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“Così è (se vi pare)”: Talking Migration to Italians ¹

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Abstract

The importance of the press’ portrayal of reality is well recognised, especially with respect to its capacity to affect public opinion. Narratives on migration found in the Italian press with respect to four periods – the 2014 European Parliament elections; the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016; the end of the *Mare Nostrum* operation in the Mediterranean; and an eventless week – revealed five main narratives: solidarity, responsibility, Westphalian, instrumental and humanitarian. Each of them had its own specificities, while all were informed by Italy’s condition as a frontline state with regard to migration – the EU’s gatekeeper, and its paradoxical state of living in a ‘permanent/potential emergency’, constantly torn by its inability to reconcile security and humanitarian needs. An understanding of justice as non-domination has mainly resulted from the analysis of the press here conducted, while poor has been the reference to migrants’ human rights.

Keywords: migration; Italy; political justice; media; narratives

That migration should resonate so widely and loudly in public debates was predictable, given both the increasing ‘politicisation’ of the issue and its intersection with the recent economic and social challenges facing many states. Italy is no exception, and its geographic position in the Mediterranean and institutional membership in the system of governance of the European Union (EU) (Lucarelli and Fassi 2017), together with ingrained domestic specificities add a distinct flavour to the direction and content of this debate.

In line with the blueprint of this Special Issue, this article investigates how the Italian press reported some important events having to do with migration in Europe. Specifically, it looks for the main ‘narratives’ that emerge with respect to selected events. Narratives are considered “cognitive devices which provide an interpretation of a complex event by making empirical claims of the

¹ ‘Così è (se vi pare)’, translated by some as ‘Right you are (if you think so)’, is a comedy by the Italian writer Luigi Pirandello centred on the impossibility of knowing the absolute truth as this is interpreted differently in accordance with different human perspectives.

causes and dynamics of the phenomenon in question and by pointing to causal relations between actions and events” (Lucarelli and D’Amato in this issue). Analysis aims to reveal the worldviews and justice claims embedded in them.

Debates on the ethics of migration and on what justice represents in this domain are taking on new vigour and for good reason: migration is one of those issues in which a synthesis between theory and practice has not yet been worked out, while the situation today highlights the urgency of narrowing this gap to provide ethically informed responses. What is considered appropriate for tackling the phenomenon, in turn, depends on which conceptions of justice gain priority in the press’ framing of issues. It turns out that different justice conceptions may co-exist.

In this article, five narratives on migration are identified – solidarity, responsibility, Westphalian, instrumental and humanitarian. They are then unpacked and analysed with respect to their referent of justice (e.g. states, citizens, migrants as human beings, migrants as specific subjects) and rationale (protection of the state territory, protection of citizens’ interests, protection of migrants’ lives, recognition of migrants’ rights, recognition of single individual specific needs, etc). –to explore what interpretation of events and related justice views are advanced. Justice is considered here in its ‘political’ dimension (Pettit 1997), and proposed by means of three possible understandings as formulated in the broader Horizon 2020 project (GLOBUS-Reconsidering EU’s contribution to Global Justice) informing this article. *Non-domination* sees the centrality of states (and their societies) as the primary actors and referents in the governance of the phenomenon, reaffirming the need to eschew arbitrary interference (Sjursen 2017). Justice is seen as *impartiality* when migrants and their rights are at centre stage, while justice as *mutual recognition* shifts the attention to the actors’ (migrants’ and receiving societies’) voices, as they are the most affected. The press analysis shows that the non-domination justice claim largely outstripped impartiality and mutual recognition.

A justice claim, hence, can only be derived after a process whereby

The article develops as follows: first, it underlines the relevance of the press debate for scholarly research and clarifies the research design underlying the article; it then provides a brief historical overview of Italian migration policy. After that, it frames the context of analysis, introducing each period and its distinctive features. Main narratives are then presented and the conceptions of justice identified. Some conclusions wind up the article.

The press and migration

The importance of the press' portrayal of reality and its capacity to affect public opinion is well known. As remarked by Giovanna Dell'Orto and Vicki Birchfield (2013, 1), "What we know about immigration processes and immigrants is shaped in part by news narratives, and therefore so are our opinions about policies on borders and integration." With respect to the Italian case, many commentators agree that the media have contributed to polarising the debate on migration (Sciortino and Colombo 2004), with mainstream newspapers and weekly news magazines publishing stereotyped frames of the issue (Pogliano 2014; Musarò and Parmiggiani 2014; Furia 2016). The terms used to refer to the phenomenon have not always been appropriate (Solano 2014) with frequent imagery of "invasion" and "emergency" evoked (Cuttitta 2012; Dal Zotto 2014), even though the Charter of Rome Association (*Carta di Roma*), founded in 2011, aims specifically at providing journalists with correct information on migration-related themes ([Carta di Roma 2018](#)).

