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ABSTRACT

The migration crisis is analysed here in the context of the fundamental challenges which Italy faces through becoming a country of immigration in a period of recession. It is argued that there has been no serious debate in Italy on multiculturalism, or on religious freedom, despite the growing socio-cultural and religious diversity arising from population movements and international conflict. The analysis begins with the Italian government's attempts in 2015 to deal with migration and diversity, and the associated domestic conflicts at the levels of both party politics and society. This leads to a discussion of the meaning of the Christian/Catholic identity of the country in its changed conditions. The external dimension of Italian politics is examined in terms of both Rome's impatient calls for EU help and the weak political position of Italy in relation to the root causes of migration, whether through intervention or diplomatic influence.

The focus of this essay is firstly on the massive migration and refugee crisis which burst on Italy and then the whole of Europe during 2015. Secondly we analyse the interplay between the migration problem and the fundamental challenges which Italy faces through becoming a country of immigration in a period of recession. The country has not so far had a major debate on how to handle growing diversity and is now at the point where it can hardly be avoided. General talk about multiculturalism has been sharpened by the apparent implications of the mass population movement for social cohesion, identity, religion, security and foreign policy. We deal with these two sets of issues by first describing the background to the new migration pressures on Italy – for change can only be judged on the basis of the previous trends – and then what 'multiculturalism' means in the Italian context. Against these two backcloths the chapter then analyses the government's attempts to deal with migration and diversity in 2015 and the associated domestic conflicts, at the levels of both party politics and society. This is followed by a section on the external dimension, particularly that of the European Union (EU) to which the Renzi government made many impatient calls for help. The chapter ends by tracing events in the sphere of religion, given both the importance of the Catholic Church and the uneasy reactions to Islam in Italy, before attempting some brief conclusions and pointers to the future.

Migration pressures

Between January 2014 and January 2015 the total number of immigrants recorded as living in Italy from outside the EU rose by 55,000 (that is 1.4 per cent), to a total of almost 4 million [ISTAT 2015]. The country also witnessed a dramatic rise of boat people from less than 43,000 in 2013 to 170,100 in 2014; as of October 2015, it had already received 136,432 sea-borne asylum seekers or irregular migrants, while over 3000 had perished on the journey [Ministero dell'Interno 2015]. The scale and global reach of this crisis were revealed following the termination, in October 2014, of the Italian-led and European Commission sponsored search and rescue mission *Mare Nostrum*; in April 2015 two major shipwrecks left nearly 900 people dead and the UNHCR warned that the death toll on this sea route had risen fifty-fold compared to the previous year.[1]

These arrivals represent a seismic challenge for the little boot in the middle of the Mediterranean, especially if we consider that immigration was almost non-existent until the mid 1980s. It has since risen exponentially, posing enormous challenges to a culturally and administratively unprepared system. Besides the much discussed issue of national border security, the challenge becomes even more demanding if we consider that the influx has also shaken the relatively homogeneous demographic and religious characteristics of the country and of church-state relations. For instance Muslims living in Italy went from being a few hundred thousands in the early 1990s to over 1 million (i.e around 2 per cent of the Italian population) in the middle of the first decade of the new millennium [Allievi 2008]. While no figures are available for recent years,[2] the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2011) calculated that 1,583,000 Muslims were living in Italy in 2010 and estimated that the number would double by 2030.

The issue of immigration in Italy during 2015 has been affected by at least three series of events which at the first level of analysis have a global dimension but which, due to the specific geopolitical position of Italy, have had an immediate and disproportionate effect on the Republic: 1) the escalating influx of migrants and refugees into Italy and along all the borders of the EU, involving a huge loss of life but also a revisiting of the utility and the assumptions of the Schengen convention; 2) the ongoing conflict in Syria and Iraq and the rise of ISIS/Daesh, which both exacerbates the flow of refugees and scatters terror through attacks in European countries; and 3) the revolutionary transformations of the Catholic church at the hands of Pope Francis.

