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securitization, depoliticisation and politicisation
theories**

Author: Francesca Messineo

SAPIENZA - UNIVERSITY OF ROME
P. le Aldo Moro n. 5 - 00185 Roma T (+39) 06 49910563 F (+39) 0649910231
CF 80209930587 – P. I V A 0 2 1 3 3 7 7 1 0 0 2

Interpreting Italian asylum policies by linking securitization, depoliticisation and politicisation theories

Francesca Messineo

francesca.messineo@uniroma1.it

Sapienza University of Rome

ABSTRACT: *The contribution aims at analysing the latest evolutions of the government of forced migrations in Italy; securitization, depoliticisation and politicisation are therefore identified as relevant theories for studying this issue. Because they are seldom interrelated in the academic literature, the contribution develops an analytical framework that highlights the assonances and dissonances among them, as well as the coexistence and overlapping of these tendencies in current policymaking. Overall, emergency-based politics stand out as a main element for reading securitization, politicisation and depoliticisation as interrelated governing strategies. In its second part, the contribution attempts to first apply the framework to asylum policies, specifically to the so-called Security Decrees, which have determined a significant reconfiguration of forced migrants' rights in Italy. The analysis focuses particularly on the abolition of the humanitarian protection and the new norms for SAR NGOs, the new design of the reception system, and the everyday impact of the two decrees. The intertwining of securitization, politicisation and depoliticisation is significantly attested in the context under observation. Because a sound and analytic interpretation of this process cannot be offered at this stage, suggestions and possible paths for further research are presented in the conclusions.*

INTRODUCTION

Forced migration is a category broader than asylum, because many forced migrants flee for reasons not recognized by the international refugee regime (Castles 2003). This supports the assumption that asylum seekers' vast majority do not deserve any protection (Sales 2002) because they do not necessarily travel because of suffering and persecution, but mainly to improve their economic conditions. But asylum entails much more than the right to travel to a safe land, and forced migrants are the inhabitants of a political place in which global societies' rights are defined: belonging, citizenship, and identity are main battlefields of contemporary times (Brubaker 2009). In the last decades, migration flows to Europe have been often framed as crisis or emergency, with policies and political discourses clustered upon the image of a *European Fortress* to defend. Right-wing politicians blame the migrants for many social problems, rising consensus easily when they promise to close the borders. Forced migrations grew to be at the core of EU institutions' interest at least since the Arabic Springs' uprising in 2010, when asylum seekers started arriving in more consistent numbers due to geopolitical changes in the Mediterranean and Middle East regions. Summer 2015 has represented the pick of this process, better known as the "European refugees crisis".

Supranational, national and local powers and institutions have tried to cope with the issue, deploying a broad variety strategies that go from building walls and fences, to welcoming migrants and sheltering them in semi-abandoned peripheral villages.

However, this paper will not account for the multiple and layered responses to this global phenomenon; it will focus rather exclusively on a recent normative change that attempted to tackle the issue in Italy. Namely, the D.L. 113/2018 and the D.L. 53/2019, commonly known as Security Decrees and promoted by Matteo Salvini leader of *Lega Nord* in the First Conte Government¹. Dividing public opinion between enthusiastic supporters and firm opponents, these laws have radically transformed the Italian government of forced migrations by downsizing the reception system, abolishing the humanitarian protection, and posing further limitations for rescue operations. In the contribution, the decrees are analysed in the light of a theoretical framework that combines securitization, politicisation and depoliticisation theories. The main objective is thereby to review and combine the existing literature in order to analyse the latest evolutions of national asylum policies. Following this purpose different concepts are introduced, while tentatively questioning the entanglement between the political and technical government of forced migrations, as well as the role of emergency-based narratives and regulations in the overall process.

The article is structured as follow. In the conceptual framework securitization, depoliticisation and politicisation are identified as relevant theories for studying the strategies deployed to govern forced migrations in Italy. In the conclusion of this section, connections among the different concepts are highlighted and discussed in relation to the emergency-based approach that informs recent asylum policies. In the second section the new regulations' objectives and outcomes are presented and tentatively analysed in the light of the theoretical framework, showing how tendencies towards securitization, depoliticisation and politicisation seem to coexist and sometimes overlap. The conclusions point out the potential heuristic usefulness of interpreting asylum policies through these theories, whose interrelations are seldom discussed in the literature. In the final section, the contribution poses further research questions on the management and the political relevance of manmade emergencies.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The uneasy synthesis of security, emergency and humanitarianism