The ways in which migration has been reported by the Italian press have been investigated by many authors. Bond *et al.* (2015) describe migration in Italy by means of 'words and images'.. Dell'Orto and Birchfield (2013) show "how professional, institutional, and technology-driven journalists' practices shape coverage of immigration". Alexander Caviedes (2013) examines the relative frequency of securitisation and economic narratives in the *Corriere della Sera* newspaper between 2009-2012, as well as in French and British newspapers. More recently, the refugee crisis has been the central focus, with contributions by Yasha Maccanico (2018) and Monica Colombo (2018).² Italy was also considered in the comparative evaluation of the impact of media attention on public opinion during the refugee crisis (Harteveld *et al.* 2018). Berry *et al.* (2015) shows that, during the refugee and migrant crisis, threat themes were the most frequent in Italy. Against this background, the specific contribution of this paper is the focus on specific migration-related events and the attempt to draw the main justice conceptions upheld from the narratives.

Research design

Narratives on migration retrieved from the press concern four events between 2014 and 2016, all of which had the potential to influence the debate on migration: the 2014 European Parliament (EP) elections ; the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016; the end of the Italian *Mare Nostrum* operation in the Mediterranean (October-November of 2014); and an eventless week (November 2016). Analysis of press debates on 'common events' (the EP elections and the EU-Turkey Statement) offers a comparative view of the narratives (and related justice understandings) that emerged in different countries. The end of the *Mare Nostrum* operation was chosen as the key event for the country in

² For the choice between 'refugees' and 'migration' crisis, see the Introduction to these articles.

order to understand press attitudes towards it and the role of the EU in addressing it. The eventless week provided an opportunity to look at press frames and embedded narratives and justice claims in a period when no major event had occurred.

The quality newspapers chosen for the Italian case were *Corriere della Sera* and *La Stampa*, two mainstream, bipartisan dailies,³ and the *Fatto Quotidiano* and *Il Giornale*.⁴ The last two newspapers were chosen to take different or more provocative narrations of migration into account, given the specific editorial line. The *Fatto Quotidiano*, founded in 2009, is sympathetic to the *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (M5S, Five Star Movement) and hence quite critical of traditional political formations (center-right and center-left). The *Giornale* is a right-wing newspaper close (especially in the past) to former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi.⁵ Only national editions were considered; letters, posts and interviews were not selected. While the sales and circulation of all four newspapers are quite low in general terms, *Corriere* and *Stampa* have a broader readership than *Fatto* and *Il Giornale*, which mostly attract a readership in tune with their editorial line.

Table 1. Data overview per time-period and per newspaper

	1) EP elections	2) EU-Turkey deal	3) End of Mare Nostrum	4) Eventless
<i>Keywords</i>	‘European elections’ and AND ‘migrants’ OR ‘migration’ OR ‘immigration’ OR ‘profughi’ OR ‘clandestini’ OR ‘asylum seekers’ OR ‘refugees’	‘Turkey’ and AND ‘migrants’ OR ‘migration’ OR ‘immigration’ OR ‘profughi’ OR ‘clandestini’ OR ‘asylum seekers’ OR ‘refugees’	‘Mare Nostrum’ AND ‘migrants’ OR ‘migration’ OR ‘immigration’ OR ‘profughi’ OR ‘clandestini’ OR ‘asylum seekers’ OR ‘refugees’	‘Migrants’ OR ‘migration’ OR ‘immigration’ OR ‘profughi’ OR ‘clandestini’ OR ‘asylum seekers’ OR ‘refugees’

³ They were chosen rather than other ‘mainstream’ newspapers, such as *La Repubblica* because they were easily accessible through the LexisNexis database.

⁴ Factiva was used to retrieve articles from these newspapers. Research on *Fatto*’s digital archive was required for two periods: the European Parliament elections and the end of *Mare Nostrum*, as Factiva did not show results on these specific topics. With the exception of these research periods for *Fatto*, all articles were drawn from print versions of the newspapers.

⁵ While most observation periods lasted three weeks, the observation span was reduced for the eventless week because of the combination of more generic keywords used. The keywords used are in English in the table if they have accurate English translations; exception are ‘profughi’ and ‘clandestini’, two terms used particularly frequently in Italian and that do not have a precise English translation. For the ‘European election’ period very few articles were available: hence, the choice has been made to extend the research in a second round to all articles generally displaying the words ‘migrants’ OR ‘migration’ OR ‘immigration’ OR ‘clandestini’ OR ‘profughi’ OR ‘asylum seekers’ OR ‘refugees’ and see whether a possible relation with elections could be found. (Predictably, the number of articles retrieved with this new selection criterion was significantly higher than in the other case studies (despite the use of similar keywords, the number of articles was more than that of the eventless week because triple was its period of observation (three with respect to one week); however, this second-round research has not extended the number of usable articles for the analysis.

Corriere della Sera	233	34	18	65
selected	1	27	6	12
La Stampa	153	25	7	62
selected	14	18	3	11
Il Giornale	100	19	29	30
selected	4	12	15	14
Il Fatto Quotidiano	296	22	15	14
Selected	2	10	5	6
				Total selected 160

Setting the stage: Italy and migration

Since the end of the Cold War and even more so after the first steps were taken toward a common migration and asylum system at the EU level (1999), migration and, in particular, immigration have turned into a highly politicised and divisive issue in Italy (for a comprehensive analyses of the Italian approach to migration, see Einaudi 2007; Geddes and Scholten 2016; Sciortino 2017; Pastore 2016). A frontier state, Italy has always been impacted by unexpected and massive arrivals of migrants. Yet, this has never driven the country to prepare for it, with the result that every new arrival is perceived, framed and coped with as an emergency. Over time, this has underlined the difficulty in dealing with the issue internally, but also created a complex relation with European partners (with reciprocal accusations of ‘free riding’ and ‘buck passing’).

