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Migration and the Challenges of Italian Multiculturalism

Christopher Hill, Sara Silvestri, and Elif Cetin

The focus of this chapter is firstly on the massive migration and refugee crisis that burst upon Italy and then the whole of Europe during 2015. Secondly, we analyze the interplay between the migration problem and the fundamental challenges that Italy faces in becoming a country of immigration while undergoing a period of recession. So far, Italy has not had a major debate on how to handle growing diversity, and it is now at the point where this topic can hardly be avoided. General talk about multiculturalism has been sharpened by the apparent implications of the mass population movement and its impact on social cohesion, identity, religion, security, and foreign policy.

We deal with these two sets of issues by discussing first the background to the new migration pressures on Italy—since change can be judged only on the basis of the previous trends—and then what multiculturalism means in the Italian context. Against these two backcloths, the chapter then analyzes the Renzi government's attempts to deal with migration and diversity in 2015 and the correlated domestic conflicts that have affected 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.

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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 (i.e., 1.4 percent) 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, Italy had already received 136,432 seaborne asylum-seekers or irregular migrants,[1] while over 3,000 had perished on the journey (Ministry of Interior 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 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) warned that the death toll on this sea route had risen fifty-fold compared to the previous year (Day 2015).

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 thousand in the early 1990s to over 1 million (i.e., around 2 percent 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 calculated that 1,583,000 Muslims were living in Italy in 2010 and estimated that the number would double by 2030 (Pew Research Center 2011).

The issue of immigration in Italy during 2015 has been affected by at least three factors that, at the first level of analysis, have a global dimension, but that, due to the specific geopolitical position of Italy, have had an immediate and disproportionate effect on the Republic. The first is 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. The second factor encompasses the ongoing conflicts in Syria and in Iraq and the rise of ISIS/Daesh, which both exacerbate the flow of refugees and scatter terror through attacks in European countries. The third factor involves 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 "multicultural," 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 (Colombo and Semi 2007). In this respect, Italians are no longer surprised by the presence of black people or mosques or ethnic restaurants as they were 20 years ago, for example. In Milan and Rome in particular, but also in a host of smaller places such as Brescia, Novara, and Ragusa, a range of ethno-cultural minority populations has become well established, partly to serve the need for low-wage labor but also through the sharp increase in irregular migration.

However, these changes have not yet fundamentally transformed Italian society. Individual Italians vary in the degree to which they welcome change and strangers, but 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 globalization (Hill 2013: 120–132). Both center-right and center-left governments have muddled through, oscillating between humanitarian and protectionist responses to the large numbers of migrants arriving via the dangerous southern sea passage, while 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 Italianness. The lack of a strong national and *étatiste* tradition, 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 local tensions have arisen over matters such as school meals, housing, and uninsured drivers. The Lega Nord (LN, Northern League) in particular has assumed the role of speaking for the "traditional Italian" way of life (Carvalho 2013). In some deprived areas (e.g., 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 in spite of the Renzi

government's efforts, begun in 2014, to reduce the maximum detention of immigrants and to decriminalize undocumented entry and residence (Milella 2016).

Yet even muddling through has its upside. Had central government taken a clearer and stronger line, whether toward integrationism or multiculturalism, the events of 2015 might have led to some very serious tensions, even violence. As it is, lip service is paid to the language of integration, but it is 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-looking nature of the latter's key institutions—the family, the church, the *case del popolo*, and other social centers—although where labor 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 despite the reliance on foreign *badanti* (sing., *badante*)[3] everywhere, they live their lives separately from the majority population. Not surprisingly, therefore, there are few minority faces on television or in Parliament to act as role models.

Nevertheless, this situation does not amount to "parallel societies," as is the case in Germany with its large and relatively self-contained Turkish-origin population. Ethno-cultural minorities in Italy are simply too fragmented and lacking in organizational resources to constitute even a defined substratum 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 in 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 that, in principle, a system of civic nationalism provides. At the personal level, Italians are often helpful to migrants, and the volunteering sector is flourishing,[4] but this has not translated into serious policies aimed at promoting integration on a stable basis. Indeed, it is arguable that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) continue to substitute for a strong state in this field.

