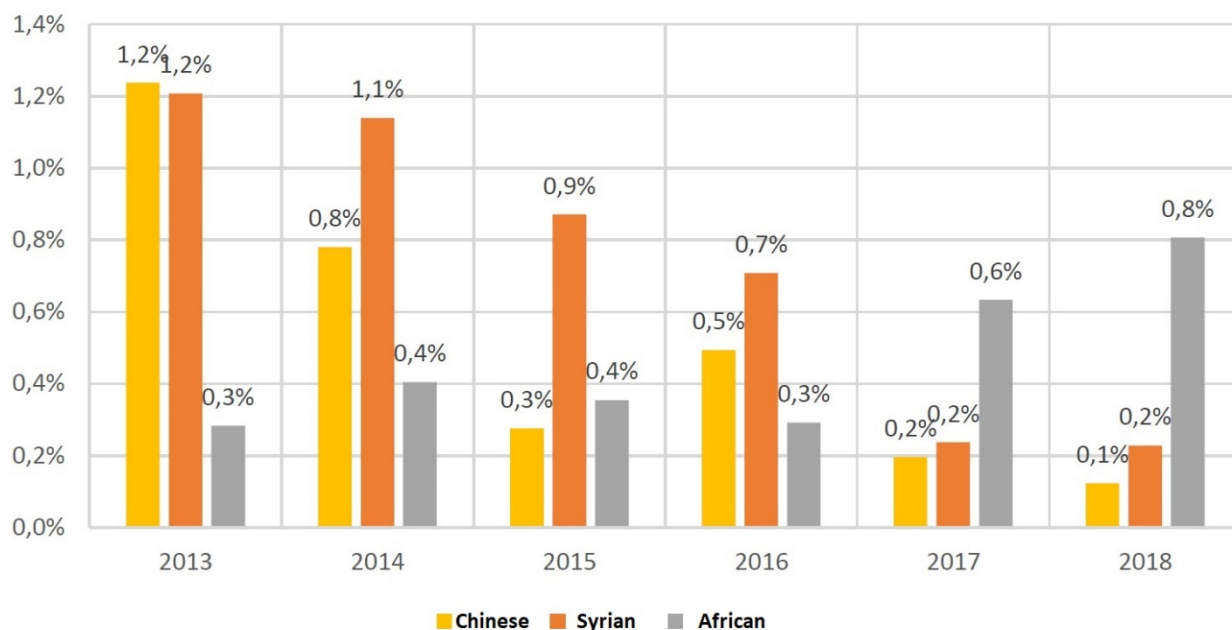
A significant proportion of media narratives about invasion concern criminality and security in local societies. Migrants and refugees are perceived as protagonists of violence and crime, thus being a threat to local communities. A large number of news items focus on the reactions of local societies to the refugee threat: "in this country, which is being invaded by refugees, people stand at the barricades". Other news reports refer to sexual abuse and rapes, representing migrants as violent and dangerous: "Horror in Rome. Woman raped by four Bengalis" (Milazzo 2018). In this frame, some journalists invoke statistical data to convince the public about the gravity of the situation: "foreigners commit sexual offences four times more than Italians do" (Barretta & Milazzo 2017). Put in this way, the construction of the other entails the

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criminalisation of the entire migrant population and produces a 'cultural threat to the otherwise cohesive society' (Yilmaz, 2016, p. 847). This reference to a threat to the host society can bring different sections of the electorate closer because it creates a sense of shared values achieved through the construction of an external threat, the migrants. In addition, the reference to the defence of the women serves to gain consensus among people not sharing fears against migration, the 'opposite side'. This recalls what Fassin (2010) stated on the pervasiveness of 'sexual democracy' into the European debates, that is concerns raised by Islamic alterity and troubling family practices (including polygamy, cousin and arranged transnational marriage) (Bonizzoni 2020).

Besides the invasion narrative, an interesting finding of the last report published by the Association Carta di Roma (Milazzo 2018) regards the evolution of the vocabulary used to represent immigration issues by the press from 2013 to 2018. Semantic analysis was employed to identify lexical forms used to describe immigration. This concerned the principal daily national newspapers, namely *Avvenire*, *Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica*, *Libero*, *La Stampa*, *Il Giornale*, *Il Manifesto*, *Il Messaggero*, *Il Fatto quotidiano* and *Il Sole 24 ore*. This report claims a shift of attention concerning migrants' origin, particularly from those coming from Asian or East European countries to those coming from Africa. While references to Chinese or East European migrants (or from the Balkans) decrease, there is a significant increase of the use of "Africa" or "African" in the titles of reports on migration, or the use of specific African nationalities such as "Nigerian", "Senegalese", "Tunisian", "Somalian", "Eritrean" or "Ghanaian". To illustrate this change, there follows a representative example comparing the use of "Chinese", "Syrian" and "African" when it concerns headlines about immigration (Figure 3).

Figure 3 – Penetration (% of the annual total) of the terms 'Chinese', 'Syrian' and 'African' into newspaper headlines (2013-2018)



Source: Milazzo 2018, p. 40

Because this semantic analysis concerns not only the right-wing but also the mainstream or left-wing press, it can be argued that constant focus on specific issues around migration and the use of certain words may be connected with the creation of distorted perceptions, as argued above. In other words, opinions that immigration inflows to Italy largely concern migrants coming from Africa may increase due to the unilateral coverage of immigration phenomena, especially when news on the most numerous immigrant populations in Italy such as Romanians and Albanians tends to be neglected.

Although many newspapers and television channels perceived refugee arrivals as an possible invasion, often distorting reality and generating stereotypes, the reports of the Association Carta di Roma made clear that other newspapers and TV broadcasts had a totally opposed perception of the reality, fighting against the stigmatization and de-humanization of migrants and refugees. As in the case of representatives of political parties, there was a polarization of media representations expressing pro-migrant or discriminatory views on what had been happening with the arrival and reception of migrants in Italy since 2015.

Social Media

Citizen involvement through social media has been shaping both public opinion and collective action over the past decade. Castells (2009) has claimed that new technologies enable horizontal and participatory social networking that, in turn, permits a kind of “mass self-communication”. These new forms of interpersonal communication have generated what Papacharissi (2015) calls “affective networked publics”, that is, people who have conversations on Twitter or Facebook on a daily basis, driven by and expressing emotions such as compassion, empathy, anger or indignation in a spontaneous way.