Migrations have undergone a long-term securitization process in Europe. Buzan et al. (1998) accurately describe the interconnection between external and internal security concerns in the international arena: nowadays security threats are identified in any field of social, economic and political life. They also clarify that securitization is a political process, the outcome of acts and speeches that simultaneously requires and allows actors to mobilize resources and expectations around a specific problem. In the last decades European welfare democracies have faced great socio-economic and institutional transformations, the resulting uncertainties and fears have often been addressed by identifying migrants as a main threat to stability (Heisler and Layton-Henry 1993). The EU integration contributed itself to this process (Huysmans 2000). Indirectly, because it

¹ A coalition government by *Movimento 5 Stelle* and *Lega Nord* (June 2018 – August 2019)

has prompted perceptions of instability about the erosion of territorial sovereignty, the fading of homogenous national identities, and the weaknesses of solidarity mechanisms. These are collective experiences often translated into opposition to and fear of immigrants. Directly, because the establishment of an internal free market and movement area (Schengen) combined with an increased cooperation on migration containment and border control activities, which made it easy to mark a nexus among asylum, economic migration, and illegal or criminal affairs (Galantino 2020).

External borders control is nowadays a main field of EU policies integration, bordering activities represent a complex and quite independent system of operations headed by Frontex. Together with expulsions and externalizations, this intergovernmental security approach has overall enhanced executive's discretion while lowering parliamentary control on this policy field. Asylum management is at the core of EU deliberation also with regards to the procedures for recognition and the definition of national responsibilities in terms of containment, reception and protection. The Common European Asylum System has hence established standards for national policymaking whose impact is complex and contradictory. Notwithstanding important concerns for the poor respect of human rights, the second most controversial issue is the opposition in character between Schengen principles and the role attributed to first arrival countries, which was sanctioned by the Dublin Treaty (1990) and further formalised by the Dublin Agreement (2006) and the EU Agenda For Migration (2015). The latter is known for the implementation of the so-called hotspot approach, whose aim is to limit asylum seekers' mobility and to collect personal and biometric data (Pallister-Wilkins 2016). From a critical perspective, securitization has therefore been interpreted as a structural strategy for the implementation of governmentality practices based on population control (Bigo 2002) that combine logics of care and control and are necessary for the safeguard of the hegemonic and European rationality (Pallister-Wilkins, 2020). These concepts, deeply entangled with the notion of humanitarism that we will soon discuss, help criticizing the assumption that securitization is linked with exceptionality, focusing instead on the day-to-day processes of institutional and political competition, surveillance technologies' production, and the management of socio-economic and political risks populations face (Reid-Henry, 2014).

However, securitization works in practice by framing problems as unexpected crisis or emergencies. These concepts combine features of exceptionality, threats on social well being, and the need for a prompt intervention in order to minimize uncertainty-related risks. Emergency allows institutions to dispense with ordinary rules and rights, and to subtract decision-making processes from the oversight of legitimate actors (Agamben 2003). The spreading of emergency-based policies and discourses can be interpreted as a consequence of the securitization of many fields of social life, and reflects an increasing porosity between the ideas of "normal condition" and of "moment of crisis" (Mindus 2008). The literature also highlights how the emphasis on unpredictability decreases the institutional capacity to put in place systemic and long-term responses, thus reducing the space for conceiving political alternatives (Calhoun 2010). Campesi (2011) analyses this process in relation to the "refugee crisis" in Lampedusa, and identifies securitization's main features in the presence of ambiguous and conflictive discourses, the questioning of the national sovereignty by supranational and subnational actors, and the steady violation of human rights.

Governing forced migrations as a perpetual emergency is ambiguous in nature, for it subordinates protection and humanitarian purposes to security concerns. Refugees' camps have been depicted as extraterritorial spaces in which humanitarian interventions combine with the deployment of social

control, containment and policing functions (Agier 2011). Solidarity is functional and rights cannot be taken for granted, eventually securitization processes allow rationalising and capitalising feelings of compassion, unease and insecurity. From one side, compassion represents a tool for practically managing and symbolically keeping distant disasters and instabilities (Pallister-Wilkins, 2020); from the other, moral panic (Cohen 1972) allows channelling social anxieties towards specific groups, often stimulating a reaction against the targeted population (forced migrants in this case). The latter concept has been investigated in relation with power, consensus and hegemony strategies (Hall et al. 1978) as well as with the response to risk societies' vulnerabilities (Garland 2009). Through humanitarian politics a mobile and temporary sovereignty is implemented, as well as a very peculiar form of transnational citizenship which main features are precariousness, partiality and revocability (Pandolfi 2005). Moreover, camps exist in an eternal present, which excludes past and future from the scope of action and fosters the implementation of a perpetual state of emergency (Agamben 2003). Asylum seekers and refugees are caught in this system and can hardly display any autonomous agency. Two concepts are central to understand both the impact of institutional and bureaucratic power on forced migrants, and the precariousness of their statuses: labelling (Zetter 2007) and civic stratification (Morris 2002). The first refers to the fractioning, transformation and politicisation of protection statuses, which is a very effective tool in order to differentiate legal positions, limit access to social rights, and promote institutional practices of exclusion. The second refers to unequal systems in which the attribution of a specific status shapes the relation between individuals or groups and the state, resulting in partial membership and differential assistance. Many scholars proved the usefulness of applying these concepts to the government of asylum in Italy (Marchetti and Manocchi 2016; Gargiulo 2017; Sciurba 2017).