Such political inertia has been badly exposed by the migrant 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 Germany’s chancellor, Angela 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 polarized political party system, which has inhibited a centralized institutional response, political unity, and indeed the development of expertise on the issue. Over the decades, this political context has prevented sustained political efforts being made at the national level for an all-encompassing immigration law. Ever since the Martelli law of 1990 recognized the rights, and also the obligations, of migrants, 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 policy is the way that 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 compromise and falls short of offering long-term solutions to the serious shortcomings in Italian immigration policy, namely, the politicized 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 electorate’s eyes. The parties to the right of the political spectrum enjoy a relatively higher level of unity and cohesiveness in terms of their approach to immigration and have had success in turning immigration into an electoral asset. Over several decades, their confrontational rhetoric has tended to securitize the issue and to breed hostility to immigrants. This came to a head in 215 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 attempt to reach Europe via Italy. Yet Italy was underprepared to manage the arrivals, revealing once again that it lacked both the political determination and the organizational capacity to deal with situations that demand swift and efficient responses (Cetin, forthcoming).

A common thread in the immigration discourses of the center-left and the center-right has been the promise of clamping down on migration. This has been shaped by the general hardening of tone

on immigration that has become 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 galvanizing the sense of crisis, repeating a scenario of two decades ago (Dal Lago 1999). The increasing public hostility toward immigration and immigrants, in turn, creates a platform for vote-seeking politicians.

The surge in the number of immigrants and asylum-seekers arriving 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: (1) the expulsion of those foreigners illegally present, and (2) the provision of judicial protection against any arbitrary expulsion practice. These debates—which originally arose out of the pressures created by the LN and center-right political parties and through the reaction of the radical left against the treatment and expulsion of irregular migrants (Einaudi 2007)—still persist. The result has been further polarization on the national level, which has blocked discussion on the much-needed policies of integration (Cetin 2014), although on a practical level there have been signs of ongoing (if fragmented) forms of integration on the local level in sectors such as health, housing, and education (Caponio 2006; Zincone 2009).

Two key policy steps could help immigrants in Italy (especially those born in Italy to immigrant parents) become equal members of Italian society: reform of the nationality law and the introduction of a law on religious freedom. In its present form, the nationality law is based strictly on the principle of *ius sanguinis*, which makes 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 due to the decades-long political unwillingness to shake a pyramidal status quo that places the Catholic Church at the top, with other religious groups benefiting from different (lesser) degrees of freedom to practice and from fewer material advantages bestowed by the state. Stuck in an outdated and unsuitable model of church-state relations (Ferrari 2000), Italy makes it especially difficult for non-Christian communities, and typically Muslims, to become officially recognized. This,

in turn, nourishes public suspicion toward such communities, along with accusations that they "do not want" to integrate.

In a 2012 report issued by the Associazione Nazionale Comuni Italiani (ANCI, National Association of Italian Municipalities), the percentage of second-generation immigrants in Italy was projected to increase from 9.7 percent of the total population to a rather significant 20.7 percent by the year 2029 (see Giovannetti and Nicotra 2012). 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 did not emerge as a significant issue in the electoral manifestos of any of the major competing parties during the 2013 general elections. The only exception was the Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S, Five Star Movement), whose leader, Beppe Grillo, was adamantly opposed to any form of *ius soli* (i.e., birthright citizenship), for those born in Italy. Following the elections of 2013, the then minister for integration, Cécile Kyenge, herself a naturalized 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 to be granted Italian citizenship (Tintori 2013). Although the bill received the support of the Catholic Church, it triggered fierce opposition in Parliament from the LN and the Berlusconi-led Popolo della Libertà (PdL, People of Freedom). 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.[5] Even though it still needs to be passed by the Senate before being enacted, an important political step has been taken toward making Italy more open and inclusive toward 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 recognizes the economic interests of business elites by adopting pragmatic policies on labor migration that 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 Italania 2015), which is also the stronghold of the LN, although many irregular migrants also provide agricultural labor in the south, usually for pitiful wages. According to 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 labor market, their presence often leads to hostile political reactions—with one exception. The political and public attitudes toward the *badanti* and the so-called *colf*[6] are both more favorable than those toward 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 have been established. This has not, however, prevented the further rise of xenophobic rhetoric, which has been 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 into areas where they would be less visible. For example, the prefect of Treviso, Maria Augusta Marrosu, transferred 101 migrants from the town of Quinto di Treviso to a former barracks outside the city. Marrosu's mismanagement of the situation led Prime Minister Matteo Renzi to demand her replacement.[7]