The recent literature shows how social-media based discussions play a crucial role in constructing discourses and perceptions concerning the so-called ‘refugee crisis’, and in shaping public attitudes towards migrants and refugees. Online publics express humanitarian (Barisione, Michailidou, & Airoidi, 2019) or security-concern sentiments (Guidry et al., 2018) that affect public opinion and views towards refugees. Similarly, Gallego and colleagues (2017) claim that tweets on refugees may disseminate generalized and stereotyped discourses that feed racism and xenophobia. This suggests that social media offer space for the formation of competing groups of users who turn immigration into a hot issue, thus contributing to the reproduction of ‘crisis-invasion’ discourses.

Since 2015, social media, in particular Facebook and Twitter, have become sounding boards for the construction of emergency, crisis and invasion discourses. In an exploratory research study on the representations of refugees and asylum seekers in Italy, Lucchesi (2017) claims that Facebook users contributed to the (re)production and spread of invasion narratives and negative perceptions on migrants, as the latter have a leading role in crimes and being a threat to the economy and citizens’ security and wellbeing. Diversely, fewer users adopted a positive stance towards migrants or communicated to defend their rights.

This kind of conflict often emerges after various events concerning migrant subjects. These events “sell” to Italian public opinion and acquire high symbolic importance: for instance, after the murder of a Nigerian asylum seeker by two Italians in Fermo, when the victim reacted to racist insults against his partner; or, when a priest

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in Pistoia posted a photo on Tweeter of some migrants enjoying a sunny day in the swimming pool of his parish (Barretta & Milazzo 2016; 2017). Starting from commenting on individual events, online discussion evolves into an ideological battle on the reception of refugees and asylum seekers between those who stand against migrants and their defenders.

Those who stand with 'them' (migrants), stand against 'us' (Italians who defend Italy against invaders). It becomes obvious that expressions of hate and intolerance in regard to refugees and their defenders entails the use of military language in the sense that the arrival and settlement of asylum seekers are perceived as an invasion. Such examples contain messages such as 'we' (united community) make efforts so that we are not invaded (*per non farci invadere*), or "we are sick of this invasion", or "uncontrolled invasion" (Milazzo 2018). Exclusion is legitimated not only on the basis of cultural diversity, but in terms of racial characteristics. In some cases, users' voices may also legitimate violence against migrants due to their exasperation, or reproduce conspiracy theories such as that of substituting Italian population with other races through migration from Africa and Asia (Kalergi Plan)²⁰.

As argued in the previous paragraphs, on the one hand, there is a cohesive society or community that stands united in terms of anxieties and fears about the effects of refugee arrival. This group of people tend to erect barriers between themselves and those who are extraneous to the space that belongs to the former. They claim to be the fighters for and defenders of the Italian cultural tradition (*Italianity*), that is, what, according to them, represents being Italian. It consists in being proud and assuming the task of defending Italy against the invasion of immigrants who seek to benefit from scarce resources in a certain locality. On the other hand, there are all those who defend migrants, and thus belong among 'them'; enemies of and threats to cohesive societies. They post messages of solidarity in favour of stigmatized refugees and migrants, and humanitarian-concern sentiments.

What becomes evident from juxtaposition of the animated online discourses is an ideological clash between opposing parties that accuse each other of abusing resources and rights. Those who stand against migrants used to accuse the government of those days (social-democrat coalition) and pro-migrant parties, local

²⁰ <http://antimassoneria.altervista.org/il-piano-kalergi-quello-che-nessuno-ti-ha-mai-detto-sulleuropa/>

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governors and civil society, while the opposite side emphasised moral responsibility towards migrants and accused anti-immigrant actors of being racists or fascists. Once again, what is worrisome is the fact that an increasing share of moderate mainstream media largely represent immigration as a process concerning mass inflows arriving from Africa which can better legitimate anti-immigrant voices in social networks. Therefore, it becomes evident that social media in Italy are becoming important means through which users reiterate xenophobia and an invasion rhetoric.

The experts: academics, journalists and intellectuals

Experts and intellectuals are key actors in shaping public opinion. Expressing their standpoint in articles and books, or accessing mainstream mass media, they can inform opinions and ideas around social issues. Because their arguments are considered “scientific”, their opinions are legitimized and enjoy automatic recognition by the political system and societies, independently of their scientificity (Dal Lago 1999). Although to a much more limited extent today, they have privileged access to the public debate, whether or not they exercise their skills. They can talk in the name of the science, and for this reason that they have the right to be heard.

On surveying academic literature, we found that there are some hard-copy books published on the issue of immigration and the refugee crisis in Italy, thus contributing in the reproduction of ‘crisis-invasion’ discourses. The authors of these books are often scholars and experts sharing moral, cultural and demographic concerns. First, the moral dimension regards the idea that native people are those really discriminated against due to the arrival of immigrants, because irresponsible legislators and politicians make economic resources accessible and grant rights to refugees at the expense of Italians. Second, the arrival of foreigners with inferior and, as incompatible, cultural traits in relation to those of Italians makes coexistence inconvenient, and puts Italian identity at risk, to the extent that migrants’ identities can prevail over that of natives in the future. Third, high birth rates among migrant families will signify their numerical superiority, thus taking work away from Italians and jeopardizing the Italian nation’s existence. All three dimensions trigger ontological discussions on concepts such as the “nation” or “human rights”, or what is the future of our societies. This, in turn, may cause anxieties and fears about what happens with the arrival of migrants, and give rise to sentiments of insecurity and fear.

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A recent work published by Ciabbari (2020) explores the ideological underpinnings of the frame of 'invasion' and analyses some hard-copy books reproducing 'crisis-invasion' discourses. One of these has been edited by Blangiardo²¹, Gaiani²² and Valditara²³ (2016) who argue that the Italian state's stance towards immigrants in recent years has been at times seen as a betrayal of the citizens it represents, that is, Italians. By granting everyone the right to enter and settle in Italy, pro-migrant governments infringe the pact between Italian tax payers and the State (Ibid. p.8). Valditara (Ibid., p. 10-11) suggests that, today, granting to everyone individual rights established in the aftermath of Nazi crimes is totally unrealistic. All those promoting and safeguarding these rights, namely socialists and progressive Catholics (the Pope included), contribute to the weakening of democracies, because they promote ideological internationalism and a universal citizenship that is not based on any *res publica*. Consequently, Italy cannot guarantee the defence of its borders and protect its sovereignty against immigrants, who are represented as invaders. Although it is not military, pacific invasion by migrants may challenge Italy's integrity, as was the case of the arrival of the Barbarians in Rome. To safeguard borders, and thus the Italian nation's survival, it is claimed that the erection of walls is of crucial importance, given that it was one of the factors determining the triumph of the Roman Empire. At this point, Valditara argues that walls and barriers, like those erected by the Hungarian government, can not only impede the invasion of unwanted migrants, but make the migration problem totally irrelevant for contemporary states; walls that have a defensive and not offensive character. This kind of discourse strategy appeals to emotions and builds upon nationalistic ideology. Valditara relates current migratory processes to historical events (Roman Empire) that serve to evoke images of a disaster in the readers' minds. These events that are linked with previous experiences of the territory in which they live (Reyes 2011) are much alive in the memories of Italians since the elementary school.