Depoliticisation and politicisation tendencies

The literature on depoliticisation focuses on the changes undergone in the exercise of power, sustaining that decision-making is increasingly deprived of its explicit political character (Burnham 2001). Depoliticisation is a manifold phenomenon that can be observed in many contexts: deliberative arenas governed by non political mechanisms; the role of experts, technicians and entrepreneurs in decision making; challenges, weaknesses and new forms of citizens' participation; even the affirmation of a frame for public action which does not account for alternative visions (de Nardis 2017). Depoliticisation can be classified into governmental (or institutional), societal and discursive forms. Governmental depoliticisation entails the increasing display of neutral powers and regulatory structures that limit discretion in policymaking. It also gives power to non-public actors, as different as economic interest groups, technical agencies, civil society organizations, courts, media and many more. Depoliticisation can therefore result in the downgrading of policies to technical solutions, but also in the shielding of policy areas from short-terms interests. These tendencies are also a core interest of the control gap theory (Bonjour 2011), which affirms that national policymakers have less power over migration policies, due to the role played by national and international courts, as well as by supranational organizations. Societal depoliticisation is related to engagement and deliberation, it can be defined as a process that subtracts a topic from public debate, relegating it to the private sphere. This concept is very much intertwined with the one of discursive depoliticisation, which focuses on the "speech acts that make certain issues appear to be normal or natural" (Wood and Flinders 2014:152). In this way, political positions and decisions are pictured as neutral, unavoidable and determined by external forces. Therefore, even if they move from different assumptions, securitization and depoliticisation lead to similar outcomes,

because they both mobilise public attention, while offering a common sense and allegedly neutral solution that often relays on the marginalization and exclusion of the targeted subjects (Foster, Kerr and Byrne 2014).

Therefore, depoliticisation can be better understood as a set of governing technics that legitimise and mask the pervasion of state intervention and informal power; a process in which ideas and values play a crucial role. By attributing responsibilities to citizens' individual behaviours, the neoliberal narrative of rational choice matches depoliticisation, and the latter allows the former to shift from the market to the political realm. In this way, politicians can easily present technical solutions not only as necessary and effective, but also as morally just. In relation to the European "refugee crisis", Triandafyllidou (2018) points out that securitarian and humanitarian approaches have eventually merged in a "rational frame" that moves attention away from more divisive opinions, and allows picturing institutional responses in terms of neutrality and efficiency. Similarly, Bonjour (2011) has observed how the shift from rights-based liberalism to the neoliberal conception of "citizens' activation" can sustain the implementation of stricter migration policies. Depoliticisation tendencies in the Italian asylum regime have been analysed by D'Agostino (2017). She identifies main evidences of depoliticisation in the enforcement of extraterritorial governance that challenges traditional forms of sovereignty, and the abdication of responsibility to subjects and agencies that escape from political accountability. Furthermore, security imperatives allow marginalizing territorial decision-making processes, and the mix of securitarian and humanitarian logics depoliticise forced migrants, subtracting them agency by depicting them either as unreliable actors or as mere victims. Overall, policymakers' hyper-politicised discourses inform social depoliticisation, the latter to be understood as the lack of consciousness about migratory flows' complexity.