The multiculturalism vacuum

What kind of society do Italians think they are developing under these new conditions of increased and variegated immigration? Is Italy becoming genuinely multicultural? The answer is complicated, not least because when citizens use the word they are usually referring to the visible diversity of everyday life, in terms of the greater variety of dress, languages, religious buildings and habits that they are now encountering [see Colombo and Semi 2007]. In this respect Italians are no longer surprised by the presence of black people, or of mosques and ethnic restaurants, for example, as they were twenty years ago. In Milan and Rome in particular, but also in a host of smaller places like Brescia, Novara or Ragusa, a range of ethnocultural minority populations has become well-established, partly to serve the need for low-wage labour but also through the sharp increase in irregular immigration over the last 15 years.

But these changes have not yet fundamentally changed Italian society. While individual Italians vary in the degree to which they welcome change and strangers, there has been no serious national debate over how society should and will inevitably change during the current century, given the low indigenous birth-rate, immigration pressures and economic globalisation [Hill 2013, pp.120-132]. Governments of both centre-right and centre-left have muddled through, oscillating between humanitarian and protectionist responses to the large numbers of migrants arriving via the dangerous southern sea passage, and leaving decisions on the form and degree of integration to the Provinces. Indeed Italy has had no clear stance on diversity. It does not celebrate cosmopolitanism through an explicit multiculturalist project, as in the UK and the Netherlands. Nor has it taken a stance of 'civic nationalism' along French republican lines, which would insist on the equal treatment of citizens within a clear framework of Italian-ness. The lack of a strong national and *étatiste* tradition, together with the disparity in regional approaches to integration, and the continuing importance of the Catholic Church, have so far prevented any clear political lead.

This has produced a largely *laissez-faire* approach to matters of dress and faith, although there have been plenty of local tensions over such matters as school meals, housing and uninsured drivers. The *Lega Nord* in particular has assumed the role of speaking for the traditional Italian (sic) way of life [Carvalho 2013]. In some deprived areas (for instance Bologna, Rome,

Naples) there have been some ugly outbreaks of violence, often focused on camps inhabited by the Roma population. This has continued a well-documented trend of low-level but diffused racism and intolerance [Human Rights Watch 2011], which is unlikely to change dramatically, despite the Renzi government's efforts, begun in in 2014, to reduce the maximum detention of immigrants and to decriminalise undocumented entry and residence..[3]

Yet even muddling through has its upside. Had central government taken a clearer and stronger line, whether towards integrationism or multiculturalism, the events of 2015 might have led to some very serious tensions, even violence. As it is, the language of integration is paid lip service to but not backed up by developments on the ground. Newcomers find it difficult to become accepted in civil society, precisely because of the strength and inward-lookingness of the latter's key institutions – the family, the Church, the *Case del Popolo* and other social centres– although where labour shortages in key areas occur, as with parish priests, individual foreigners have found acceptance. But for the most part the growing migrant communities have far less social status and fewer rights than the indigenous population. Even where incomers have become important to the local economy, as in Prato (Tuscany), the dairy industry of Emilia or the fruit-picking zones of the *Mezzogiorno*, and with the reliance on foreign *badanti* everywhere, they live their lives separately from the majority population[4]. Not surprisingly, therefore, there are few minority faces on television or in parliament to act as role models.

This situation does not amount, nevertheless, to 'parallel societies' as is the case in Germany with its large and relatively self-contained Turkish-origin population. Ethnocultural minorities in Italy are simply too fragmented and lacking in organisational resources to constitute even a defined sub-stratum of society, which compounds their disadvantages. With the exception of the long-established Jewish community they are not in a position to press for group rights, whether over faith schools, the building of places of worship, or rule-exemptions on grounds of conscience. Thus minorities, and especially the newly arrived, have the worst of both worlds, enjoying neither the ability to shelter within established communities in a devolved, multiculturalist system, nor the formal equality which a system of civic nationalism in principle provides. At the personal level Italians are often helpful to migrants, and the volunteering sector is flourishing,[5] but this has not translated into serious policies aiming at promoting integration on a stable basis. Indeed it is arguable that non-governmental organisations (NGOs) continue to substitute the lack of a strong state in this field.

