The role of non-state actors' cognitions in the spiralling of the securitization of migration: prejudice, narratives and Italian CAS reception centres

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Abstract

Today's management of migration is strongly dependent on the role of reception centres. Despite their crucial role, scholars of the securitization of migration have overlooked at how they affect the process. In the light shed by this special issue, the present contribution analyzes nonstate actors' cognitions and narratives in the management of reception centres, so as to explain their performative roles in securitizing or de-securitizing human mobility as a threat. Its findings prove that, when reception centres' managers hold prejudicial cognitions, they develop negative practices that produce hostile and stereotyped narratives. A multi-method comparative case study, including covert ethnography, field observation and in-depth interviews, shows that, differently from speech-acts, narratives do not need to be accepted by the audience to exercise their effects. The audience is impressed from the narratives, which, in a performative act, make people feel and perceive what the narration stages (Alexander, J. 2004. "Cultural Pragmatics: Social Performance between Ritual and Strategy." *Sociological Theory*, 22(4): 527-573; Lyotard, J. F. 1979. La condition postmoderne: rapport sur le savior. English Translation "The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge", Manchester University Press.). Akin accountings contribute to spiralling the process, by self-fulfilling and reinforcing the securitization of migration.

Keywords

Migration; Securitization; Reception Centres; Practices; Narratives.

Introduction

Today's management of migration is often strongly dependent on the activity of a

variety of non-state actors, particularly when it comes to border controls or to first

reception of migrants (Bello 2017a; Bloom 2014): from border guards to

businessmen, NGOs and civil society, along with UN agencies and churches, they all

play a crucial role at different stages of migratory journeys. Matters of life and death

often depend on their very intervention. Although there have been interesting analyses of FRONTEX's activity (Neal 2009; Léonard 2010), most works on the topic have limited their study to the role of either states or institutions in which states play a predominant part (Huysmans 2007; Squire 2015; Karamanidou 2015). A few others have instead considered both the process of the securitization of migration and the consequences it entails for some non-state actors' activities -such as xenophobic movements and detention centres (Lazaridis and Wadia 2015), or civil society's activism (Squire 2011), and NGOs' rescue operations (Cusumano 2019a).

Among non-state actors, reception centres are crucial for the research to take into account, as they affect both migrants' and receiving populations' lives. They often performatively establish the relations between newcomers and the local communities, and, thereafter, perceptions of migration more widely in receiving countries (Bello 2017a). Many times, issues related to specific reception centres are at the core of electoral campaigns and political decisions, and they become reasons to further subordinate migrants' positions in a country (Dines, Montagna and Ruggiero 2014). A notorious case is Italy. Matteo Salvini, leader of the party The League (La Lega), when he was in power as Ministry of Interior between early 2018 and the summer of 2019, put in place policies criminalizing migrants and making their integration in the country extremely arduous, mainly through some crucial changes to the system of reception. Namely, the two Salvini's security decrees have decisively diminished the role of those integration centres that were included in the System of Protection for Asylum-seekers and Refugees (SPRAR) (Decreto Legge, 04/10/2018 n° 113, Gazzetta Ufficiale 04/10/2018) by significantly reducing their funds. The two security decrees instead increased the budget for both extraordinary reception centres (CAS), which do not offer any type of integration programmes to

newly arrived migrants, and centres of expulsions (CPR), which entail prison-like conditions for migrants, and thus establish a migration-crime nexus. Salvini's security decrees benefitted in particular extraordinary reception centres (CAS), which had often been both at the core of harsh political debates and in the media focus for some presumed negative impact on local communities. CAS reception centres consequently represent a crucial case of analysis to contribute to understanding how the spiralling of the securitization of migration (Bello 2017a; Bello 2020) has taken place in the country.

Despite the relevance of reception centres, if we exclude two works on migrants detention centres (Ceccorulli and Labanca 2014; Wadia 2015), scholars of the securitization of migration have overlooked at how they affect the process of securitization. A similar research gap is worth exploring and the current study contributes to filling it by analyzing the effects of prejudicial cognitions in reception centres. The introduction to this special issue has indeed classified nonstate actors' cognitions as useful to explain their performative roles in securitizing or de-securitizing human mobility as a threat (Bello 2020). In such a light, the present work provides some reflections and findings on the effects that specific cognitions shown in reception centres, exercise in the spiralling of the securitization of migration. In particular, it identifies in prejudicial cognitions what allows some reception centres to contribute to the upward spiralling of the securitization of migration, thus supporting one of the arguments of the theoretical framework of this special issue (Bello 2020). When reception centres' managers hold prejudicial cognitions, they develop negative practices that produce hostile and stereotyped narratives and allow a self-reinforcing spiralling of the securitization of migration. Differently from speech-acts, narratives in fact do not need to be accepted by the

audience to exercise their effects. The audience is impressed from the narratives, which in a performative act, make people feel and perceive what the narration stages (Alexander 2004; Lyotard 1979). The actors reproducing the narratives act as "impression managers" before the audience (Goffman 1959; Braun, Schindler and Wille 2008). Reception centres managed through prejudicial cognitions reproduce securitizing narratives and consequently further increase prejudice within countries. This work claims that prejudice engenders, through practices and narratives, a spiralling self-reinforcing progression of the securitization of migration.