The divisions between the industrialized north and the mainly agricultural south make a holistic approach to both the labor market and the specific question of migrant labor very difficult. In Menz's (2009: 236) view, Italy's political economy is marked by "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. 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 was 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 that would enable them to move throughout the EU and not have to request asylum at their first landfall.[8] In any case, this plan was overtaken by the collapse of the EU's Dublin accord on asylum requests under the weight of Syrian refugees moving through the Balkans. The persistent uncertainty and fast-moving events continued to provide the LN with fertile ground for exploiting public concerns about undocumented migration, while making a clear policy vision difficult (Perlmutter 2015). 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 short-, medium-, and

long-term needs to be met. The Renzi government did not come up with such a multifaceted strategy, partly due to the pressures of crisis management but also due its willingness to expend the political capital that it requires for its economic and constitutional priorities. And 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: unemployment and violence led many young Africans to put themselves in the hands of criminal gangs so as to get on a boat toward 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—sought to reach Europe. Italy was their principal destination, and the small island of Lampedusa became overwhelmed by the number 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. However, a combination of cost pressures and of domestic hostility to the large number of migrants soon led to its suspension under Renzi, who attempted to make the EU address the problem through Frontex, its feeble external border instrument (Cetin 2015: 377–378). This resulted in the severely under-resourced Triton program and an increase in drownings, culminating in the shocking loss of around 800 people in a single incident in April 2015. In response, the EU member states provided a budget equal to that of Mare Nostrum and a set of multilateral naval commitments that reduced, but did not end, the loss of life (UNHCR 2015).[9] By the same token, these measures 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 of 2015 arrived, Italy began to face social and political problems. The LN, led by the strident Matteo Salvini, used its virulent opposition to immigration in a bid for national appeal, while many communes simply refused the requests of their provincial governors (themselves responding to the central government) to provide housing and sustenance for newcomers, whose number would be decided on the basis of each province's wealth and population density. Violent protests broke out in July, fueled 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 that 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 traveled through Italy toward their many fellow citizens in the Hexagon (i.e., Metropolitan France). Tensions rose again between Paris and Rome.

It was at this point that events turned in Italy's favor, 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 across the EU. Just before this, Chancellor Merkel had dramatically announced that Germany would not send back any Syrian refugees—a move that became controversial as it stimulated even larger numbers to attempt the hard and slow walk through the Balkans toward the richer north. By this time, refugees from places such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Eritrea were joining the long march, as they too had 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, and the inability of the EU member states to come to an agreement on arrangements for sharing the refugees among them.

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, forthcoming). Even the populist and Euro-skeptic M5S called for the EU to do more to help the front-line states like Italy (Franzosi et al. 2015: 119–120). On the other hand, 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 sea crossing from Libya did not disappear, but it was clearly not as strong 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 2014–2015 were from citizens of Mali, Nigeria, and the Gambia (*Stranieri in Italia*, 23 October 2015). 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 its problems of jobs, housing, and popular resistance, to being a country of transit. This was far more acceptable, even if Italy still faced big resource problems in terms of supplying temporary accommodations and documenting the many new arrivals. This last problem was sharpened by the terror attacks in Paris of 13 November 2015—the day after the EU's Valletta Summit on migration in Malta. It was now clear that ISIS/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, these areas had been kept in separate analytical silos, but now they were increasingly recognized as being intimately related. On the one hand, the huge immigration influx of 2015 had 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 pacifist nature of public opinion reinforced this tendency. Even with regard to 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, with the Italian navy being widely praised for its dedication to rescue missions.