Such political inertia has been badly exposed by the crisis of 2015. The government has struggled to register and accommodate the wave of newcomers. But it has also had to fall back on mere hopes – that a large proportion will move on to other destinations, preferably through the offices of the EU, or that those who stay will not encounter harsh local reactions. The Renzi administration has certainly not dared to voice the 'we can do it' philosophy of Chancellor Merkel, although its rivals for office could hardly have done differently.

Policy and politics

The development of immigration policy in Italy cannot be fully understood without taking into account the country's volatile and polarised political party system which has inhibited a centralised institutional response, political unity and indeed the development of expertise on the issue. This political context has prevented over the decades sustained political efforts being made at the national level for an all-encompassing immigration law. Ever since the Martelli law of 1990, immigration policy developments have proceeded along fractured lines given that every government change leads to symbolic efforts to put aside the initiatives of its predecessor but not to any paradigmatic shift. Another obstacle to a settled immigration policy is the way parties use immigration as a bargaining chip during coalition formation and as a way of keeping a distinctive profile for their electorates [Cetin 2014]. Thus legislation is all too often the product of political compromises and fall short of offering long-term solutions to the serious loopholes in Italian immigration policy, namely the politicised nature of entry quotas and irregular migration [ibid.].

It should be noted that the use of immigration as a bargaining card is more common among the left-wing parties, which eventually diminishes the strength of their political positioning in the electorates' eyes. The parties from the right of the political spectrum enjoy a relatively higher-level of unity and cohesiveness in terms of their approaches to immigration. Right-wing parties have also been more prominent in terms of turning immigration into an electoral asset. Over several decades their confrontational rhetoric has tended to securitise the issue and to breed hostility to immigrants. In 2015 this came to a head through the collapse of the regimes (and border controls) in Tunisia and Libya, as it became clear that many new migrants and asylum-seekers would seek to reach Europe via Italy. Yet Italy was

underprepared to manage the arrivals, revealing once again that it lacked both the political determination and organisational capacity to deal with situations that demand swift and efficient responses [Cetin 2016, forthcoming].

A common thread in the immigration discourses of the centre-left and the centre-right has been the promise of clamping down on immigration. This has been shaped by the general hardening of tone on immigration evident across the EU over the past three decades. Despite promises from the political class, the number of foreigners living in Italy has been growing. Italian politicians have not been able to regulate the presence of non-EU citizens in the job market – a more prominent problem in the South than in the North. Unmet promises have played a decisive role in deepening the public impression that migration is out of control and in intensifying feelings of insecurity [Boswell 2003; Zincone 1995].

In addition to the discrepancies between policy discourse and actual policy, the sensationalist portrayal of migrants by the Italian media, especially in associating them with crime, has played a crucial role in galvanising the sense of crisis, repeating a scenario of two decades ago [Dal Lago 1999]. The increased public hostility towards immigration and immigrants then in turn creates a platform for vote-seeking politicians.

The surge in the numbers of immigrant and asylum-seeker arrivals in 2015 also inflamed the debates on two important technical issues that have been at the core of the political discussions in Italy since the early 1990s: the expulsion of those foreigners illegally present and the provision of judicial protection against any arbitrary expulsion practice. These debates originally arose out of the pressures created by the *Lega Nord* and centre-right political parties, and through the reaction of the radical left against the treatment and expulsion of irregular migrants [Einaudi 2007]. They still persist. The result has been further polarisation, blocking discussion on the very much needed policies of integration [Cetin 2014], even though on a practical level, there have been signs of ongoing (if fragmented) forms of integration on a local level in the health, housing, and educational sectors [Caponio 2006; Zincone 2009].