At the same time, international migrations are currently among the most strongly politicised issues in Europe. Hay (2007) defines politicisation as the extension of deliberation and public debate, which occurs when an issue moves away from the realm of necessity, grows to be considered as a problem of collective interest, and becomes the focus of legislative action. Undoubtedly, asylum is currently a very sensitive and divisive topic in the political agenda, and it represents a meta-issue for the framing of different policy problems. Krzyżanowski et al. (2018) investigate the ideological and discursive politicisation of the "refugee crisis" and observe how it is deeply intertwined with mediatisation processes. Media are increasingly important because political activity relays more on attention-seeking strategies, rather than on representation and policymaking. Thus, nationalistic and populist politicians and media use the issue to promote exclusionary political identities and forms of participation (Wodak 2017); while social movements and civil society organizations advocate for solidarity, and try to challenge the prevailing negative frame. Many contributions stress the relevance of local governments in mitigating restrictive national laws and in pursing civil society involvement; even if these relations have become increasingly conflictive (Campomori and Ambrosini 2020). Lastly, Cuttitta (2018) provides an interesting analysis of rescue activities as an attempt to re-politicised border management in opposition to the depoliticising effects of European policies. SAR NGOs have partially transformed humanitarian work in political campaigns, by developing counter-narratives about migrations and by explicitly contesting the externalization of border management to Libyan authorities. In this way, these actors challenge the common understanding of humanitarian action as a relief that pushes governments away from their responsibilities.

Drafting connections between the main theories

To sum up, securitization is firstly and importantly interpreted as a process of (hyper) politicisation (Buzan Wæver, and de Wilde 1998), for it always involves actors' engagement in a political struggle for the definition of problems. When securitization strategies are successful, a single response is accepted as unavoidable, the problem stops to be considered as a matter of political deliberation and is framed as something belonging to the realm of necessity (Hay 2007). This reduces the space for political imagination (Calhoun 2010) and lead to the enhancement of depoliticised mode of government (Wood and Flinders 2014). However, as the literature accounts (Campesi 2011; Mindus 2005), this process is less linear of what it may appear, this because normality and crisis increasingly overlap in contemporary politics and the latter seems to take place in a perpetual state of emergency (Agamben 2003). In fact, forced migrations' securitization is never completely achieved, and we increasingly observe hybrid forms of government in which securitization and politicisation variously combines with depoliticisation tendencies. The situation can be briefly sketched as follow. Media and politicians continue displaying important securitization strategies (Krzyżanowski, Triandafyllidou and Wodak 2018) at both discursive, and — at least in the Italian context — normative levels. Furthermore, the enhancement of emergency-based regulations allows mobilizing rhetorical and material resources (politicisation) and implementing policies oriented towards social control and the exclusion of target groups; but it also fosters the outsourcing of functions to non-public actors (depoliticisation) such as security agencies, the Territorial Commissions, and non-governmental organizations. Humanitarian actions generally lead towards depoliticised rather politicised modes of government. In fact they naturalise differential access to rights (Pandolfi 2005), allow the state to retreat from some of its fundamental functions (D'Agostino 2017), and help presenting problems as both natural and exceptional, hence not manageable by means of ordinary means. The framing of forced migrations as a perpetual emergency seems to underlay the overall process and to be sustained by both political and technical means. From my perspective, it is precisely the naturalization of social problems the key element for understanding the interrelation between security, emergency and non-political decision-making in the Italian government of asylum issues.

Two concepts have been identified that may help understanding what the naturalization of social problems entails in both practical and theoretical terms. The first is the concept of moral panic (Cohen 1972); securitization promotes unease and uncertainty, feelings that are channelled towards target groups, in this case the undeserving refugee and the illegal migrant. This prompts the rise of exclusionary political identities (Wodak 2017), and allows institutions to enhance broader social control measures (Zetter 2007; Agier 2011), which can be defined as covert (or depoliticised) governmental technics. Those negative perceptions and the related policymaking do not help solving the problem; on the contrary, they significantly sustain the securitization process itself, leading to an increase in marginalization that determines the spread of more feelings of insecurity across society. In this way a social emergency is normalised and even sustained by normative changes, and the problem perpetuate itself allowing for the long-term implementation of securitization strategies. In the insightful analysis provided by Foster et al. (2014), moral panic works simultaneously as a politicising and depoliticising factor, because it does mobilise public attention (politicisation), but offer a simple and depoliticised solution for the problem, that often simply relays on the exclusion of specific groups. In a second instance, the naturalization of social

problems is more directly linked to depoliticisation theories with respect to the increasing isomorphism between the market and the political realm (de Nardis 2017). In other words, neoliberal values of rationality and individual responsibility lead to the acceptance of technical solutions for political problems not only as something necessary, but also as something ethical. This idea has been mainly explored in relation to the field of political economy, but it may fruitfully apply to the context of international migrations likewise, as the works of Triandafyllidou (2018) and Bonjour (2011) attest. In conclusion, although the government of forced migrations is traditionally linked to securitization and politicisation theories, I would like to further explore its relation with depoliticisation processes, the latter to be understood as a set of technics and strategies that transform, rather than reduce, the space for governing relations (Foster, Kerr and Byrne 2014). This section has provided a synthetic and provisional account of some contributions that help drafting connections among securitization, politicisation and depoliticisation, also accomplishing with the objective to start exploring the role of emergency-based narratives in reinforcing or transforming these governmental tendencies. In the next section this framework will find a first and explorative application in the strategies deployed to govern forced migrations in Italy.