²¹ Gian Carlo Blangiardo is a Full Professor of Demography at the Department of Statistics and Quantitative Methods of the University Milano-Bicocca. Since 2019, he has been the head of ISTAT (Italian National Institute of Statistics).

²² Gianandrea Gaiani is a historical analyst of conflicts and strategic operations, and collaborates as opinion maker with various media. During the mandate of Salvini as Minister of Interior, he was his counselor.

²³ Giuseppe Valditara is Full Professor of Roman law at the Law Department of the University of Turin in Italy. A former member of parliament, during 2018 he was appointed Head of the Department of Higher Education and Research at the Ministry of Education during the coalition between M5S and League.

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Settlement of refugees and asylum seekers at reception centres is another reason for which Italians are neglected. Gaiani (Ibid p.49) shares the opinion that reception in Italy is a kind of business that costs the state a great deal of money, specifically EUR 3.3 billion in 2016; rising to EUR 4 billion, including EU contributions. According to Gaiani, this money goes indirectly to clandestine migrants through Italian intermediaries (operating in SPRAR projects or CAS centres), instead of going where it is needed most, that is, to Italians living in poverty or below the poverty line. Such criticisms concern all those involved in the reception of migrants and asylum seekers, from the State and authorities to NGOs and the Catholic Church. Migrants are perceived as living extravagant lifestyles in some of these reception centres, namely hotels with Wi-Fi and air-conditioning at the Italian tax payers' expense. What is considered unacceptable is that solidarity is offered to false refugees, namely young men from Western and Eastern African countries which are not involved in any kind of war but instead enjoy high economic growth rates. These examples of 'crisis-invasion' discourses are built upon nationalistic ideology and based on 'us-versus-them' comparisons. Migrants seem to benefit from the support provided by the Italian state and the EU. Migrants are contrasted with Italians, who are depicted as 'suffering from poverty'; migrants are perceived as engaging in morally questionable opportunism (Wi-Fi and air-conditioning), while Italians are seen as being deprived and suffering from the situation (see also Vaara 2014). Therefore, legitimization of such discourses is built upon a moral evaluation of the situation, because support to migrants, who are not really in need of international protection, is considered unfair.

Irresponsibility of pro-migrant governments and institutional actors is overtly manifested as they receive new arrivals who suffer from serious communicable diseases. Gaiani and Valditara (Ibid, p. 42-43) claim that rates of contagious diseases such as tuberculosis and scabies have increased among the migrant population in Italy and that the situation could deteriorate with new arrivals who could put the health of Italian citizens at risk. As already discussed above, such discourses elicit fear among Italians that may result in legitimization of restrictive policies and exclusion of migrants.

The second main argument of experts propounding such xenophobic ideas is that new arrivals are unprepared to live in "our" societies, as they have different cultural features and inferior habits and attitudes. Gaiani and Valditara (p. 47) argue that

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cohabitation between Christian and Islamic populations is inconsistent because, for instance, Muslim women do not enjoy the same rights as men according to their religious tradition. Moreover, it is suggested that recent arrivals have very little inclination to integrate and they resist assimilation into the local population. On considering the funding provided by Saudi Arabia for the construction of Koranic schools and new mosques all around Europe, Valditara reveals the existence of a hegemonic plan envisaging the spread of Islam in Western societies. Selection of migrants made on the basis of cultural homogeneity and greater propensity to integrate could have positive outcomes for the Italian economy. As already discussed, these discourses constitute ethnic stereotypes which have been also registered in different contexts in the past to legitimize restrictive policies (van Leeuwen and Wodak 1999).

Emphasis is placed on identity issues, i.e. the danger connected to loss of the national and cultural identity, not by those sharing extreme right-wing ideological values, but also by experts with more moderate opinions. Such views are often published in mainstream online newspapers or magazines such as *Reset*. For instance, Claudia Mancina²⁴ published an opinion article with the title "Immigration: the fears deserving respect" in which she maintains that concerns in relation to migrants are justified when immigration issues are connected to the fear of losing the Italian and European identity²⁵ (3 December 2018).

Low integration propensity and apathy towards assimilation with host societies are also reflected to?? public misconduct or deviance by immigrants. For instance, Galli della Loggia²⁶ (2015) justifies Italians' concerns and fears about their own security when they see migrants "urinating against the walls, getting drunk and making a noise, not paying for tickets on public transport, camping in city parks, selling counterfeit goods everywhere, invading common spaces (stations, sidewalks) to openly engage in shoplifting". Such a view of immigrants who may not respect public

²⁴ Claudia Mancina is a lecturer at the University of Rome Sapienza and has been deputy of the PDs (Left Democratic Party).

²⁵ <https://www.reset.it/il-trend-illiberale/immigrazione-le-paure-che-meritano-rispetto>

²⁶ Ernesto Galli della Loggia is Emeritus Professor of Contemporary History. At present, he writes for *Corriere della Sera*, which is one of the most influential Italian newspapers.

https://www.corriere.it/editoriali/15_agosto_02/migranti-non-servono-sermoni-editoriale-galli-loggia-de84c13c-38de-11e5-b1f9-bf3f6fff91aa.shtml

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order can be very influential in shaping readers' views, confirming and reinforcing stigmatization.