There has always been an inherent attention in the nation to migrants, their rights, and their needs, Italy being a country of emigration until recently. The first (and thus far the only) comprehensive law on the issue, the Turco Napolitano Law of 1998 had the difficult task of keeping this attention while simultaneously trying to manage the issue in the context of a changing international scenario and Italy’s desire to enter the European club. Meanwhile, the progressive change into a country of immigration opened up space for more hostile views of the phenomenon, relating it to challenges of public order. This stemmed not only from the political turmoil in Italy, but also from the changing geopolitical situation at the end of the Cold War, the Balkan wars, the EU’s enlargement process and then the terrorist attacks in the United States (9/11) which raised ‘mobility’

as a critical and potentially problematic issue.

When the *Lega Nord* (Northern League), a right-wing, nationalist party which arose out of the ashes of the ‘first Republic’ in the 1990s,⁶ made it to government, the party was able to impose harsh tones on the centre-right coalition and, in specific instances, a clearly restrictive turn (Zorzella 2011; 2012). That was particularly the case with the introduction of the crime of illegal entrance and permanence and with the ‘push-back operations’ of 2009 in the Mediterranean, for which Italy was internationally sanctioned (Abbondanza 2017). This approach gained currency largely because of the failure to adopt full-fledged legislation and policies regarding the various aspects of the phenomenon, and to enforce effective implementation above all of reception capabilities and integration. Ultimately, this left space for ‘exceptional measures’,⁷ with consequent social tensions and marginalisation of migrants (Marchetti 2017; Godio 2017; ANCI *et al.* 2017.), an emergency approach which, with all its consequences, was also adopted during the 2015 refugee crisis (Castelli Gattinara 2017).

But the Italian migration and asylum policy was not only influenced by domestic factors. Italy’s role in the European system of migration governance was also instrumental in that it required the definition of an asylum policy compatible with Schengen requirements. Indeed, its absence was at odds with both a reality of increasing arrivals from instable areas and the presence of an extensive ‘right of asylum’ in the country’s Constitution (Asprone 2012). At the same time, Italy’s primary role as a frontline state in the EU’s Dublin system of examining asylum requests probably emphasised the urgency of restrictive measures. Largely incapable of coping adequately with the inflows of the past and now being the entry door to the European Union, the country increasingly adopted restrictive policies. Progressively, a narrative tilting the debate in favour of securitisation of the phenomenon gained currency in the press, while the dysfunctional nature of European rules to the detriment of frontline states was remarked as unjust in the political and the public debate, especially in times of large inflows.

Migration as an issue in four relevant periods

The four periods considered for the analysis were already imbued with ethical issues. Three of the periods, the ‘EU-Turkey Statement’, the ‘end of *Mare Nostrum* operation’ and the ‘eventless’ spans were specifically related to migration. The interesting element, then, was to see how migration was discussed, what elements were given priority, who the referents of justice were and the logic

⁶ On the dark sides of the 1st Republic in Italy see, among others, Di Giovacchino (2005).

⁷ Exceptional measures refer mainly to assistance and reception projects launched after significant increase in arrivals by sea, such as the ‘Northern Africa emergency’.

guiding the arguments made. In the case of the EP elections, the ethical challenge posed by migration or, less ambitiously, the role played by migration as an issue did not appear. The overall number of articles in the press was negligible. Notwithstanding the increasing tensions provoked by the mounting arrivals of immigrants via the central Mediterranean route in 2014, the unilateral military and humanitarian operation *Mare Nostrum* and the upcoming presidency of the European Union the next July (2014), the press (with few exceptions such as *La Stampa* and *Il Giornale*), failed to consider migration part of the debate on governance of the issue at the EU level.

Although limited, the debate on the EP elections showed a marked emphasis on the economic crisis and austerity measures adopted and on administrative, provincial and regional elections occurring concomitantly with the European ones, and the extraordinary performance of the Democratic Party with 40 percent of the consensus (doubling the second place M5S). The result was in stark contrast with the widespread growth of anti-system or anti-immigration parties/movements elsewhere, which represented the main incentive for the press to discuss migration in relation to European elections. For example, a terrorist attack at the Jewish museum in Brussels on 25 June, the day Italy went to the polls, occupied part of the press debate.

It was not the Statement between the EU and Turkey of 18 March 2016 itself that triggered most of journalists' reactions; rather, the previous extraordinary EU-Turkey meeting of 7 March (*de facto* already hypothesising the deal) and the following day, when discussions seemed to be conducted bilaterally by Angela Merkel and Ahmet Davutoglu. This raised many comments regarding the EU's internal governance of migration, and the role of external actors and Turkey in particular. After 20 March, very few articles were related to the deal, partly because of the terrorist attacks on the Brussels Zaventem airport and the Maelbeek metro station on 22 March, just two stops away from European institutions.