SECURITIZATION, POLITICISATION, AND DEPOLITICISATION IN THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT OF FORCED MIGRATIONS

This section aims at an initial application of the theoretical framework to the government of forced migrations in Italy, a policy field strongly characterized by emergency-driven legislation. Particular reference is made to the D.L. 113/2018 and the D.L. 53/201, the so-called Security Decrees, and their implementation. In order to carry out this empirical analysis, mainly secondary data have been used, provided by academic contributions, legislative and governmental documents, and NGOs reports. It is worth specifying that Decree Laws are temporary normative acts to be used by legislators only in case of necessity and urgency, although they are widely employed by policymakers in Italy. Decree Laws have therefore immediate validity but should be converted into regular laws within 60 days from their emanation, both the Security Decree have accomplished with this following stage of formalisation. The specific focus on these decrees justifies the narrowed time frame, which goes from 2018 to early 2020. Nonetheless, the overall process cannot be read through the lens of mere discontinuity, and it is important to keep in mind that the events analysed are part of a prolonged tendency in the Italian political arena. This is partially a consequence of path dependency and continuity in policymaking, and of the stickiness of historical processes such as differential inclusion and cultural othering. For the purpose of this analysis, it has to be mentioned at least the long-term political trajectory that frames incoming migrants as a security threat and a social problem. It is also important to account for the interplay of structural and subjective political and socio-cultural factors, as well as for the wide range of agenda-setters and stakeholders involved in this policy field (such as economic actors, civil society organizations, local governments, courts and international organization or institutions). The already mentioned Common European Asylum System is a key actor that influences the Italian asylum regime deploying a combination of veto-player and agenda-setter functions. Scholars (Favilli 2020) notice that the absence of an organic

corpus of asylum laws in Italy² enlarges the impact of EU regulations, sometimes triggering a conflict between the latter and (more favourable) constitutional norms. Overall, in Italy EU directives have been used for improvements in reception services, but harmonization purposes have also led to policy changes that decrease asylum rights (Di Pascale 2020). This is an important element in the evolution of asylum policies in Italy, which interacts with other supranational and subnational policy regimes (Caponio and Jones-Correa 2018), such as informal plurilateral consensuses (Oelgemöller 2011) and bilateral agreements, local governance (Campomori 2008) and the well-known Italian regionalism (Loprieno 2018). Lastly, the contribution does not account for the very recent modifications to these decrees approved in December 2020³, for it is not possible yet to observe their consequences and impact. The discussion is organized in three sections: the first discusses the humanitarian protection and the new norms for SAR NGOs, the second presents the main changes in the reception system, and the third accounts for the everyday impact of the two norms. Each topic is analysed in terms of normative objectives, legal consequences and practical implications. These processes are interpreted in the light of the theoretical framework; therefore this section represents a first attempt to chart tendencies relating to securitization, depoliticisation and politicisation in this policy field, and to find evidences that account for the overlapping between the two theories in governmental practices.

Illegality and arrivals

The D.L. 113/2018 (art. 1) has controversially abolished the humanitarian protection, which has been the main channel for asylum seekers to get a legal status in Italy. It is worth mentioning that humanitarian (or special) protection is an option permitted but not regulated at the EU level, which does not include this kind of protection in its own standards. Not having the EU clauses for the application of the most favourable standard (Di Pascale 2020), new and diminished categories are established in Italy, which in most cases do not give access to the second level of reception, lasts one year (or less), and cannot be converted into a working permit. The new rules have determined an increase in protection requests' denials — from 67% in 2018 to 80% in 2019 (OpenPolis 2019:11), as well as in the predictable loss of a previously gained regular status for many people. Differentiating among deserving and undeserving refugees and attributing differential mobility rights is indeed part of a prolonged tendency in Italian and European politics. It has been recently reinforced by the so-called hotspot approach (Sciurba 2017), which sees Italy as a EU frontline country for the selection and identification of asylum seekers. Overall, we can observe a process of labels' multiplication as it is described in the theoretical framework. Policy changes of this kind appear to be very much in line with the rational frame for policymaking that claims to better allocate resources (by offering quality services only to who really deserve them), and to solve political problems by means of technical and neutral solutions (in this case a more accurate classification of statuses). Nonetheless, this policy's most visible outcome is shrinking of protection and a parallel rise in illegality⁴, problems that are supposedly addressed by repatriation efforts⁵.