The assumption that Islam and terrorism are interrelated is shared by experts as well. Coming from Guinea, Ivory Coast and Gambia, illegal migrants connected to Islamist extremists have been able to pay considerable amounts of money to criminal organizations to arrive in Italy (Blangiardo, Gaiani & Valditara 2016). Hence, they should not be seen as poverty-stricken, since many of them belong to a prosperous social class in their countries. In other cases, migrants negotiate contracts with criminals in their country of origin. The latter are already connected with conational criminals in Italy, thus fuelling criminality in the host society. Once again, what should be noted is that the idea that inflows to Italy largely regard African migrants arriving by sea is reflected in various online opinion articles published also by (left-wing) mainstream media. The exclusive focus on flows of this kind could create distorted perceptions on immigration issues.²⁷ In this case, too, the authors construct their discourses by perceiving migrants as potential terrorists. Not only do they construct narratives on moral bases (it is unfair to provide help to migrants not coming from presumably war-torn countries), but they directly link mass immigration to (Muslim) terrorists. This evokes feelings among natives against all Muslim migrants in general, since new arrivals can threaten the lives of the former.

The refugee crisis has also gained attention among experts in demography, who reaffirm the dangers of an invasion. Although it could be stated that "the danger of an invasion has been (temporarily) overcome", Blangiardo (2018, p.81) claims that it is necessary to be careful about the demographic, economic and socio-political factors determining it. The most important source of concern is constituted by the arrivals from Africa - mainly from sub-Saharan countries - since there is no evidence of economic recovery and development plans in the near future (Blangiardo, Gaiani & Valditara 2016, p.22). Such arrivals can generate even more irregular migrants in Italy, where migrants today are 100 times more numerous than in 1961 (op. cit., p. 19)²⁸. In regard to the problem of immigration, Blangiardo maintains that Italians may refuse

²⁷ See for instance <http://temi.repubblica.it/micromega-online/la-crisi-dei-rifugiati-e-crisi-delleuropa-anche-dei-suoi-pensatori/>

²⁸ This observation is characteristic of Blangiardo's effort to create the impression that immigrants in Italy are too many.

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to work in low-skilled sectors, not because of the low prestige and difficulty of such jobs, but because they are discouraged by the wage compression caused by the presence of irregular migrants in the labour market (Blangiardo 2018, p.79). He also welcomes economic incentives to increase natality among Italian families, expressing concerns about the increasing number of immigrants in Italy that is "100 times more numerous since 1961". This is another example of how the use of scientific indicators can be a means of legitimization (Vaara, 2014), and how such economic rationalizations based on nationalistic discourse can constitute arguments to justify the exclusion of migrants. The reference for instance to '100 times more numerous since 1961' can cause surprise and fear in readers' mind; immigrants become more and more numerous, and natives are depicted as victims as they are not protected in a labour market where conditions are bad due to migrants' presence.

In the same vein, narratives of invasion by immigrants putting nationals' well-being at risk are also reproduced by experts who publish books or opinion articles in mainstream media. In his recent book, Federico Rampini (2019), a columnist of the left-wing newspaper *La Repubblica*, represents immigration as a threat for Italians as "it is not true that immigrants do those jobs that young Italians reject". Such narratives propounded by "supporters" of left-wing ideological values then become arguments for other experts seeking to represent immigration as a real social problem.²⁹

Last but not least to be discussed are two views considering invasion as the result of plans by developing countries or global economic actors. First, immigration is seen as the result of foreign policy decisions by specific states which intentionally create, manipulate and exploit mass population movements (Greenhill 2010). On this view, mass migration is a weapon used by countries which can use the arrival of (their) populations (or threat of it) in order to gain political, economic and strategic benefits damaging other states. In the Italian case, this can be reflected in the benefits that Libya and Turkey gained with agreements with Italy and EU in exchange for keeping flows of refugees away from the EU territory (Gaiani 2017). In the past, Albania has been demonstrated to gain advantageous exchanges from the Italian and Greece

²⁹ https://www.corriere.it/19_giugno_01/rampini-errore-sinistra-notte-cazzullo-corriere-repubblica-12cee77a-848e-11e9-b1c4-7ac365a010cf.shtml
https://www.corriere.it/19_maggio_25/raffaele-simone-l-ospite-il-nemico-garzanti-3962e142-7f0d-11e9-a444-6e83400b8609.shtml

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state by organizing mass emigration to these two neighbouring countries. In a different narrative, mass immigration from African countries is not represented as a strategy of poor countries to export migration, but as an organized plan by global capitalists and speculators. Totolo (2019) describes how the arrival of thousands of migrants in Italy takes places with the funding of capitalists such as George Soros, who sustains pro-migrant NGOs often connected with human traffickers. The aim is to import cheap labour into the Western societies in the name of global economy. Such funding goes to various NGOs which operate to rescue migrants or defend their rights.

The local level

Literature on how social actors at the local level (re)produce discourses on the so-called refugee crisis is very limited. 'Crisis-invasion' narratives at the local scale share similarities with those at the national one. They are based on frames representing local communities as homogenous and integrated sets of people with shared cultural traits and living in harmony on a certain territory. As in the case of social actors' discourses at the local level, argumentation strategies are established on a dichotomy between "us" and "them", where "us" are local actors (local governments and civil society actors) and "them" are refugees and migrants who threaten local communities, thus mainly reflecting nationalistic ideology. This can be an example of what Faist (2002, p. 11-12) calls "symbolic politics" or "meta-politics", in the sense that local events ("real world issues") may be linked to "fears around international migration". The concept of meta-politics indicates that feelings of fear and anxiety on the local scale can assume extraordinary significance when connected with fears about phenomena on a larger scale. Through meta-politics, local community actors avoid dealing with serious structural problems (economic hardships, lack of opportunities) by turning attention to the arrival in recent decades of refugees. In this frame, they reinforce ties among themselves and ally themselves with each another against "them", attributing responsibility for this situation to the latter, i.e. refugees and migrants.

Local governments

Local authorities have been demonstrated to have a stake in the (re)production of 'crisis-invasion discourses' against migrants, mainly in the eventuality of new arrivals in their areas. They reproduce anti-immigrant narratives when reacting against the reception of asylum seekers by either refusing membership of the SPRAR network or protesting against the possible establishment of a CAS centre in their area. On the one hand, although local governments are encouraged to join the SPRAR network, most of them are not at all interested in doing so. On the other hand, they may protest when prefectures announce the selection of a small town to host a CAS centre run by private actors. In this context, social actors are able to justify and legitimize their decisions linguistically, in order to reject the reception of new arrivals or exclude them from services offered to all citizens.