The migration crisis called out for a shared and effective 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 2015 surge in numbers 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 that might eventually restabilizing the country.[10]

Only if the two de facto governments of the country can reach agreement will it be possible to negotiate an accord that might hold with regard to clamping down on the smugglers. As this stratagem will take time to see results, however, Italy has supported the multipronged EU approach that 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 under way. In terms of the root causes of migration, Italy is skeptical that bombing ISIS/Daesh will help to end the Syrian war, and it is not in a position to contribute large amounts of public money to the development aid that—over the very long term—might help to give young Africans jobs in their own countries. The level of Italian official development assistance (ODA), never high, is now back at 0.16 percent of gross national income (GNI), from a peak of 0.3 percent in 2005.[11] As so often happens, Italy is thus torn between the need to focus on its significant internal problems and the difficulties of playing a role in its problematic neighborhood.

The Religious Factor

Religion is now again a factor in the political life of most developed countries. Due to the presence of the Vatican, Italy is often considered the archetype of a Catholic country. Yet this may no longer be appropriate, given that Italy's society has gone through some seismic transformations in the last quarter of a century. Catholicism has gradually diversified, and to some extent it has also become diluted in Italy, often limited to being an expression of "cultural memory" (Pace et al. 2003: 298), if not a "civil religion" (Melloni 2014). Adherence to Catholicism is ever less firm among the Italian population on

two counts.[12] First, there is a decline in both practicing Catholics and believers in the tradition. According to a survey conducted by Doxa (2014) between 2013 and 2014, 75 percent of respondents believed in Catholicism, but only 62 percent of them—that is, less than half of all respondents—considered themselves to be practicing. Second, the population of Italy has become increasingly multicultural and multi-religious as a result of the migration influx over the last three decades. However, this pluralism is *singolare* (peculiar), as Garelli et al. (2003) express it, 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 toward pluralism and religion were evident in the dispute of November 2015 surrounding the cancellation of the *presepe* (nativity scene) in the village of Rozzano,[13] as well as in the national debates over the place of the cross in public places (Ozzano and Giorgi 2016).

The result is ignorance and confusion concerning both the boundaries between the secular-public and the private-religious spheres and the new issues arising from migration and communities of different faiths. One example is the attempt by LN 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 group of Catholic believers has in fact been divided over immigration. A "leftist" camp—which includes the main Catholic NGO Caritas and various groups such as Azione Cattolica (Catholic Action)—supports the reception and integration of all migrants, while other groups, including many bishops, have in recent years taken a defensive stance toward Islam and have argued for a selective reception of migrants, admitting only those with a Christian background.[14] The Vatican establishment has always encouraged a culture of generosity and of welcoming the stranger, but it rarely chooses confrontation with the state authorities.

The election of Pope Francis in March 2013 ushered in a period of change in the Vatican's 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 Mario Bergoglio has woven together threads of dialogue and reconciliation between Christians and non-Christian minorities, as with, for instance, his message to Muslims at the end of Ramadan in August 2013, his famous Lampedusa visit and speech in July 2013, and his meeting with the Waldensians in June 2015.[15] He has repeatedly urged 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. However, they have simultaneously provoked splits among Catholics, shaking the delicate political, social, and juridical equilibria that the state has 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 with regard to religion and politics. It does not display the same level of secularism as is evident in northern Europe, but there is no clear social consensus on many of the emerging issues (Ozzano and Giorgi 2016). In fact, many of the debates in Italy on religious pluralism, Islam, and multiculturalism have been imported from abroad in a scattered manner, rather than being the product of an in-depth autochthonous reflection (Silvestri 2012). Thus, the public debates on these matters tend to be fragmented, without a clear delineation of the issues at stake—not least given the fact that the main actors often display contradictory preferences. It is even difficult to establish the views of the camps within the Catholic Church, let alone those of the Church as a whole.

Conclusion

In the year 2015, Italy, like the entire European region, faced a crisis in migration that has been building for more than a decade. For Italy, this plight has been caused in broad terms by the country's proximity to the African continent. Indeed, the progress made in Africa over the last decade has perhaps exacerbated the migration pressures due to its citizens' rising expectations. But the failure of the Arab Spring and, in particular, the collapse of the Libyan state have produced an outflux of both refugees and economic migrants, who have been ruthlessly exploited by criminal gangs (and increasingly by jihadists). This has led both to the tragic episodes of drowning that Europe could not ignore and to the pressures on the Italian state and its people, 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 of 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 a large number of newcomers, and in various places tensions

have risen 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 soli* has 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 toward integration, which were already more skeptical than at any previous time in post-war history. Events provided some temporary relief from the particular pressures on Italy due to the sudden movement of Syrian refugees through the Balkans, while Germany's apparent willingness to absorb large numbers meant that Italy could become more of a transit state than a final destination for the many migrants seeking safety and/or jobs. But in time, given the structural causes, the pressures will build up again, no doubt involving the spread of war zones around the Levant and the 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 pro-active 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.