² The Italian Constitution's principles referring to asylum (Article 3) have never been translated into an organic corpus of law, the national asylum legislations thus proceeds from the *Testo Unico Immigrazione* (1989) and has incorporated a stratification of EU directives and national Decree Laws.

³ D.L. 130/2020

⁴ Before the Covid-19 outbreak, Amnesty (2019:27) forecasted that irregular migrants in Italy would rise of at least 140.000 units from June 2018 to December 2020.

Because the latter do not constitute a very effective measure (Villa 2020), we can hint here how the securitization process works in practice. Making up problems rather than looking for long-terms strategies is not an unwanted shortcoming of the policy, it is instead a constitutive component of securitizing policymaking. As the literature highlights, this allows politicians to channel feelings of fear towards specific social categories and to justify the implementation of extraordinary policymaking. Notably, moral panic works both as a politicisation and a depoliticisation factor, for it raises attention about the issue without presenting truly alternatives visions for its solution. Moreover, while illegality is a hyper-politicised issue at the discursive level, labelling is a twofold depoliticising tool. It actually subtracts agency to the involved subjects, limits public accountability, and removes responsibility to decision makers, attributing it to external agencies (such as the Territorial Commissions and the courts).

The D.L. 53/2019⁶ further formalises the hostile and distrustful attitude towards forced migrants, by explicitly attacking rescue NGOs. In general terms, violent containment strategies such as externalization and repatriation are well-established practices in which a policy change seems impossible to achieve in the short term. More specifically, the events characterizing the “European Refugees Crisis” and the enforcement of stricter procedures to be accomplished by first arrival countries (Dublin Regulation) triggered a growing discomfort towards humanitarian intervention and rescue NGOs in the Mediterranean Sea. The explicit hostility towards these organizations is a prevailing tendency in Italian politics at least since 2016, which milestones are: the Conduct Code for SAR NGOs, the Memorandum of Agreement with Libyan authorities, and the so-called Close Harbours Policy that overtly stood in opposition to EU directives. The decree (Art. 1) limits or prohibits boats’ transit and stay in the Italian territorial waters if they violate migration related national laws. By doing so, it criminalises rescue activities performed by non-governmental organizations, and endorses the idea that our societies are under siege by a mass of migrants that do not deserve any help. The law has been widely criticised at the national, EU and international level (see, for instance, Camilli 2019); remarkably, a national Constitutional Affairs and Justice Commission arose multiple concerns regarding the violation of human rights, international agreements and constitutional principles. Notwithstanding, it gathered a high consensus in the Italian public opinion, and has been praised not only because of its objective to halt arrivals, but also because it claims for shared responsibility at the European level and opens up a conflict with those institutions. Scholars observe the crucial role played by media discourses in supporting narratives of suspicion, which overall contributed to the politicisation of arrivals, despite quantitative data show that the number of departures is independent from the presence of rescue boats, and arrivals started to consistently decrease since summer 2017 (Cusumano and Villa 2020). Interestingly, the D.L. 53/2019 represents a shift from previously depoliticised – or less politicised – modes of government (e.g. the Memorandum of Agreement with Libya) to explicit political strategies. So, reducing asylum seekers’ inflow is the objective of both politicised and depoliticised governmental technics, which seems to equally sustain the securitization of the issue, presenting it as a matter of sovereignty and security. In this case, depoliticised strategies demonstrate to be more effective than politicised ones in halting arrivals. Although no factual emergency justified the

⁵ In the D.L. 113/18: enlargement of maximum stay in repatriation centre (Art. 2) and consistent rise in repatriation funds (Art. 6). In the D.L. 53/2019: rise in funds for investigations (Art. 4) and for repatriation agreements (Art. 5).

⁶ Later law 77/2019

political and legislative actions performed by the Interior Minister Salvini, the ineffectiveness of these measures is not a major problem for those politicians that, through discursive hyper-politicisation, pursue consensus rather than solutions.