First, the discursive construction of 'crisis-invasion' narratives has involved the inconvenience caused to local citizens following the arrival of refugees and asylum seekers. Arguments of this kind may be supported through the discursive strategy of *mythopoiesis* (Val Leeuwen 2008) or *hypothetical future* (Reyes 2011) to legitimize rejection of new arrivals and their depiction as a threat. The following example is a declaration by the mayor of Bagnolo, a small town in the province of Brescia (10 July 2015, in Ambrosini 2019): "*At the beginning they talked about six people, but considering the size of the facilities and the purpose of tackling the emergency, the possible numbers could have been much bigger*"³⁰. In this case, the mayor made projections speculating that the municipality would be asked to host a greater number of asylum seekers than that announced, which could create problems for the local community.

Similarly, the mayor of Saronno, a satellite municipality of Milan, who prevented the establishment of a private reception centre, declared that: "*I do not want African males in proximity to schools attended by our girls*" (22 April 2016, in Ambrosini 2019; Marchetti 2020). In this case, he foresaw a dangerous future for young female citizens because he implied that African males would constitute a hazard for them. The negative other-presentation also involved a public campaign against the 'invasion of

³⁰ <http://www.palazzotenta39.it/public/rifugiati-a-bagnoli-il-no-e-i-dubbi-del-sindaco/>

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clandestines' by affixing posters across the city in which migrants were represented as illegal invaders, and thus a threat to the city (Marchetti 2020)³¹.

'Crisis-invasion' discourses and anti-immigrant initiatives have been adopted not only by mayors belonging to or sympathising with right and extreme-right wing parties, but also by some governors affiliated to the centre-left party. In Spinoteli, a small town of 7,000 residents close to Ascoli in the province of Marche, the mayor affiliated to the PD declared that "*the public administration is opposed to this mass reception*", when referring to the possible arrival of 37 refugees, considering it "a huge number"³² (23 November 2017, in Ambrosini 2019). In another small town in the region of Campania, Vitulano's mayor, elected with the support of the PD, stated that the municipality is "*in favour of migrants but not of an invasion*"³³ (14 February 2017). Once again, *rationalization* and creation of fears (emotions) as legitimization strategies are based on numbers and contribute to the reproduction of images of invasion.

Second, economic arguments are at the core of anti-immigrant narratives in local contexts. This reasoning is connected to the local structural and labour market characteristics, and is grounded on worries about the exploitation of available resources, employment and welfare opportunities. This has been expressed in several public speeches by municipal representatives around Italy. The mayor of Castell'Umberto, a small town in the province of Messina refused to host 50 refugees, stating that: "*In the South of Italy, youth unemployment rates reach 50%, and the arrival of migrants has triggered a sort of war among poor people*" (28 July 2017)³⁴. This example indicates that decisions are made according to evaluations based on rationality. The use of numbers is a classic means to legitimize decisions and, in this case, it refers to the costs of hosting people who will be in need of a job, since workforce demand in the local labour market is too low. This excerpt also provides an example of 'moral evaluation' as a legitimization strategy, because the arrival of asylum seekers and eventual insertion in the labour market would be 'unfair', and local citizens would feel angry as disadvantaged. This type of legitimization strategy is

³¹ http://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/cronaca/2016/08/17/sindaco-diffida-cittadini-su-migranti_8a5f22e0-9049-4cb8-92d2-6a351fdad78b.html.

³² <http://www.osservatoriorepressione.info/spinetoli-ap-sindaco-pd-sfila-casapound-linvasione-37-profughi/>
³³

https://www.ilmattino.it/benevento/si_agli_immigrati_no_all_invasione_vitulano_si_schiera_con_il_sindaco-2258489.html

³⁴ <http://www.today.it/politica/migranti-rifiuto-castellumberto-sindaco.html>

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often accompanied by claims concerning the falsity of applications for asylum (Marchetti 2020), that is, those by so-called 'bogus asylum seekers', which reinforces narratives against migrants.

Besides these concerns, economic worries are also expressed according to the logic of an eventual invasion by asylum seekers may destroy the image of tourist areas, thus acting as a deterrent for those desiring to visit the specific area for holidays. The mayor of Capalbio, a small village on the Tuscan coast declared that: "*We must welcome [asylum seekers], of course. But, here there are villas. And very luxury ones. With gardens. Finely furnished. In the historic centre*"³⁵ (14 August 2016, in Marchetti 2020). In the same vein, the mayor of Positano, a village on the Amalfi coast declared: "*The reception [of asylum seekers] is not compatible with our distinctive features. This is not racism, but protection of a place, and there are also reasons of public order and security*"³⁶ (22 February 2017, in Marchetti 2020). These excerpts evidence how new arrivals are perceived as subjects that do not fit in a specific place, since tourist resorts are depicted with images of extraordinary beauty, historical value and wealth. Their arrival will offend the aesthetics of the tourists who seek in these places anything but seeing people suffering (migrants). This strategy therefore appeals to emotions and creates an 'out group' whose arrival will be destructive for locals. At the same time, it is a repeal to the economic interests of tourism operators of these localities. The references to 'public order and security' trigger further fears in citizens and serve to legitimize decisions to exclude or reject the reception of refugees. In addition, such discourses indicate efforts of 'legitimization through a hypothetical future' in which places will no longer be attractive to possible investors because they are degraded by the presence of migrants. This idea is reflected in the following excerpt from a speech by the mayor of Ficarolo, small town of about 2,400 residents in the province of Rovigo in Veneto: "who will want to invest in Ficarolo anymore? Who will buy a home in Ficarolo anymore?"³⁷ (28 October 2016, in Marchetti 2020).

Third, opponents of immigration evoke *security* aspects concerning the arrival of asylum seekers. Such arguments are common in immigration debates with regard to

³⁵ <http://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2016/08/14/capalbio-larrivo-di-50-profughi-fa-discutere-la-sinistra-alcuni-territori-sono-speciali-le-accuse-ipocriti-radical-chic/2974710/>

³⁶ <http://www.caprinews.it/leggi1.asp?cod=8084>

³⁷ <http://www.rovigooggi.it/articolo/2016-10-28/arrivano-80-profughi-il-sindaco-si-ribella-parte-la-lotta/#.Wyzue1UzaUk>.

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illegal entries by immigrants that may challenge international security (Castelli Gattinara 2017b) because migrants are perceived as possible criminals and threats to the public order. However, securitarian arguments do not only refer to 'public order' or criminality'; local governments refer to *security* expressing worries about public health in relation to new arrivals. In this context, the arrival of refugees is seen as damaging to the physical health of Italians. In the province of Vicenza (Veneto Region), the local council of Albettone adopted a resolution against the functioning of a CAS reception centre in order to "protect the community" against "risks connected to security and the possible spread of diseases or infections" (20 July 2015, in Ambrosini 2019; Pettrachin 2019)³⁸. In similar vein, the Mayor of Camerata Picena, in the province of Ancona in the Marche region, made a public declaration claiming that there are health risks entailed by the eventuality of refugee arrivals (Marchetti 2020). Such discourses undoubtedly trigger various emotions in citizens by demonizing new arrivals. This process is linguistically realized by hypothesising that new arrivals are carriers of diseases that are dangerous to public health.