Despite the end of the *Mare Nostrum* operation and the start of the European Operation Triton, led by FRONTEX, on 1 November 2014, Italy continued to play a primary role in search and rescue operations and as a port of disembarkation. In the period under scrutiny, a crucial event for the future of the Italian political system occurred, that is, the transformation of the Lega Nord as it was known until then. On 19 October 2014, on the occasion of a local demonstration in Milan, migration was framed by the Lega's leaders as the glue between the northern and the southern parts of the country and a common, unifying threat. As a previously secessionist movement, the *Lega* (no longer *Lega Nord*) turned into a party embodying "less Padania [Po Valley] and more Le Pen" (Cremonesi 2014).

The eventless week was of particular interest since, not influenced by major events/debates,

it allowed for a genuine assessment of the issues chosen by the press. Unsurprisingly, the press focused particularly on challenges regarding ‘reception’. Much space was devoted to integration as a crucial issue (by all but *Il Giornale*), a subject quite absent in the other periods. Some articles were also devoted to the 25 November 2016 EP resolution, calling for the freezing of negotiations for Turkey’s entry into the EU: here again, migration and the possible demise of the EU-Turkey Statement came to the fore.

Framing by the press

TABLE 4: Main narratives emerged from the analysis.

	Subsets	Justice claim	Event	Main presence (newspaper)
Solidarity (lack of)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Intra-European - Among reception actors 	STRONG: non- domination	EU-Turkey Statement	<i>Corriere Stampa</i>
Responsibility responsible/irresponsible behaviour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Vs. migrants and asylum seekers - Vs. Italian citizens 	WEAK: non- domination; impartiality and mutual recognition	End of Mare Nostrum Eventless week	<i>Il Giornale Stampa</i>
Westphalian migration as a threat	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ontological for the Left - In economic, health, security, cultural terms 	STRONG: non- domination	EU-Turkey Statement End of Mare Nostrum Eventless week	<i>Il Giornale</i>
Instrumental migration used as a weapon	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - EU-Turkey relations - Alt-right/anti-immigration movements 	STRONG: non- domination; mutual- recognition	European elections	<i>Stampa</i>

Humanitarian poor conditions for migrants/asylum seekers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Migrants - asylum seekers 	WEAK: impartiality and mutual recognition	EU-Turkey Statement Eventless week	<i>All</i>
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Table 2 offers an overview of the main findings of the analysis: five narratives are identified and briefly explained. Certain justice claims stand out clearly from the press coverage (strong); others are only hinted at claim (weak).

Solidarity (the lack of)

The ‘solidarity’ narrative was largely present in all periods considered. It specifically raised the issue of burden sharing, but did so with respect to different issues, addressing various referents, embodying different rationales and hence raising multiple justice claims. This was by far the most frequent narrative at the time of the EU-Turkey Statement.

A first subset of ‘solidarity’ concerned relations among member states, providing a clear view of how internal migration governance was perceived by the Italian press.

This sub-set had three ramifications: the survival of Schengen (Ceccorulli 2019); the impact of the EU-Turkey Statement on Greece; and the potential inflows towards Italy as a consequence of the closure of the Eastern route to the EU. With respect to the survival of Schengen, the press underlined how the actions of some member states were creating bottlenecks (for example, sluggishness or non-compliance with relocation decisions). In a utilitarian perspective, some articles raised the question of the potentially negative economic consequences of the demise of Schengen. The lack of solidarity among member states and the EU-Turkey Statement required to halt the influx of migrants, were seen as related, the latter necessary to preserve the Schengen area plagued by nationalist outbursts. Dismay with the EU’s political weakness with respect both to its ability to take decisions and the potential blackmail from Turkey to which it opened itself was emphasised (see the ‘instrumental narrative’ below). Also, lack of coordination was denounced, and the leading role of Angela Merkel in negotiating with Ankara.

Hence the justice claim emerging most vigorously was non-domination, seen as the effort to prevent the actions of some states impacting on others. The survival of Schengen, achieved by sealing the EU’s borders, inevitably had to pass through a deal with a third state. As explained, for example, “Non è solidarietà verso migranti e rifugiati; è solidarietà fra Paesi di arrivo, di transito e di destinazione” [This is not solidarity towards the migrants and refugees; it’s solidarity between the countries of arrival, transit and destination] (Stefanini 2016a), underlining the centrality of states as

the main players in governance of the phenomenon. Summarising these conceptions are, for example, these thoughts taken from the *La Stampa*,

L'immigrazione (...) è un tema dirompente perché la crisi che ha innescato non si cura; al massimo si tampona. E' profondamente divisiva, scava al cuore della solidarietà e dei valori europei. Non ci sono soluzioni ideali. La scelta è fra il minore dei mali. Ma l'importante è che i leader scelgano. (...) Gli europei chiedono una mano al timone. Se non è quella dall'Ue, la chiederanno ai governi nazionali che non potranno non mettercela. Con tanti timonieri la barca europea perderà la bussola. Ogni Paese correrà allo scaricabarile. [Immigration is an overwhelming matter because the crisis it has triggered cannot be cured, at the most it can be held at bay. It is profoundly divisive, it corrodes the heart of solidarity and European values. There are no ideal solutions. The choice is between the lesser evil. But it is important that the leaders choose. (...) The Europeans are asking for help at the helm. If it's not the EU, they will ask the national governments which will have to provide it. With so many helmsmen, though, the European ship will lose its bearings. Each country will hurry to pass the buck.] (Stefanini 2016b).