In order to prove that prejudicial cognitions enact practices and narratives whose outcomes are key elements for an understanding of the role of non-state actors in the spiralling of the securitization of migration, this study presents the results of a comparative case study of migrant reception centres in Italy. The analysis was based on a fieldwork conducted between 2014 and 2017, which included covert ethnography, participatory observation, and unstructured and semi-structured interviews. The findings confirm that prejudice has actually played a crucial role not only in increasing the perceptions of migrants as threats, but also in creating dynamics that both self-fulfill its predicaments and spiral the process of securitization.

Prejudice and non-state actors in the spiralling of the securitization of migration

Prejudicial narratives in the spiralling of the securitization of migration

It is evident that there is a general tendency to associate migrants with crimes, terrorism and, more generally, insecurity, and when not directly depicted as criminals, they can be referred to as catalysts of organized crime and a harbinger of corruption, thus implying any way the construction of a migration-security nexus (Huysmans 2007). However, it is equally clear that there also exist some non-state actors that, instead, help desecuritize migration, and namely some UN agencies, NGOs and some civil society associations (Bello 2017a; Crepaz 2020; Della Porta 2018; Squire 2010). However, especially the latter category is generic enough to allow in its inclusion very different types of citizens' spontaneous or less spontaneous movements. For example, the activity of the transnational movement "Defend Europe", which rented a boat to operate a surveillance of the activities of those NGOs rescuing migrants in danger at sea, shows how civil society organizations are not automatically and always playing similar roles. Their impact depends on a variety of factors (Castelli Gattinara 2018; Cusumano 2019b; Schneiker 2019). While the positive role of civil society has already been depicted in some studies (Crepaz 2020; Della Porta 2018; Squire 2010), there is a lack of analysis of the consequences that prejudicial cognitions can entail for non-state actors' role in the securitization of migration.

Prejudice has in the past been identified as a negative attitude towards others, and in particular towards immigrants (Pettigrew 1980). More specifically to this theoretical framework, prejudice is understood here as a faulty cognition or, to put it more simply, a misleading mind-set, or frame of interpreting the world, according to which the presence of others would in more or less serious ways always compromise what is a desirable life in a place (Bello 2017a). The assumption and generic affirmation that migrants, without distinctions, pose a threat to national, or

individual or collective security is *per se* prejudicial towards individuals. Due to its implicit characteristics, the phenomenon of the securitization of migration is an intrinsically prejudicial process.

As part of the literature has identified (Bello 2017a; Huysmans 2000; Karamanidou 2015; Sasse 2005), both national and regional regulatory frameworks can entail, among their consequences, the formation of negative perceptions of migration. For instance, an important element that has been recognized as a source of perceptions of migrants as threats, lies in the increasing linkages connecting migration and minority policies to security and rights (Sasse 2005). However, practices can also engender prejudice. An example among such practices is the focus placed on the procedure of the asylum request after the "threat to the border" has been staged: the EU establishes that those asylum seekers who cannot prove their status of "refugees" within 18 months will be expulsed (European Parliament 2015). Those persons who have travelled without proper documentations and do not immediately state that they wish to request asylum, are sent to readmission (or expulsion) centres, in prison-like conditions, and then "returned" to their countries. The fact that there is given no other option than the readmission centre in prison-like conditions to the persons who have committed the administrative offence (or civic violation) of travelling without proper documentation, perpetuates a rhetoric that criminalize an administrative or civic violation, which only happens in the case of migration. Similar practices and criminalizing rhetoric amplify the narratives of both an existential threat at the border and the nexus between migration and crime (Bello 2017a). Such a rhetoric finds its perfect loci in those reception centres that relegate migrants to a separate place in the world, where they stay until their status is "checked and verified". The audience of such narrative -the society of the country

at large- assists, as in a public ceremony, about migrants and migration mostly through the news reporting threats at the borders and their "temporarily trapped" presence in these reception centres. No other performance is offered of migration: the life of migrants and their contribution to society is not portrayed at any other stage. The consequent perception is that migrants – and the entire phenomenon of migration – mainly exist at the borders and within these centres, and they solely use the resources of states and do not contribute to its welfare (Bello 2017a). Narratives further spreading from perceptions of this kind can engender other prejudicial ideas, in a self-fulfilling dynamic that spirals over time.