As already argued in the previous section on narratives at national scale, politicians often reproduce 'crisis-invasion' discourses and exercise power to legitimize their ideological positioning. Local communities thus represent themselves as the victims of an invasion or as being under attack, targeting not only refugees and asylum seekers but also prefectures, that is, the public authorities in charge of giving authorization to private organizations to run a host facility. To cope with such decisions and to resist arbitrariness of national power on local communities, local authorities may adopt resolutions that not only promote migrants' exclusion that are legitimized by 'crisis-invasion' narratives but predominantly serve to obtain or maintain political consensus (Pettrachin 2019). Ambrosini (2013, p.138) terms "local policies of exclusion" those "measures that in various ways target the exclusion of immigrants as a legitimate and recognized part of the local community". Measures of local exclusion regard different aspects because they can be policies promoting civil, social, cultural, and economic exclusion. In this way, local governments "confirm, in the public opinion, the seriousness of the measures introduced, their effectiveness in protecting citizens

³⁸ <https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2015/07/20/un-muro-in-paese-per-bloccare-i-rifugiati-lultima-sceriffo14.html>

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against the invasion of immigrants and the courage of local administrators in challenging vibrant oppositions" (Ibid, p.149).

Several examples across Italy demonstrate how local governments have adopted anti-immigrant policies against invaders, targeting also those who assist them. In 2017, the mayor of San Germano Vercellese, a small town close to Turin, was opposed to the establishment of a CAS centre in that locality, and as head of the municipal council he adopted a resolution entitled "Protection of the territory against invasion/immigration of populations coming from Africa and not only"³⁹ (Ambrosini, 2019). Considering that non-profit and religious organizations, as well as people sympathetic to the arrival and settlement of asylum seekers, should be discouraged from renting properties to asylum seekers, the council, affiliated with the League, proposed fines from 150 to 5,000 Euros for those favouring new arrivals. The relative resolution stated: "It is not possible to tolerate that the authority of the Mayor elected by citizens is infringed as regards the reception of migrants; that the hospitality, given hypocritically and at all costs, is a weight borne on the shoulders, on the budget and on the responsibility of municipalities (especially the small ones) the presence of hundreds of people alien to the local context and who, after a few months, will be knocking on the Mayor's door to demand assistance which very probably it will not be possible to provide."

In many cases, heads of municipal councils have not remained alone in the fight against new arrivals, but they have mobilized citizens to prevent invasion. The mayor of Borghetto, a small town in the province of Liguria, declared that "we cannot permit an invasion"⁴⁰ (10 May 2017). The council of the municipality, which is affiliated with the League, organized meetings with local residents to inform them about the risks connected to the arrival of migrants. Although such actions have been common, initiatives have been spontaneously taken also by groups of citizens or radical-right social movements, as argued in the following section.

³⁹ <http://www.vita.it/it/article/2017/08/29/la-delibera-del-comune-che-si-tutela-dallinvasione-delle-popolazione/144335/>

⁴⁰ <http://www.cittadellaspezia.com/cinque-terre-val-di-vara/politica/ivani-migranti-a-borghetto-non-possiamo-233477.aspx>

Social Movements and spontaneous initiatives by inhabitants

Mobilizations of contemporary right-wing movements have intersected with local authorities in resisting the arrival and settlement of migrants in local contexts (Castelli Gattinara 2017a). Instead of claiming racial superiority, such movements base their identity on new civic values, promoting the idea that the cultural characteristics of new arrivals are not compatible with those of Western societies. Recognizing the risk of Islamization of European liberal societies, they deny the right of Muslim immigrants to basic rights, and they condemn Muslims for adopting patriarchal views, such as not respecting gender equality for instance. This is a kind of incorporation of (rhetorical) liberal – or even left-wing ideological – values (Fassin 2010) used to legitimate resistance by local social movements against migrants.

On analysing the mobilization of far-right social movements in Italy against asylum seekers, Castelli Gattinara (2017a) argues that these organizations doubt the honesty of pro-migrant actors demanding respect for the human rights of refugees, and accuse them of offering “fake solidarity” to illegal migrants. This reasoning is based on the fact that, in some cases, pro-migrant organizations have provided accommodation in degraded facilities, whereas they profit financially from the refugee reception system? Members of far-right social movements claim that non-profit organizations are corrupt, and that refugee hubs are characterized by criminality and illegality (Ibid., p. 86). This view reflects what has been called the “business of hospitality”, as argued above. Some activists maintain that this is part of conspiracy that legitimates the invasion of Italy by economic migrants, and aims to destroy Europe and its values (p.88).

Primary data collected by Castelli-Gattinara (Ibid, p.87-88) evidence several legitimization strategies. Two members of far-right movements related their experiences in relation to the reception centres in their localities:

“I went with a group of journalists to visit the building that hosted the refugees. I believe it was unfit for habitation, not even by animals [...] our protests are also about raising awareness on the living conditions of these people”.

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"We obviously do not mobilize to divide or based on the colour of the skin. We are against the business of hospitality. We are convinced that someone is making money off this situation".