The reception system - a paradigm shift

The D.L. 113/18⁷ has transformed CAS into the ordinary and legit system through which asylum seekers find shelter and support until their request is examined. It declares (Art. 12) that refugees (5 years protection beneficiaries) and unaccompanied minors only will be admitted in the SPRAR system (renamed SIPROIMI), while asylum seekers will stay exclusively in CAS (or similar facilities). The SPRAR system, born in 2002⁸, was the ordinary mean for asylum seekers reception and is under the responsibility of Municipalities. CAS instead were firstly established as an extraordinary and temporary tool, necessary to tackle the increased number of arrivals from 2014 onward⁹, and they were slowly improved thanks to European directives on reception standards. Yet, the emergency character of CAS endures, and manifests in calls for tenders run directly by Territorial Prefectures (emanation of the Minister of Interior) and lower standards in respects to accountability and services provided. Although only a minority of potential beneficiaries was actually hosted in SPRAR till 2018, it was still the system through which asylum seekers' rights were granted. Instead, the new regulation formalises the divide between the first level of reception (mainly extraordinary) and the second (ordinary) one. Giovannetti (2019) describes this process as a paradigm shift: a unitary system with different stages has been converted into a binary system that strongly differentiates between migrants' legal status. The segmentation of the reception system decreases the effectiveness of social inclusion and has practical and everyday implications, for it comes together with another decree¹⁰ that sets new standards for the allocation of CAS management. The latter combines very poor standards for services (abolition of psychologists and language teachers, very few hours for social services, legal assistance, cultural mediators, etc.) with the erosion of public funding (from 35/32 to 21/26 euro per capita per day given to the managing body). Thus, a number of rights have been turned into privileges that only the most vulnerable, the authentic and deserving refugees will hold. A narrative of better and more efficient allocation of resources justifies the differential access to basic social rights, since providing rights and services to asylum seekers, which may not get protection, is interpreted as an economic waste. But it has been observed how this strategy practically favours scale-economy, which materializes in socially and materially segregated hospitality (Campesi 2018) run by for-profit actors (OpenPolis 2019).

In the new configuration of the reception system we can observe strong depolitisation tendencies. In the SPRAR local governments are very much involved; those actors are usually more kin to implement collaborative forms of government and have often challenged restrictive national policies. On the contrary, the CAS system has always been characterised by less democratic modes of government and a greater exclusion of local authorities from decision-making. With the application of the new measures, also many non-governmental organisations have been divested from the management of CAS, since this field of activity is no longer economically sustainable and

⁷ Later law 132/118

⁸ Law 189/2002

⁹ D.L. 142/2015

¹⁰ Circular n°14810, Interior Minister, 21/11/2018

socially valuable for them. Therefore, the securitization of the reception system has led to depoliticised forms of government, which seems to greatly rely on the rational frame described in the theoretical framework. The role of non-governmental actors remains ambiguous: from one side it complements governmental depoliticisation strategies, from the other it might be interpreted as a factor of re-politicisation, civil society participation and advocacy. However, the shift from a “humanitarian” to a “rational” management of the reception system is strongly attested in the reform objectives and implications.

Everyday Implications

The lack of recognition and a prolonged condition of suspension are constitutive features of the Italian reception system, and they have often been identified as main causes of marginalization and exclusion (Marchetti and Manocchi 2016). From an ethnographic point of view, this process can be highlighted through the story of Ade¹¹, a Gambian guy that was denied protection by the territorial commission in 2016, although his deposition has been poorly translated. He thus went through all the judicial levels with no success; trying not to fall into illegality, he was suggested to advance a new request of asylum. Experiences of this sort are not uncommon, forced migrants spend years fighting for a document able to grant them legal recognition in Italy; in the meantime they are stuck and unable to go forth. Ade spent long periods without a permit of stay; the only document he held was a spare paper-sheet with an appointment to the immigration police office, which does not give working or sanitary¹² rights. He is still hosted in a first reception facility; but he changed three of them, he saw the deterioration of living conditions and services, and he knows his chances to get a protection diminishes; at last, his hopes are fainting, jeopardized by bureaucratic obstacles and the spread of hate. Long waits have always been depicted as a main problematic aspect of the Italian reception system, both by supporters and opponents of stricter regulations on asylum. The D.L. 113/18 claims to cope with this issue, but instead it normalises and strengthens asylum seekers’ condition of suspension.

The very fact of turning the first level of reception into a “waiting system” enlarges asylum seekers’ uncertainties and frustrations, diminishes their chances for social inclusion, and further enhances the negative frame of the undeserving refugee and the illegal migrant. All in all, neither the marginalization of specific subjects nor wider social anxieties seem to be successfully tackled by the D.L. 113/18. On the contrary, these problems are further exacerbated by the new norm. Hence, this social emergency is sustained and normalised by normative changes, allowing more securitization strategies to be implemented for consensus seeking purposes. This process also stands out from the analysis of the reception workers’ experiences, which provide an insightful lens for the observation of policies implementation and outcomes (Lipsky 1980). These workers are aware of the dichotomy between humanitarian and security related purposes entailed in their profession, for they have to daily implement a controversial balance of controlling and helping functions. With institutions accomplishing more public order goals (Accorinti and Spinelli 2019), workers’ capability of being advocate of users’ needs seems to be confined to individualised spaces of

¹¹ Fictional name, this ethnographic observation has been collected during a 4-year long working experience in a first reception facility (CAS) in Rome. This example is presented because it helps highlighting a process otherwise difficult to grasp in purely theoretical or general terms.