Two key policy steps that could help immigrants in Italy, especially those born in Italy to immigrant parents, to feel equal members of Italian society, are reform of the nationality law and the introduction of a law on religious freedom. In its present form, the nationality law is strictly based on the principle of *ius sanguinis* making it particularly difficult for foreigners

who do not have any ancestral or marriage bond with an Italian to obtain citizenship. The lack of a proper law on religious freedom on the other hand is mainly caused by the decades long political unwillingness to shake a pyramidal status quo with the Catholic Church at the top, while other religious groups benefit from different (lesser) degrees of freedom to practise and material advantages bestowed by the state. Stuck in an outdated and unsuitable model of church-state relations [Ferrari 2000], Italy makes it particularly difficult for non-Christian communities, and typically Muslims, to become officially recognised; and this, in turn, nourishes public suspicion towards them and accusations that they 'do not want' to integrate.

In a report issued by Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani (ANCI) in 2012, the percentage of second generation immigrants in Italy was projected to increase from 9.7% of the total population to a rather significant 20.7% by 2029.[6] The events of 2015 have made a further increase inevitable. Despite the importance of the issue for the future of Italian society, reform of the nationality law had not emerged as a significant issue in the electoral manifestoes of any of the competing parties during the 2013 general elections. The only exception was the *Movimento Cinque Stelle* whose leader Beppe Grillo was adamantly opposed to any form of *ius soli*. Following the elections of 2013, the then Minister for Integration Cécile Kyenge, herself a naturalised Italian, presented a bill that proposed making children born to foreign parents and who have been living legally in Italy for five consecutive years eligible for the granting of Italian citizenship.[7] The bill received the support of the Church. In Parliament, however, the bill triggered fierce opposition from the *Lega Nord* and the Berlusconi-led *Popolo della Libertà*. It was finally passed under the Renzi administration on 13 October 2015, with the escalation of the migrant crisis having focused attention on all sides.[8] Even though it still needs to be passed by the Senate before being enacted, an important political step has been taken towards making Italy more open and inclusive towards the different communities residing in it.

The debates triggered by the nationality law reform bill once again revealed the dominance of security-oriented positions on immigration in Italy, usually voiced by parties of the right. It should, nevertheless, be noted that the right recognises the economic interests of business elites by adopting pragmatic policies on labour migration which are dramatically at odds with its tough rhetoric [Einaudi 2007, 306-307].

The foreign population in Italy is largely concentrated in the north of the country [Caritas and Migrantes 2015], which is also the stronghold of the *Lega,* although many irregular migrants

also provide agricultural labour in the south, usually for pitiful wages. According to a recent ISTAT report [ISTAT 2015, 2] Lombardy, Emilia-Romagna, Lazio, and Veneto are the main regions where migrants settle. This reveals the contradiction that even while immigrants are needed in the Italian labour market, their presence often leads to hostile political reactions – with one exception: at both political and public levels attitudes towards the co-called *colf* and *badanti* are more favourable than towards other immigrant workers [van Hooren 2010]. The nuance is important as it indicates that xenophobia and racism are by no means omnipresent, especially when personal relationships are established. This has not, however, prevented the further rise of xenophobic rhetoric stimulated by fears about the flow of new migrants in 2015.

This hostility was evident during the year in places as diverse as Treviso and the wealthy Roman suburb of Casale San Nicola. In both cases, public anxieties seemed to focus on a distaste over the prospect of proximity to migrants and refugees, most of whom were of African origin. Bringing the protests to an end sometimes involved relocating new arrivals out of town into areas where they would be less visible. For example, the Prefect of Treviso, Maria Augusta Marrosu, ended up transferring 101 migrants from the town of Quinto di Treviso to a former barracks outside the city. Marrosu's mismanagement of the situation led Premier Matteo Renzi to demand her replacement.[9]

The divisions between the industrialised north and the mainly agricultural south make a holistic approach to both the labour market and the specific question of migrant labour very difficult. The dual economy in Italy is marked by, in Menz's formulation [2009, 236], "high-tech islands and seas of low-skill assembly" with the former located only in the north. The Italian economy's heavy dependence on sectors that demand unskilled or low-skilled migrants lowers the incentives for employers to recruit highly-skilled migrants who would pay taxes and integrate more easily. This means that political attention focuses on other, social, aspects of immigration, most commonly the implications for crime and even terrorism.