Read in this way, the argument is also compatible with the 'responsibility' narrative, whereby the EU has a clear responsibility toward European citizens as well as its own survival.

A second ramification of intra-European solidarity on migration emphasised the burden the EU-Turkey Statement would place on Greece. All newspapers underlined this and some of them strongly denounced a clear disregard for the country's situation, hit by both economic and migration crises. As explained by *Il Fatto*, "*Spetterà alla disastrosa Grecia l'onere di far fronte praticamente alla crisi umanitaria dei profughi*" [It will be the task of devastated Greece to cope with the humanitarian refugee crisis] (Zunini 2016). Often, the country's bad luck was associated with that of the many immigrants and asylum seekers "trapped" in the country following the closure of the Western Balkan route in late 2015 and then the EU-Turkey Statement. In this sense, the 'solidarity' narrative crossed and fed into the 'humanitarian' narrative explained below.

Somehow related to the 'uneven challenge' facing Greece was a third ramification of the European solidarity debate, focused on Italy: the closure of the Western Balkan route and the extreme burden put on Greece would likely divert inflows from Greece to Albania and then to Italy. This possibility was invariably presented by all. However, unlike the concerns for Greece, the newspapers seemed to have forgotten the human factor in favour of a preoccupation with the 'invasion' (drawing on memories of the massive inflows experienced on the coast of Apulia in the 1990s). This approach resonates perfectly with what has been defined as "humanitarian securitisation", whereby migrants represent both the 'sufferers' and a 'threat' (Chouliaraki *et al.*

2017).

Accordingly, an ‘emergency’ rhetoric started to appear in the articles, implicitly or explicitly endorsing border protection. “The perfect storm”, “massive arrivals”, “the peril is materializing”, “a human tide” were expressions used by the press. Also, notwithstanding the criticism of the Turkey deal, the idea that this could be a ‘precedent’ for Italy in its relations with Maghreb countries to reduce the number of arrivals was mentioned. Particularly caustic were the words of *Il Giornale*, bluntly accusing the other European states of ruining Italy’s future. Closing their borders to the imminent increases in arrivals after the March 2016 Statement, they purposefully created a sort of “Mexicanisation” of the peninsula. For example,

E con le frontiere a Nord chiuse a doppia mandata, con buona pace della «solidarietà» targata Bruxelles, ecco che l'Italia diventa praticamente l'unica porta verso il Vecchio Continente, un grande parcheggio della speranza per il fiume costante di immigrati che punta a raggiungere l'Europa. [With the borders to the north double locked and in complete disregard of Brussels’ solidarity, Italy has practically become the only port of the Old Continent, a huge parking area of hope for the constant flood of immigrants aiming to reach Europe.] (Malpica 2016)

Here again, the narrative on the lack of solidarity and the undue burden on Italy goes hand in hand with the EU’s (ir)responsible behaviour.

The question of solidarity with Italy was also raised in the debate on the end of the Mare Nostrum operation and the launch of Triton (late October 2014). The issue revolved around the effective tasks of the European operation, which would still leave Italy in charge of rescue activities and the reception of irregular immigrants and asylum seekers. Finally, during the eventless week, a lack of solidarity with Italy was also seen in the nomination of Simon Mordue as Vice-President of the DG Home Affairs: the appointment of the British officer instead of the Italian candidate was described as a true slap in the face for Italy, a country at the forefront in the governance of migration.

A second subset of narratives on solidarity underlined the lack of cohesion among actors engaged in the reception of asylum seekers in Italy: regions, the central government, municipalities, search and rescue teams and people working in initial reception. Here, the emphasis on the lack of solidarity among actors produced an emergency rhetoric. This subset highlighted the failure to give voice to or consider the specific needs of the actors involved (both the Italian citizens and asylum seekers), thus stressing the absence of the conception of justice as mutual recognition.

To sum up, solidarity as a narrative mainly pointed to the dysfunctions of the European system of governance and the Italian reception system and their consequences. Discussions about global solidarity and burden sharing were scant, and appeared in only a handful of articles, revealing the

opportunistic nature of the debate, but also the treatment of migration as an ‘internal’ issue more than a global phenomenon requiring fair governance and responsibility.

Responsibility

Responsibility was a second narrative which found much space in the Italian press in the periods considered. As seen above, this narrative was often seen together with solidarity, given that uneven burden sharing was believed to be responsible for many of the problems arising in the governance of migration. In most cases, irresponsible behaviour was underscored. *La Stampa* described the migration governance, for example, with regard to the dire situation in the Idomeni camp in Greece during the refugee crisis as “continental inertia” (Zatterin 2014). Attention was clearly on the living conditions of migrants (hence advancing a humanitarian argument), but the ultimate aim of the press was to stress responsibility for this situation.