In these two excerpts, the description of conditions at reception facilities as inhuman ('*not even for animals*'), and, at the same time, the assertion that NGOs managing such facilities profit from doing so ('*business of hospitality*') indicates 'legitimization through altruism'. In particular, members of these social movements try to legitimize their actions against NGOs by claiming that their actions are beneficial for poor and vulnerable subjects, as refugees may be. In this way, as argued above, such discourses penetrate the semantic and political territory of the 'opposite side', that is those advocating migrants' rights. However, a clear distinction is drawn by supporters of far-right movements between true and false asylum seekers. In this way, actions and discourses against migration are legitimized through negative other-presentation and also involve moral evaluation focusing on the unfairness of providing the benefits of international protection to economic migrants who '*have invaded Italy*':

"We must create awareness that what we are facing is not a crisis. It is an invasion. Every day there are new arrivals. And they don't come from war-ridden countries. Unless there is a war in Ivory Coast"

Moving now to some recent events of mobilization by far-right movements, we see how these actions are legitimized by 'crisis-invasion' discourses. In Casale San Nicola, a neighbourhood in Rome, Casapound members, together with self-organized groups of citizens, demonstrated against the imminent arrival of asylum seekers in an establishment close to their homes. The neighbourhood committee stated that: "*250 families of the small district [...] consider not only that the building and the area are too isolated and inadequate for reception, but they fear that the arrival of one hundred migrants close to a population of just over 400 people will end up by becoming a real invasion; unmanageable from the point of view of security*"⁴¹ (17 July 2015, in Ambrosini 2019). Riots have occurred in other neighbourhoods of Rome, and in some cases there have also been acts of armed violence: for instance, when an

⁴¹ <http://romanord.romatoday.it/la-storta/rifugiati-arrivo-casale-san-nicola-proteste-scontri.html>

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Eritrean migrant was stabbed.⁴² Such violent actions and demonstrations against new arrivals are linguistically justified by triggering fear that the arrival of migrants will cause 'security problems'. The use of the adjective 'unmanageable' creates the impression that in the case of arrival the situation would be out of control, thus provoking fear among citizens. Moreover, the appeal to emotions through the use of numbers serves to justify invasion narratives and create an 'out group' (migrants) that threatens the lives of the 'in group' (the local community).

Local media

Locally-based TV and press have proved to be key players in covering immigration and ethnic issues. Franklin and Murphy (1991) show, for instance, how local media have contributed to the definition of citizenship in local politics, when media competition is low. Differently from national media, local media in Northern European countries have been shown to pay closer attention to the representation of immigrants, who generally enjoy positive coverage (Bennett et al., 2011). This is mainly because local media more frequently cover cultural events organized by immigrant associations that do not interest national media.

Positive representations of immigrants and ethnic communities are also present in local media coverage in Italy, although this coverage, too, regards community events or festivals organized by NGOs or local authorities (Pogliano 2016). However, many scholars suggest that local media are influential in disseminating crime news that stigmatize immigrants and specific immigrant communities (Maneri 1998). Local media stances towards immigrants thus differ within local contexts, some being more sensitive (Grossi 1995) while others frame immigration as a problem.

A recent study on coverage of the refugee crisis in 2015 reveals how local media can be influential in spreading 'crisis-invasion' discourses and anxieties about immigration (Ponzo & Pogliano, 2019). On considering two different case studies concerning refugees (news coverage of transit refugees at the central train station in Milan, and occupation of buildings by refugees and social movements in Turin), these two authors stress that local media have played a central role in shaping different

⁴² <http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/cronache/roma-rivolta-dei-residenti-contro-centro-daccoglienza-1435560.html>

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narratives on migrants, largely dependent on the interaction between local institutions and journalists. In Turin, media coverage practices predominantly required interviews with members of neighbourhood committees and local or national politicians belonging to right-wing parties who represented squatting as a threat to public order. Migrant supporters' voices did not lack media coverage, but they were underestimated, because reports always ended by invoking public order. In this case, the standpoint of local institution representatives who have different a view was rather absent or weak, so that local protest groups' voices were taken as reliable narratives of what had happened (Maneri 1998). Conversely, shared and coordinated narratives of institutional actors in Milan provided the basis for humanitarian discourses, and drove local media to assume an advocacy role that enhanced public opinion's sensitivity towards migrants.

Although few scientific articles deal with discourse analysis in local media in Italy, there are some materials that have been produced outside academe funded by third-sector organisations. A work by Tronchin and Di Pasquale (2017) analyses how local media in the province of Treviso (Veneto Region) narrate immigration. These authors suggest that local media contribute to the reproduction of narratives against migrants using stereotyped vocabulary regarding migratory phenomena and migrants. The following excerpt is a telling example of how local media can (re)produce 'crisis-invasion' narratives. It is taken from a broadcast by TV7 Match (28 October 2016) entitled "For some more black people?" with the aim of exploring the case of protests in Gorino, a small village in the province of Ferrara (Emilia Romagna region), where about 300 citizens protested against the arrival and settlement of 12 asylum seekers (women with children) by blocking the roads through the village. In the presenter's words while introducing the topic:

"We necessarily go back to talking about migration, reception, refugees or would-be refugees, and about a business that continues to proliferate despite attempts to curb it [...] 300 inhabitants (in a village of 600) took to the streets (to protest) against the arrival of 12 refugees, announced at the last moment with a certainly invasive procedure".

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There are many examples of how local media can contribute to the diffusion of crisis-invasion frames. One representative example is Milanopost.info⁴³ coverage on refugees hanging out at central squares in Milan (8 October 2017). This news is entitled "Riot of Citizens", with a subtitle "the gardens are invaded by asylum seekers who use free wi-fi [...] the residents: we need more patrolling". Throughout this article, stigmatization of migrants and fears of their presence are omnipresent: "No one ever deigns to obliterate the ticket," bus passengers said; "They (migrants) urinate and defecate everywhere, they dirty the gardens, lie down on the benches and invade the dog areas"; "In the late afternoon the situation starts to become dangerous: we smell marijuana and see suspicious movements". A manager of the open space adds: "Above all women are afraid of going there"; "People get annoyed of some foreigners watching porn videos and jerking off"; "Mothers with children have given up the gardens". In this telling example, local communities represent themselves as the victims of invasion of people who do not respect laws, adopt deviant attitudes, and benefit from public goods belonging to Italian people. As regards the way in which such news are covered, there is a monopolization of local protest group voices that are considered as representative of the neighbourhood, in the absence of any other critical voice.

Concluding Reflections and Future Research

This report has shed light on those actors at both national and local level constructing and reproducing 'crisis-invasion' discourses related to the arrival and settlement of migrants in Italy and in local contexts. It has analysed their reasoning and the main dimensions (social, economic, cultural, public health, general inconvenience) adopted when claiming that Italy or local communities face the threat of invasion by migrants, largely male Muslim Africans. In so doing, it has elucidated the discursive dynamics in legitimizing their argumentation that shed clearer light on the ideological underpinnings of such discourses, thus laying the bases for the collection of empirical material in the context of WP3.