Christopher Hill is Sir Patrick Sheehy Professor of International Relations at the University of Cambridge.

Sara Silvestri is Senior Lecturer at the City University, London, and Affiliated Lecturer at the University of Cambridge.

Elif Cetin is Research Fellow at Wolfson College of the University of Cambridge and Postdoctoral Researcher at Von Hügel Institute.

Notes

1. The term "irregular migrant" has come to be used to avoid the question-begging adjective "illegal" and to cover both authentic refugees and so-called economic migrants, that is, those hoping to find better living conditions.
2. The Italian census does not collect statistics about religious affiliation.
3. The word *badanti* refers to care workers of the sick and/or elderly, generally on a personal level in the home.
4. Such NGOs include the Catholic Church's Caritas Internationalis, the Evangelical Federation's Servizio Rifugiati e Migranti (SRM, Refugees

and Migrants Service), and the Associazione Ricreativa Culturale Italiana (ARCI, Italian Culture and Leisure Association), the largest secular NGO devoted to social issues in Italy.

5. "Cittadinanza agli stranieri, la Camera approva la nuova legge: Ora Senato," 13 October 2015, http://www.corriere.it/ (accessed 10 January 2016).
6. This is an abbreviation for *collaboratrice familiare* (i.e., domestic worker).
7. "Renzi Asks Alfano to Replace Treviso Prefect after Violent Anti-immigrant Protests in Quinto," 21 July 2015, http://www.ansa.it/english/news/ (accessed 7 December 2015).
8. "'We Will Hurt EU If Migrant Crisis Is Not Fixed,' Says Italian PM Matteo Renzi," 15 June 2015, http://www.theguardian.com/ (accessed 6 December 2015).
9. According to the UNHCR (2015), by August 2015 the rescue efforts had saved "tens of thousands of lives." The total deaths up to that point were at least 2,500, compared to 3,500 in the whole of 2014, and although the total number attempting the crossings was significantly higher, the proportion of deaths was lower.
10. "ISIS Push Spurs Italy and US to Step Up Talks," *Financial Times*, 9 December 2015.
11. "DAC Member Profile: Italy," http://www.oecd.org/dac/italy.htm (accessed 20 December 2015).
12. We use the expressions "Italian population" and "population of Italy" interchangeably, deliberately including both citizens and non-citizens.
13. At the end of November 2015, the headmaster of a primary school in Rozzano (near Milan) announced that instead of the typical Christmas celebration (traditionally symbolized in Italy by the *presepe*), he would substitute a generic winter feast. While in the past some schools had refused to celebrate Christmas with a Christmas tree or with a *presepe*, 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 any mention at all of Christmas was canceled. A huge row ensued, not only because of the complaints of parents, school authorities, and the Catholic Church, which resulted in the resignation of the school head, but in particular because the three main center-right parties took the opportunity to capitalize on the crisis with their anti-migrant slogans and tactical use of Christian symbols. Salvini of the LN, Ignazio La Russa of Fratelli d'Italia (FDI, Brothers of Italy), and Mariastella Gelmini of Forza Italia all picketed the Rozzano school, singing Christmas carols and bringing along their own *presepe*. See "Rozzano, Natale cancellato a scuola: Proteste ai cancelli. Arrivano anche Salvini e Gelmini," 30 November 2015, http://milano.repubblica.it/ (accessed 10 January 2016).
14. For a summary of these positions, see Guolo (2001).
15. For Pope Francis's message to Muslims, see Hafiz (2013). See also "Pope at Lampedusa: 'Forgive Us Lord' for Indifference," Vatican Radio, 9 July 2013, http://www.news.va/en/news/pope-at-lampedusa-forgive-us-lord-for-indifferen-2 (accessed 20 November 2014); "Pope Francis Asks Waldensian Christians to Forgive the Church," *Catholic Herald*, 22 June 2015.

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