In some articles, the specific focus was on deaths at sea, migrants’ brutal exploitation by smugglers and the harsh conditions in camps in Europe. If at first glance there seemed to be a humanitarian approach, identification of the reason for this situation (policies of ‘openness’ acting like magnets) revealed a logic whereby the irresponsible behaviour of policymakers was to blame for the humanitarian catastrophe. For example, in *Il Corriere*:

In una situazione in cui occorre evitare qualsiasi iniziativa che possa mettere a rischio la vita dei migranti, non resta altra soluzione fuor che quella di controllare, per quanto possibile, tutte le porte d'accesso all'Europa. [In a situation in which all initiatives that can endanger the lives of migrants must be avoided, there can be no other solution than to control as much as possible all European entry points.] (Romano 2016)

But in particular *Il Giornale* insisted on this, referring mostly to the humanitarian situation in Greece, the end of Operation Mare Nostrum, and reception problems: open policies inevitably lead migrants towards illegality and hence marginalisation. This recurring theme can be called ‘humanitarian pretence’: while the referents of justice are migrants and asylum seekers, the solution to the injustice involves putting an end to ‘open policies’, which act as pull factors, andreiterating the need for state control. It is highly debatable whether the subject implies a justice conception of impartiality.

The end of the Italian Mare Nostrum Operation and the start of the EU Triton Operation also triggered a wide debate on responsibility: on the one hand, underlining the retreat from the important commitment undertaken a year earlier (October 2013) and its ethical implications; and on the other, questioning the future of the many persons disembarked in Italy, where a proper reception

policy was not yet in place. The shift from the national to the EU operation clearly created discomfort, albeit for different reasons. For *Il Corriere*, it was deceiving (and hence irresponsible) to speak of a “humanitarian handover”, as Triton was (and is) not a perfect substitute for the Italian operation: “Dovremmo ricordare che ogni miglio marittimo in più o in meno significa vita o morte per centinaia di naufraghi” [We must remember that one mile more or less at sea can mean life or death for hundreds of people adrift at sea.] (Buccini 2014). For *Il Giornale*, instead, Italy had for years “subito l’invasione senza reagire” [endured the invasion without reacting] (*Il Giornale* 2014), and Operation Triton was the continuation of a fallacious policy of attracting migrants and filling smugglers’ pockets. With respect to migrants disembarked in Italy, all media underlined the appalling reception conditions offered by Italy, a clear sign of government irresponsibility towards both migrants and refugees and Italian citizens. The press provided particular details of the situation at the Olympic village in Turin, occupied by migrants and asylum seekers with no clear occupation, described as “forgotten by the authorities”, “overcrowded”, in dire sanitary conditions, and , located close to “angry and tired people” (Pogliano and Ponzo 2017). *Il Giornale* insisted particularly that “*il fiume carsico della rabbia*” [the anger seething under the surface] was already showing: shanty towns and thousands of jobless asylum seekers clumped in reception centres were already becoming a potential powder keg (Bulian 2016). Some ethical issues were raised by the press with respect to reception conditions: “Perché dobbiamo far arrivare le cose all'esplosione prima di intervenire? Perché non ci dotiamo di una strategia dell'integrazione degli immigrati adeguata?” [Do we have to wait for things to explode before we act? Why don't we adopt an adequate integration policy?] denounced *La Stampa* (Sabbadini 2016), criticising the institutional void that had allowed the situation “to become gangrenous”.

A second argument stressing lack of responsibility with respect to reception was closer to the ‘humanitarian pretence’ mentioned earlier. *Il Giornale* directly condemned search and rescue operations such as Mare Nostrum, as guilty of aggravating the many challenges of reception in Italy. While the other newspapers praised the work of Mare Nostrum for having saved many lives, *Il Giornale* complained that it brought “a large amount of migrants” into the country. Undoubtedly, Italy’s haphazard policy, which saved so many lives but failed to provide (or even totally neglected the issue of) proper reception after arrival was also mentioned by the other newspapers. But the positive evaluation of the Operation and the answer to the question ‘what is responsible policy’ were never questioned in the way *Il Giornale* did. By making this argument, it intervened directly in the justice debate on what ‘primary responsibility’ of states should be.

The press emphasised the ‘problematic’ nature of migration in two ways. The first underlined the adverse reactions the issue of migration provoked in traditionally ‘open’ political formations, advocating policies of closure with a view to hampering the growth of radical movements. This argument was particularly clear in articles emphasizing how social democracies around Europe were becoming less sympathetic towards massive inflows. As reported by *Il Corriere*,

Le ondate di profughi (con i problemi di sicurezza e convivenza che si tirano dietro) stanno sommergendo un po' ovunque ciò che resta o restava di una certa idea di Europa, sospingendo persino socialdemocrazie collaudate e avanzatissime come quella svedese sotto l'Opa politica dell'ultradestra e del populismo. [The waves of refugees (with their inherent problems of security and coexistence) are almost everywhere disintegrating what is left of a certain idea of Europe, pushing even experienced and advanced social democracies like the one in Sweden towards the far right and populism.] (Buccini 2016)

A second way centred directly on potential problems related to migration. While most of the press reported this negative impact to be caused mainly by the massive disorderly arrivals of migrants, as well as the shortcomings in legislation and implementation, some accusations were directed at regular migration or pinpointed specific types of migration. Given the perspective adopted, this narrative unequivocally endorsed a primary state or society concern.

As seen, the possible scenario of a diversion of flows from the Balkans to Italy after the EU-Turkey Statement of March 2016 was reported with anxiety by all newspapers. The EU’s introduction of the hotspot approach (with full fingerprinting of all immigrants entering), seemed to be received by the press as a challenge Italy had long been able to avoid (Italy having not fully complied with EU’s legislation in the past). The requirement that all immigrants remained (at least for the time their single positions were considered) in the national territory inevitably raised the problem of reception capabilities. The economic challenge of governing migration was also pointed out, underlining for example the costs of the Mare Nostrum operation (*La Stampa* 2014); or the large informal market nurtured by irregular immigrants (Cottone 2014).