¹² Except from emergency services.

autonomy (Esposito, Ficcadenti and Messineo 2019). Their ability to mediate against the strictest implications of the D.L. 113/18 seems to be very limited and increasingly fragmented by external and normative constraints, which contribute to the depoliticisation of social work, a topic that should deserve a more accurate analysis.

Lastly, a very interesting case is offered by the decision to preclude asylum seekers' enrolment in municipal registers (DL. 113/2018, Art. 13), which is a crucial stage in order to get an official residence. Residence has been a highly debated issue in current Italian politics because it practically grants access to many rights, but simultaneously entails formal recognition by and belonging to the local milieu (Gargiulo 2017). Despite the legislator's intention, the law text is ambiguous and suitable for contrasting interpretation. After an intense public debate, the Constitutional Court finally declared this norm unconstitutional. This attempt to reinforce asylum seekers' exclusion can be read as an evidence of normative securitization strategies, similar to the ones described above. However, in this case, it has been challenged by a process of "judicial activism" (Bonjour 2011) and societal politicisation deployed by the overall actors that contribute to the norms' interpretation and implementation (Ferri and Neri 2019). Civil society, local authorities and Courts have therefore represented an important shield against the normalization of emergency and exclusion, by demanding for the application of normal procedures and by defending the constitutional principle of equal treatment.

CONCLUSIVE CONSIDERATIONS

Securitization, politicisation and depoliticisation theories focus on different but intertwined processes. Because the interrelation of these three theories has not been empirically explored in the literature on forced migration, the contribution has firstly highlighted the assonances and dissonances among them, as well as their possible coexistence and overlapping in current politics. While securitization and politicisation have been often employed for interpreting contemporary asylum politics, the application of depoliticisation to this issue may appear more controversial and less significant. However, it is my opinion that the entanglement between the three concepts can help to deconstruct the nexus between the political and technical government of forced migrations, as well as the perpetual stretching of crisis and emergency management in the related policymaking. Three elements have been provisionally identified as particularly insightful: the notion of moral panic, which systematically perpetuates securitization and emergency-based forms of regulation and operates simultaneously as a politicising and depoliticising factor; the consolidation of a rational frame for policymaking, which moves from the economic realm to the political and moral sphere and sustains the assumptions that no alternatives are possible; the overlapping between depoliticisation tactics and the politicisation of individual behaviours, which makes it difficult, but not impossible, to pursue more solidarity-oriented political actions. Further research should assess the validity of this analytical frame, and explore in details how the three processes depicted above work in practice.

As a first stage of a more extensive research, in this paper we applied this framework to the analysis of the so-called Security Decrees showing the coexistence of securitized, politicised and depoliticised governmental strategies. Certainly, this is a very exploratory work, which does not allow organizing the observations in a consistent and systematic interpretation of the overall

process. Yet the analysis is successful in charting down clues that assess the potential heuristic usefulness of interrelating securitization, politicisation and depoliticisation theories for the understanding of forced migrations' government in Italy. In further research a more detailed analysis should be provided which encompasses a longer timeframe and, even more importantly, a more accurate observation of the strategies, interests and agency deployed by each actor in this policy field, including supranational and subnational institutions and organizations.

In more general terms, the contribution raises important questions about the instrumental use of emergencies in contemporary politics both at the discursive and at the normative level. The naturalization of problems, which is a relevant feature of the securitization process, seems to be sustained by both politicisation and depoliticisation tendencies. In my opinion the three strategies contribute to the enhancement of a broad emergency-based approach, which increasingly becomes the new normality, not only in the field of migration flows. Complexity is always addressed by pointing at the last piece of its consequences, hyper-politicised discourses intertwine with the silent retreat of institutions from their responsibilities, and normal rules are continuously overcome by extraordinary means. Policymaking and political acts do not aim at finding solutions, but at perpetrating the situation by disabling the ordinary social structure that may cope with the alleged emergencies, both in material (dismantling of the reception system) and in immaterial (norms that foster the targeted subjects' marginalization) terms. The impression is that we are consciously going towards the outbreak of a new "refugee emergency", which is manmade and politically desired. In my opinion, it is timely and necessary to further enhance the understanding of these governing processes, the specific ways in which they work, as well as their consequences at the political, social and cultural level.

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