Until now the analyses of the securitization of migration have focused upon speech-acts, which need the acceptance of an audience (Buzan 1991; Weaver 1995; Balzacq 2010). However, when the process entails narratives, such as, for instance, stories passed orally, in personal networks, the audience has very limited alternatives to accepting the messages. The very act of uttering stories that started to be told under the form of a personal knowledge or experience of the first narrator and then recounted across networks, in the function of its performativity, cannot be challenged as different from the truth (Goffman 1959; Lyotard 1979). As Lyotard clarifies: "True knowledge, in this perspective, is always indirect knowledge; it is composed of reported statements that are incorporated into the metanarrative of a subject that guarantees their legitimacy." (Lyotard 1979: 35). One needs to add to such a consideration that narratives can be openly rejected by some, but they do not to need to be accepted by all the others to exercise their effects. They convince of their intrinsic truth all those interlocutors who do not share an alternative version of the story, a counternarrative which needs to be immediately and openly proposed in order to reject the securitizing narrative of the performative act of utterance.

The main difference between a speech-act and a narrative is that, while for the first the audience has to "accept" the message, for the second (the narrative) the audience "is impressed" from it and, if the actor is successful, *feels* what the matter at stake is (Alexander 2004). The narrative is a performative act in itself and the actors that contribute to it are "impression managers" before an audience (Goffman 1959; Braun, Schindler and Wille 2008). In a postmodern understanding, the narratives represent "true knowledge" that cannot be challenged by the audience (Lyotard 1979), but needs to be "resisted" with alternative narratives.

Along these lines, societies sometime witness but more often *feel* the arrival, detention and removal of migrants. Recent research has shown that, while the presence of long-term migrants is connected to an increase of positive attitudes towards newcomers even in times of economic crisis, the appearance of short-term migrants and return migration will be associated with a rise in prejudice because it solely highlights the flows of migrants arriving and leaving these countries (Bello 2017b). Therefore, some consequences of administrative practices in accepting or rejecting migrants' asylum requests and in the management of reception centres are key reasons for the development of perceptions of migrants as threats and the reproduction of stereotyped narratives. These practices derive from both regional and national policies (Huysmans 2000 and 2007; Squire 2015) but more importantly translate into narratives of migration and consequent perceptions that create more prejudice towards newcomers (Karamanidou 2015) and, more specifically, towards those perceived as "outsiders" because of a variety of visible elements that allow specific biological, cultural or ethnopolitical forms of racism and discrimination (Bello 2017a).

The role of non-state actors in the securitization

The literature on the securitization of migration (Balzacq 2010; Bigo 2002; Buzan 1991; Caviedes 2015; Huysmans 2006; Léonard and Kaunert 2010; Waever 1995) has already clarified the reasons for looking specifically at the role of non-state actors. In particular, Buzan (1991) and the Copenhagen School were amongst the first to emphasize both the importance of different actors and sectors in the securitization of migration, and the role of the audience in the acceptance of those speech-acts that transform a socio-economic, political or cultural issue into an existential threat (Buzan 1991; Weaver 1995). Bigo instead focused on a crucial category of non-state actors in the securitization, and namely those security professionals who intervene in "the management of the unease" (Bigo 2002). Huysmans examined the creation of insecure communities through policies and techniques as the referent objects within the process (Huysmans 2006). Balzacq (2010) has then placed specific attention to the role of the audience that received the information and admitted it as true for a successful securitization. In Balzacq's collection, Léonard and Kaunert specifically addressed the lack of a necessary "conceptualization of the relationship between the securitizing actors and the audience" (Léonard and Kaunert 2010: 57). More recently, Caviedes (2015) has tested the role of narratives as results of securitizing policies by part of different actors in different countries with a comparative perspective and has found that, from 2008 through 2012, these have been consistent only when related to the threat at the borders. However, Covidies has not considered the consequences of the narratives, but only their content and consistency.

From all these works, it emerges that the securitization of migration is also linked to some non-state actors' activities in the management of migration, and in

particular: 1) policies, discourse, practices and techniques, which public and private non-state actors use; 2) the symbols and narratives, which emerge from their management of migration, particularly when the focus is on the threat at the borders; and 3) the consequent perceptions that the audience form out of these situations, which constitute the new forces that help spiral the process of securitization. Of all these elements of connection, there is a lack of analysis of the practices of non-state actors and the consequent narratives and perceptions that the audience form out of them.