More emphatically, *Il Giornale* often framed the debate as a zero-sum game. Hence, it discussed the huge per-day costs of Mare Nostrum in relation to youth unemployment at 40 percent (*Il Giornale* 2014); and remarked that “Gli immigrati vengono sistemati in albergo, spesati di tutto punto fino a 1.000 euro il mese. Ottimo. Ma i connazionali pensionati che campano con 600 euro non sono contenti di osservare che è meglio essere profughi anziché italiani?” [The immigrants are put up in hotels, and taken care of to the tune of €1000 per month. Great. But surely our retired fellow countrymen and women who live with €600 are not happy to see that it’s better to be an

immigrant than an Italian?]) (Feltri 2014). Although only a few times with respect to the overall amount of articles selected, this newspaper also hinted at the connection between migration and terrorism and at the potential diffusion of the Ebola virus because of the unchecked arrivals favoured by Mare Nostrum. Furthermore, asylum seekers in reception centres were described as loafing about, protesting, breaking things, smoking, drinking alcohol and going with women. These articles all touched on the ‘responsibility’ narrative mentioned before. Some of the alarmist statements clearly had the effect of undermining the credibility of the principle of international protection.

A specific subset of this narrative, only present again in *Il Giornale*, advanced a cultural/value threat to Italians or more broadly to Western society, a sort of ‘clash of civilisations’. Denounced was the tendency to save migrants at sea with an “Islamic pedigree”, while disregarding Christians persecuted and trapped in remote countries (Biloslavo 2014). Or the contrast between asylum seekers’ norms and habits and those of the Western world was emphasised, raising issues of self-identification, cultural roots and faith (Allam 2016). The ‘clash of civilisations’ theme was not dominant overall, but it is worth mentioning, as it proposed an irreconcilable divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’ (the migrants) which clearly discarded two of the three justice claims considered.

With its emphasis on potential threats to the state and the well-being of society, the Westphalian narrative denotes a clear securitarian approach to the issue.

Instrumental

The fourth narrative, involving the instrumental use of migration, emerged particularly after the EU Statement with Turkey, but was also raised in reaction to the rise of radical-right/xenophobic movements.

All newspapers shared the idea that Turkey had the upper hand in the arrangement with the EU, evoking the likelihood of potential domination, and that Recep Tayyip Erdogan had once again used migration as a “political card” to blackmail the European Union. Europe is described as “kept in check” (Ottaviani 2016), having paid a big “political price” (Stefanini 2016), with Ankara imposing a “diktat” (Valentino 2016) and “doubling the stakes” (Gramaglia and Marra 2016a) on Brussels, “usando come ostaggi i circa due milioni di rifugiati siriani in territorio turco che possono riversarsi sulle coste europee” [using the approximately two million Syrian refugees on Turkish territory as hostages who can be pushed onto the European coasts] (Gramaglia and Marra 2016b). More emphatic is the language *Il Giornale* used to denounce the constant blackmail Erdogan exerted after the deal: “La Turchia minaccia di riaprire le porte ai migranti verso l'Europa per farci

ripiombare nell'incubo della marea umana di un milione di persone sulla rotta balcanica dello scorso anno” [Turkey is threatening to open Europe’s doors to migrants again, evoking the nightmare scenario of being flooded by a million persons via the Balkan route of last year.] (Biloslavo 2016). . Mostly of the press stressed the barter-like dimension of the Statement, with one Syrian from a refugee camp resettled in the EU for one Syrian irregularly arrived returned to Turkey: “un migrante a te e uno a me” [one migrant for you and one for me] (Battistini 2016), as well the trade-off of migration with acceleration of membership (Gramaglia and Marra 2016a). Clearly, the idea of ‘commodification’ and hence de-humanisation of migrants bought up the humanitarian narrative, emphasising human rights, often disregarded by Turkey. It also raised the issue of the outsourcing of migration governance to a third state, given Europe’s inability to solve it alone (Zatterin 2016a).

Nevertheless, the press insisted on the ‘inevitability’ of the Turkey deal, reiterating the relevance of states as primary actors in the governance of migration. Hence, *La Stampa* reported that the urgency to reach a common position “è stata più forte del fastidio davanti all'ennesima concessione” [outweighed concerns about the concession] (Zatterin 2016b). Or as the *Fatto* explained, “Nessuno fa concessioni di buon grado ad Ankara in questo momento. Ma tutti sanno che, se Ankara non collabora, la situazione già drammatica peggiorerà” [No one wants to make concessions to Turkey right now. But all know that, if Ankara doesn’t collaborate, the already dramatic situation will deteriorate even further.] (Gramaglia 2016).

A second argument concerning the instrumental use of migration underlined how right and xenophobic movements and parties nurture anxiety in the public by means of migration-related fears, with a view to increasing their consensus. All parties emerged from the analysis as sensitive to migration issues, but this was particularly weighty during the EP elections period. The issue was raised whether endorsing anti-immigration rhetoric to gain consensus would lead to more restrictive approaches to the issue.