Although it has been argued that arrivals from Africa account for a small part of the overall migrant population in Italy and allegations about 'invasion' are anything

⁴³ <https://www.milanopost.info/2017/10/08/cittadini-in-rivolta-piazzale-susa-ostaggio-dei-migranti/>

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but real, distorted representations of the so-called refugee crisis have shaped public opinion and legitimated restrictive and exclusionary policies. In this context, issues concerning the majority of the immigrant population in Italy have been often neglected and debates on migration policies (i.e. new law on accessing Italian citizenship) have been suspended. Therefore, it can be argued that 'crisis-invasion' discourses on new arrivals can impact on the entire migrant population and discourage policies aimed at increasing immigrant integration.

In particular, the analysis of secondary data contributed to our understanding of the argumentative strategies of various social actors to portray migration in negative terms. Most of these strategies are based on appeal to emotions, that is, fear (by predicting threats in the future) and anger (by depicting asylum seekers as bogus and welfare scroungers). 'Crisis-invasion' discourses are predominantly based on the 'negative other-presentation' constructed upon a division between 'us' and 'them' which is closely linked to nationalist ideologies. However, it was not rare for social actors to draw on liberal, anti-capitalist or traditionally left-wing claims to support their argumentation and justify restrictive policies, as in the case of the advocacy of women's rights, the idea of the industrial reserve army, or the protection of poor sections of the Italian population.

The meta-analysis of secondary data also suggests that there is a link between the use of frames of 'invasion', 'threat' and 'fear' and other crises. First, one aspect of the so-called 'refugee crisis' concerns public anxieties and panic in relation to mass inflows and large numbers of migrants arriving in local communities. Sea borders are considered uncontrollable, whereas NGOs operating to rescue migrants are seen as enemies favouring the invasion. Second, the situation that characterizes the reception system is considered critical because, on the one hand, Italy should not provide help to all those migrants who try to cheat state mechanisms, and on the other, because this sector is perceived to be overwhelmed by Third Sector Organisations that profit from state funding. Third, very frequent was the connection between migratory phenomena and the outcomes of the recent crisis of 2008: for instance, lack of job opportunities and poor conditions in the labour market have been seen in contradiction to the protection of people seeking asylum.

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All these connections through different discursive strategies enable populist and right-wing politicians to legitimize restrictive migration policies or maintain/gain political consensus. In other words, institutional actors do not restrict themselves to public declarations, but they implement measures through bills and administrative acts that promote migrants' exclusion. In the same vein, xenophobic movements may legitimize demonstrations or actions against immigrants and their supporters. It can consequently be argued that the analysis of 'crisis-invasion' narratives serves to gain better understanding of how migration governance is shaped by crisis representations, which is one of the main milestones of this project

On considering social actors at different levels, it can be said that speakers at the national level deal with both arrival and reception that concern either the national territory or local contexts, while local level actors focus mainly on the outcomes of the reception of refugees in their area. In this context, local communities can present themselves as victims of decisions taken by the national government or institutions, and this can create tensions between the local and central administration, because local authorities try to bypass measures or policies implemented by higher levels of governance.

On comparing 'crisis-invasion' discourses related to recent migratory processes and those in the early 1990s when Italy started to become an immigration country (Ter Wal, 2000), there are many similarities, but some new features emerge or others are accentuated. Firstly, there is a new political attitude towards Third Sector Organizations, which are considered accomplices of the invasion because they are perceived as facilitating the arrival and reception of migrants. Secondly, it can be argued that a new kind of nationalism places a great deal of emphasis on the fact that Italian sovereignty is being infringed by both migrants and EU institutions that impose policies in contrast to Italian interests. Here, one can add the conspiracy theories concerning the role of international actors (i.e. the Soros Foundation) in the process of substituting the European population and in attracting migrant labour to Europe to make profits out of it. Furthermore, some other features seem to be accentuated. When constructing divisions between 'us' and 'them', much emphasis is given to individual characteristics such as gender (male) and skin colour (black), although clear racist discourses are not common. African males are often perceived as a peril in local contexts, while, in the past, such peril derived mainly from Albanians

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(1990s) and Romanians (early 2000s). Moreover, as migration is characterized by the arrival of people seeking asylum, invasion is linked to falsehood in relation to new arrivals' asylum applications. People are not only illegal due to the way they arrive to Italy, but they are also unethical because they aim to profit from state subsidies. It is also argued that the 'invasion' of different cultures does not regard only their inferiority in comparison with the Italian one, but it has also to do with religion. This element has been accentuated because Islam is seen as incompatible with the values of Italian society. Finally, security and public orders issues are much more connected to terrorism as well, while it is often claimed that invasion is organized and planned to serve capitalist interests.

In light of these considerations, future research should focus on a series of research questions such as: (1) how 'crisis-invasion' discourses affect immigration governance, direct exclusion policies (i.e. citizens' income' scheme), or weaken policies aimed at immigrant integration (i.e. law on citizenship), mainly after the implementation of new restrictive asylum policies; (2) what are the effects on migration governance due to the weakening of local authorities and criminalization of civil society actors who support migrants and refugees; (3) how has the 'crisis-invasion' discourse evolved since the 1990s and what are the implications; (4) how the on-going coronavirus COVID-19 health crisis shapes such discourses, and what is its impact on immigration governance and policies.

Last but not least, another interesting point concerns the conflict between pro- and anti-immigrant actors who reproduce contrasting narratives and adopt actions to support or obstruct/exclude new arrivals. There is evidence that numerous pro-migrant actors who adopt humanitarian discourses demonstrate solidarity towards immigrants and challenge policies of exclusion (Campomori and Ambrosini 2020). NGOs or Third Sector Organizations (TSOs), organized actors (trade unions, churches, and associations), social movements, and support groups which coalesce spontaneously provide services to migrants and asylum seekers, and apply political and cultural pressure, in the sense that they fight exclusion policies by acting as advocates for refugees and asylum seekers. In other words, by helping for instance rejected asylum seekers, or irregular migrants, they attenuate the effect of restrictive migration policies. Future research, therefore, could focus on how these contrasting discourses interact and shape migration governance.

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D.3.3 Working paper on the construction of the crisis-invasion discourse by different stakeholders in Italy

20Synthetic%20Report%20-%20Crackdown%20on%20NGOs%20and%20volunteers%20helping%20refugees%20and%20other%20migrants_1.pdf

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Appendix

Photo 1 – Election poster of the League - “Own people first” (*Italians first*)



Source: Retrieved from <https://medium.com/@melefabrizio/leggi-il-programma-67d96fc98ea3>

Photo 2 – Invasion - Local newspaper's headline on the arrival of Albanian migrants (9 August 1991)



Source: <http://archivio.lagazzettadelmezzogiorno.it>