The migration events of 2015 have been viewed largely through a security lens and portrayed as a crisis. Matteo Renzi urgently demanded EU support, as did his predecessors, by referring to the current emergency as European, not just Italian. He also talked about putting a 'plan B' into action, if the EU were not sufficiently willing to share Italy's burden, without doing more than hinting at what that plan might entail – probably issuing travel documents to migrants which would enable them to move throughout the EU and not have to request asylum at their

first landfall.[10] If so, this plan was overtaken by events as the Dublin system collapsed in any case under the weight of Syrian refugees moving through the Balkans. Yet the persistent uncertainty and fast moving continued to provide fertile ground to the *Lega Nord* for exploiting public concerns about undocumented migration, while making a clear policy vision difficult [Perlmutter 2014]. An effective strategy at this point would have mapped out ways to manage economic migrants and asylum-seeker arrivals by identifying the tools to be developed at different policy levels and the needs to be met in the short, medium and long terms. The Renzi government did not come up with such a multifaceted strategy, partly through the pressure of crisis-management but also through not being willing to expend the political capital it needed for its economic and constitutional priorities. It seems unlikely that this will change in the near future.

The external dimension

The government in Rome was not helped by a turbulent external environment, although this could hardly have come as a surprise. A migrant crisis in southern Europe had been developing for at least a decade, with Italy in the eye of the storm. Structural pressures deriving from poverty and war in Africa had led to intermittent waves of irregular migration through Libya during the Gaddafi years, which the dictator had used for political leverage against the EU and its Member States. The removal of Gaddafi in 2011, which many had hoped would produce democracy and stability in Libya, turned out to have the opposite effect, with unemployment and violence leading many young Africans to put themselves in the hands of criminal gangs so as to get on a boat towards the EU. The situation was then much worsened by links to the civil war in Syria, whose seriousness led to a major population movement out of the country and forced the migration issue to the top of Europe's agenda.

In the first half of 2015 the Libyan sea route remained the main way in which desperate people – fleeing Eritrea, Afghanistan and other conflict zones as well as Syria and Libya itself – sought to reach Europe. Italy was their principal destination, with the small island of Lampedusa overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of arrivals. In 2013 the government of Enrico Letta had initiated the *Mare Nostrum* policy which attempted to rescue as many as possible of those in danger at sea, but a combination of domestic hostility to the large number of migrants and cost pressures soon led to its suspension under Matteo Renzi, who attempted to make the

EU address the problem through its feeble external border instrument Frontex [Cetin 2015, 377-78]. The result was the severely under-resourced Triton programme, and an increase in drownings culminating in the loss of around 800 in a single incident in April 2015. This shocked the Member States of the EU into providing a budget equal to that of *Mare Nostrum*, and a set of multilateral naval commitments, which reduced but did not end the the loss of life [UNHCR 2015][11]. By the same token it increased the influx to Italy and the pressure on both its receiving ports – and the country as a whole as migrants began to be distributed around the peninsula.

As the summer arrived Italy began to face social and political problems. The *Lega Nord*, led by the strident Matteo Salvini, used its virulent opposition to immigration to bid for national appeal, while many communes simply refused the requests of their provincial governors (themselves responding to central government) to provide housing and sustenance for a certain number of newcomers – to be decided on the basis of the wealth and population density of each province. Violent protests broke out in July, fuelled in places by neurotic anxieties about the Ebola epidemic in west Africa. Alarmed by these reactions, or just seeking better job opportunities, many migrants headed north to the frontiers with France and Austria, countries which were not slow to react by making transit difficult. This threw the Schengen system of open borders into crisis, just as in 2011 when France had closed the border at Ventimiglia to stop the thousands of francophone Tunisians who had travelled through Italy towards their many fellow citizens in the Hexagon. Tensions rose again between Paris and Rome.