Humanitarian

Although present in almost all periods considered and reported by all newspapers, the ‘humanitarian’ narrative did not drive the debate. This was mainly because the humanitarian argument upholding the narrative was not convincing. Particularly during the EU-Turkey deal and the eventless periods, the focus of attention was on migrants, but mainly on their conditions, their precarious situation. “Getting migrants on the front page is not per se a guarantee of fair coverage”, rightly clarified Gabriela Jacomella (2015). The language used by the press was often compassionate, merciful, exemplified by reiteration of the body-count at sea. Yet, attempts to see migrants as individuals (Fassin 2011), as holders of rights, and destination states as bluntly violating rights were scant.

Above all, humanitarian considerations related to solidarity, responsibility and instrumentalisation of the phenomenon were underscored. The uncertain destiny of migrants was emphasized both before and after the EU-Turkey Statement: migrants were described as exhausted, trapped, “stagnating” in Greece or the Balkans (*La Stampa* 2016), living in dire conditions. Clear (although often implicit) was the message that, in the battle to save Schengen, migrants ended up as a secondary issue. Seemingly, migrants’ vulnerable situation in Italy was recognised. Telling was, for example, the description of an informal camp in Rosarno (Calabria) and its comparison with the infamous Choucha camp in Tunisia (Giannini 2016). And yet this type of narrative was not powerful enough to instill the idea of the migrants’ centrality in the debate.

In concluding the analysis of narratives, a supplementary finding has to be highlighted: with few exceptions, little effort was made to frame and discuss migrants, asylum seekers and migration more generally in a broader debate regarding the governance of future challenges, their causes, the potential solutions and the directions to be taken. Absent these perspectives, the discussion was not broadened to alternative conceptions of justice.

Conclusion

The analysis of the Italian press coverage undertaken in this work uncovered five main narratives: solidarity, responsibility, Westphalian, instrumental and humanitarian. All were clearly informed by Italy’s condition as a frontline state constantly torn between securitarian and humanitarian inclinations. The ‘migration as a problem’ (Westphalian) narrative was the clearest in emphasising the centrality of state control in forestalling or coping with the challenges of migration. The argument was driven to the extreme by the ‘clash of civilisations’ view, a marginal argument but worth mentioning. Two other narratives, the ones on ‘solidarity’ and the ‘instrumental use’ of migration advanced a conception of justice as non-domination: the emphasis was on the modalities of migration governance, whether among EU member states or with third states. The narratives on responsibility and the instrumental use of migration by right or populist formations were also able to emphasise the lack of attention devoted to the actors, be they migrants and asylum seekers, local actors engaged with reception or Italian society. Overall, these narratives led to an overexposure of the consequence of migration over the Italian state and its society.

The debate that emerged in the ‘responsibility’ narrative was particularly interesting in that it questioned the meaning of responsible behaviour when applied to migration and led to a critical assessment of the use of ‘humanitarian’ rhetoric in the Italian debate. By putting migrants and their marginality at centre stage, *Il Giornale* was able to make an argument in favour of closing borders.

Humanitarian pretence, far from an understanding of justice as impartiality, was the leitmotif behind an argument which, no matter how contestable, represented much more coherent reasoning than the contradictory rhetoric of the other press. Nevertheless, the ‘humanitarian’ narrative was largely present throughout the periods examined. However, the scant attention to the different causes of outflows and the mismatch between the humanitarian rhetoric and an ‘impartiality’ understanding of justice (one based on migrants’ rights as individuals and obligations with respect to those rights) flattened the debate on benevolence, on compassion and piety.

Questions such as why borders have to be kept open (at least partly); why agreements with third states must never neglect fundamental rights/values; why saving migrants’ lives cannot be ‘traded off’ with saving money; or, finally, why integration must be an absolute priority, remained largely unanswered, with only a few attempts to dig deeper into these issues. Even when describing the chaotic situation in Greece or the precarious reception in Italy, little space was devoted to the possible challenge of ‘domination’ migrants might be exposed to because of gaps in legislation or the disregard of relevant rights.

Because of this, it is understandable why humanitarian and emergency rhetoric could coexist in the same article, along with the use of terminology that one would normally not expect from mainstream newspapers. The rapid shift from a humanitarian to a securitarian frame also found in previous research (Pogliano 2014) was perfectly reflected in the mounting anxiety over the possible opening of an Adriatic corridor as a consequence of the EU-Turkey Statement. This mirrors the seemingly schizophrenic approach of the Italian government which, over time, displayed clear moments of humanitarianism, such as in the Mare Nostrum operation, but also a harsh approach with, for example, the push-back operations of 2009 or the recently adopted Security Decree (December 2018).⁸ This is also seen in the substantial lack of attempts to frame the issue differently, pointing out, for example, the potentially positive contributions migrants can make to a country destined to lose population through and ageing,.

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⁸ Law 132/2018 sets restrictions both in the realm of international protection and immigration. Among the most important, a tight on humanitarian protection and the limitation of integration and social inclusion activities only to persons entitled of international protection (hence excluding asylum seekers). See http://www.interno.gov.it/sites/default/files/allegati/decreto_immigrazione_e_sicurezza_definitivo.pdf

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