It was at this point that events turned in Italy's favour, at least from a grimly pragmatic point of view. Refugees from Syria, becoming increasingly hopeless of both a return home and finding a decent life in the refugee camps of Turkey and Lebanon, began to pour through Greece and the Balkans, heading for northern Europe. These people, often middle class and thus able to pay smugglers the large sums of money demanded, took the relatively safe route via the Greek islands close to Turkey, and included many children and other vulnerable people. But tragedies still occurred, and the image of a dead toddler washed up on a Turkish beach unleashed a storm of concern right across the EU. Just before this Chancellor Merkel had dramatically announced that Germany would not send back any Syrian refugees – a move which became controversial as it stimulated even larger numbers to attempt the hard and slow walk through the Balkans towards the richer north. By this time refugees from places such as

Iraq, Afghanistan and Eritrea were joining the long march, they too with strong claims for asylum, which in turn encouraged others, from Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Balkans, whose claims were less sympathetically received. Either way it was soon clear that the EU had a new and massive migration crisis on its hands which it was not up to managing, given the indefensibility of the external border, the collapse of the Dublin accord on asylum requests, and the inability of the Member States to come to an agreement on quotas by which the refugees could be shared around the Union.

For Italy this failure of collective policy-making had contrasting implications. On the one hand Italy and Greece, together with to a lesser extent France, Malta and Spain, remained the countries of first resort for the hundreds of thousands of people now desperate to reach the European Union. Both states felt severely let down by their partners [Cetin 2016 forthcoming]. Even the populist and eurosceptic *Movimento Cinque Stelle* called for the EU to do more to help the front-line states like Italy [Franzosi et. al. 2015, 119-120]. On the other, the sudden Syrian exodus meant that the main route had now moved to the Balkans, thus relieving (but not removing) the pressure on Lampedusa and Sicily. The general sympathy in Europe for Africans risking their lives on the long crossing from Libya did not disappear, but it was clearly not such a strong force as the concern for Syrian families willing to walk en masse to safety under the daily eye of television cameras. It is notable that the main sources of asylum requests in Italy during 2014-15 were from citizens of Mali, Nigeria and the Gambia[12]. What is more, with Germany apparently sending the message that it welcomed mass immigration, Italy seemed likely to move from being a destination country, with all the problems of jobs, housing and popular resistance that implied, to being a country of transit. This was far more acceptable, even if the country still faced big resource problems in terms of temporary accommodation and documenting the many new arrivals. This last problem was sharpened by the terror attacks in Paris of 13 November (the day after the major summit on migration in Valletta), after which it became clear that Daesh was capable of using the migrant wave as cover for the free movement of its own operatives back and forth between the Syria/Iraq war zone and the European Union.

This brings us to the connection between migration and foreign policy, for too long kept in separate analytical silos but now increasingly recognised as being intimately related. On the one hand the huge influx of 2015 has been caused by foreign policy problems in the Middle East and North Africa. These in turn were partly the result of the actions or inactions of

European states, although it would be going too far to lay significant responsibility at Italy's door. In general, Rome increasingly attempted to keep a low profile on the issues of Afghanistan, Iraq and Syria as the inevitability of western withdrawals became more apparent. The economic crisis and the pacific nature of public opinion reinforced this tendency. Even on Libya, where Italy has both historic ties, and a vital interest in trying to stem the outflow of irregular migrants, Rome did not join London and Paris in the front line of the 2011 intervention. Once the consequences of that action were apparent, in terms of breaking Libya in half and creating ideal conditions for human trafficking, Italian diplomacy was reduced to a mixture of fatalism and humanitarianism – the Italian Navy being widely praised for its dedication to rescue missions.

The migration crisis cried out for an effective common European response, not only in terms of developing a common asylum policy and quota system but also at the level of foreign policy. This need had been evident for a decade or more but in its absence countries like Italy had fallen back on bilateral negotiations and readmission agreements with the countries of origin. The surge in numbers of 2015 made this even more vital. One Italian response has been to become more active in promoting conflict mediation within Libya. Late in 2015 Italy took the initiative, joining with the US in convening a major conference, including the UN Security Council's permanent members, in an attempt to broker a deal among the Libyan factions which might eventually restabilising the country[13].

Only if the two de facto governments of the country can reach agreement will it be possible to negotiate an accord which might hold on clamping down on the smugglers. As this is a long game, however, Italy has supported the multi-pronged EU approach which has finally been forthcoming, one element of which involves giving Frontex the military component of interdicting and destroying smugglers' vessels, even perhaps inside Libyan territorial waters. The legal and practical problems of this approach, mean that it has inevitably been slow to get going. In terms of the 'root causes' of migration Italy is sceptical that bombing Daesh will help to end the Syrian war, and is not in a position to contribute large amounts of public money to the development aid which – over the very long term – might help to give young African jobs in their own countries. The level of Italian ODA, never high, is now back at 0.16% of GDI, from a peak of 0.3% in 2005[14]. As so often, therefore, Italy is torn between the need to focus on its significant internal problems, and the difficulties of playing a role in its problematic neighbourhood.

The religious factor

Religion is now again a factor in the political life of most developed countries. Given the presence of the Vatican, Italy is often considered the archetype of a Catholic country. This may no longer be appropriate given that its society has gone through some seismic transformations in the last quarter of a century. Catholicism has gradually diversified and to some extent also become diluted in Italy, thus often becoming limited to an expression of 'cultural memory' [Pace et al. 2003, 298] if not just a 'civil religion' [Melloni 2014]. Adherence to Catholicism is ever less firm among the Italian population on two counts.[15]. First, because of the decline both in practising Catholics and believers in the tradition: according to a survey conducted by Doxa between 2013 and 2014, 75 per cent believe in Catholicism but only 62 per cent of this number, that is, less than half of all the sample, considered themselves to be practising [Doxa 2014]. Second, is the simple demographic point, because the population of Italy is increasingly multicultural and multi-religious as a result of the migration influx of the last three decades. But this pluralism is 'singolare' (i.e. peculiar) as Garelli et al. [2003] say, and inconsistent; it exists de facto in everyday life but it is unstructured and lacks any political awareness and direction. The inherent contradictions of Italian attitudes towards pluralism and religion were evident in the debate of November 2015 surrounding the cancellation of the *presepe* (nativity scene) in the village of Rozzano,[16] as well as in the previous national debates over the place of the cross in public places [Ozzano and Giorgi 2016].

The result is ignorance and confusion over both the boundaries between the secular/public and the private/religious spheres, and the new issues arising from migration and new faith communities. One example is the attempt by *Lega Nord* activists, not usually known for their piety, to posture as the protectors of Catholicism and Christianity. In practice this is an instrumental device to make more palatable their hostility to migrants and to Islam. The broader church of Catholic believers has in fact been divided over immigration, with a 'leftist' camp (incorporating the main Catholic NGO Caritas, and various groups such as Azione Cattolica) supporting the reception and integration of all migrants, while other groups, including many bishops, have in recent years taken a defensive stance towards Islam and argued for a selective reception of migrants, admitting only those with a Christian background only [for a summary of these positions see Guolo 2001]. The Vatican establishment always

encouraged a culture of generosity and of welcoming the stranger but rarely wanted confrontation with the state authorities.

The election of Pope Francis in March 2013 ushered in a period of change in approach, coinciding with the sharp rise in both immigration and deaths at sea. Since 2013 the Catholic Church has attempted to add a determinedly spiritual and moral dimension to political life. In contrast with the alarmist tones of his predecessor concerning the loss of the Christian identity of Europe and the rising relativism of values, Pope Jorge Bergoglio has woven together threads of dialogue and reconciliation between Christians and non-Christian minorities, as for instance with his message to Muslims at the end of Ramadan 2013, his famous Lampedusa visit and speech in July 2013 and the meeting with the Waldensians in the summer of 2015.[17] He has repeatedly urged the people to welcome migrants. While his actions and words have been directed to the whole world they have had an immediate impact in Italy, attracting the support of many non-believers and of the minority communities – but they have simultaneously provoked splits among Catholics, shaking the delicate political, social and juridical equilibria that the state had developed with the Catholic Church over more than a century.

While being part of the broad family of liberal, secular and democratic countries of the West, Italy has a *sui generis* relationship between religion and politics, not displaying the same level of secularism as is evident in northern Europe yet without a clear social consensus on many of the emerging issues [as illustrated by Ozzano and Giorgi 2016]. In fact many of the debates on religious pluralism, Islam, and multiculturalism have been imported to Italy from abroad in a scattered manner, rather than being the product of an in-depth autochthonous [Silvestri 2012]. Thus the public debates around these matters tend to be fragmented, without a clear delineation of the issues at stake the positions of the different political parties – not least given that the main actors have displayed contradictory preferences. It is difficult even to establish the views of the camps within the Catholic Church, let alone those of the Church as a whole.

Conclusion

The year 2015 has seen Italy, like the entire European region, face a crisis in migration which has been building for more than a decade. It has been caused in broad terms by the country's

proximity to the African continent – perhaps, indeed, the progress made in Africa over the last decade has exacerbated the migration pressures through the revolution of rising expectations. But the failure of the Arab Spring and in particular the collapse of the Libyan state produced an outflux of both refugees and economic migrants, ruthlessly exploited by criminal gangs (and increasingly by jihadists) which led both to the tragic episodes of drowning which Europe could not ultimately ignore and to the pressures on the Italian state and society which have proved so difficult to manage. Italy has not developed a clear view of how to manage increased migration and diversity, let alone the policies and institutional mechanisms to deal with the very large numbers of new arrivals. The Italian Navy performed heroically in its new humanitarian role, as did the people of Lampedusa and other arrival sites. Many towns and villages across the peninsula welcomed migrants and made available their facilities, despite the economic difficulties. But the country as a whole has been divided on the issue of permanently absorbing large number of newcomers, and in various places tensions rose to dangerous levels. The Catholic Church has been drawn into the debate, displaying its own internal divisions, and the problem of citizenship and the *ius solis* raised its head once more.

Italy has understandably looked to the European Union for help in its exposed geographical position, but the EU's failure to respond effectively has rebounded on general attitudes towards integration, which were already more sceptical than at any previous time in post-war history. Events provided some temporary relief from the particular pressures on Italy through the sudden movement of Syrian refugees through the Balkans, while Germany's apparent willingness to absorb large numbers meant that Italy has become more of a transit state than a final destination for the many migrants seeking safety and/or jobs. But in time the pressures will build up again, given the structural causes, not least the spreading of war zones around the Levant and southern littoral of the Mediterranean. Given Italy's historical and economic links with Libya, as well as the proximity of Lampedusa and Sicily, Rome has little option but to work on a proactive foreign and security policy strategy as well as a more long-term view of its approach to diversity and integration. For migration has now become, both for Italy and for the EU, a matter of high politics.

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[16] At the end of November 2015, the headmaster of a primary school in Rozzano (near Milan) announced that he would substitute the Christmas celebrations (which in Italy are traditionally symbolisedby the 'presepio', the nativity scene) with a generic 'Winter' feast. While in the past some schools had refused to celebrate Christmas with a Christmas tree or with a presepio, on the basis of the questionable assumption that this would hurt the feelings of the (increasingly) large number of pupils of immigrant/non Christian background, this was the first time that the mentioning of Christmas was cancelled altogether. A huge row ensued, not only because of the complaints of parents, school authorities and the Church, and the resignation of the school head, but in particular because the three main centre-right parties took the opportunity to capitalise on the crisis with their anti-migrant slogans and tactical use of Christian symbols: Mr Salvini (Lega Nord), Mr La Russa (Fratelli d'Italia) and Mrs Gelmini (Forza Italia) all picketed the Rozzano school singing Christmas carols and bringing along their own presepio. See: *Rozzano, Natale cancellato a scuola: proteste ai cancelli. Arrivano anche Salvini e Gelmini*, «La Repubblica», 30 November 2015,

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