The Role of Non-State Actors in Framing Migration

Waever and colleagues (Waever et al. 1993) were among the first to highlight that the concerns that migration seems to provoke in the domain of societal insecurity would have been key in the stability of Europe in the future. Waever (1996) himself illustrated some further consequences. Identity dynamics are twisted with security issues in Europe to a point that, if not resolved, will threaten the stability of this region of the world and possibly the whole globe. Among these identity dynamics there are we-identities that *move* the reactions of non-state actors. On the one hand, non-state actors include civil society (Feischmidt, Pries, and Cantat 2019; Lazaridis and Wadia 2015) and private actors (Bloom 2014; Moreno and Price 2017), such as the corporations of security professionals or even sometime extremely violent paramilitaries, such as in the case of the Balkans (Zavirsek 2017). On the other hand, there are a variety of non-state actors, such as national and European border controls agencies and migration centres, whose roles have not been studied enough in the framework of the securitization of migration – if one excludes those existing works on Frontex (Neal 2009; Léonard 2010) and border surveillance system

(Jumbert 2012; Martins and Küsters 2019; Martins and Jumbert, 2020). The "generalised diplomat" that Waever identifies can operate in different directions: the securitization or its deconstruction. In such a light, it is key today to understand the roles of non-state actors at different stages in the process of securitization (Waever 1996: 126).

The introduction to this special issue has illustrated that for certain types of non-state actors (see Bello 2020: table 1), in particular those holding collective interests, it is possible to anticipate their role in the spiralling as their cognitions are predictable. Instead, the role of non-state actors holding individualist interests is more difficult to anticipate, because they do not need to publicly clarify their activity to an audience. Their role in either securitizing or desecuritizing migration needs further studies to be identified. In particular, it is not possible to establish *a priori* if individualist non-state actors are prejudiced or inclusive towards migrants and migration. Such a theoretical question makes them a perfect case study to empirically contemplate the role of cognitions in the securitization of migration and whether they eventually lead to a spiralling process. This work claims that, among key nonstate actors in the management of human mobility, reception centres holding a prejudicial cognition would engender a variety of practices that produce prejudicial narratives and further negative perceptions of migrants. New stereotyped narratives will be recounted by all those interlocutors who do not hold already opposite cognitions and related alternative and resisting narratives, indispensable to reject the prejudicial ones. All the "neutral" interlocutors would therefore be impressed from the first impression manager they encounter and could eventually recount the same narratives to other interlocutors and bring into existence more stereotyped ideas of migrants. In such a performative function of

narratives, it is possible to understand why prejudice can create a self-reinforcing dynamic within the spiralling of the securitization of migration. This study has consequently focused on reception centres, whose analysis could confirm the role of non-state actors' cognitions and their consequent narratives in either constructing or deconstructing human mobility as a threat.

Methodology of a Comparative Case Study of Reception Centres in Italy

Methodology and methods

In order to understand if prejudice could be confirmed as a key cognition in identifying non-state actors' practices and narratives in the securitization of migration, this work has relied on a comparative case study methodology on the role of migrants reception centres in the southern part of Italy, and namely in Campania, one of the main areas where migrants are hosted upon arrival.

Reception centres are among those non-state actors that could either be prejudiced, and consequently enact an upward spiralling of the securitization of migration, or be inclusive and thus decelerate the securitizing forces. The role of Italian reception centres, usually managed by non-state actors with individualist interests (Bello 2020) cannot be *a priori* defined as prejudiced or inclusive and, as such, if increasing or decreasing the securitization of migration. Therefore, the identification of two examples of very similar reception centres that only differ by their cognitions, makes possible to delve into the outcomes of their management, and consequently to consider whether prejudicial cognitions contribute or not to spiralling the securitization of migration. This analysis constitutes a comparative study that employs *most similar cases* strategy (George and Bannet 2005). Because both the context and all other characteristics are analogous, in case they differ in the

outcomes, it will be confirmed that the only distinctive element (an inclusive *vs* a prejudiced cognition) is the main reason that triggers practices and narratives spiralling the securitization of migration.

As this study attempts to establish links between causes and observed outcomes, it has employed the analytical method of process-tracing and a multi-method approach of data gathering. "Process-tracing might be used to test whether the residual differences between two similar cases were causal or spurious in producing a difference in these cases' outcomes" (George and Bennet: 6-7). Process-tracing is a method that contributes to causal inference in multi-method research (Bennet 2012). In particular, it is useful to generate causal-process observations (CPOs), and to validate hypotheses in qualitative research, and particularly in multi-method research. Following Checkel and Bennet's (2012) suggestion, the process-tracing has been particularly useful to control the effects of possible confounding variables and make sure that these did not influence the outcomes of the independent variable.

In this work, process-tracing is used in an interpretivist perspective, which is most appropriate for an understanding of this case study.

"In an interpretivist perspective, process tracing allows the researcher to look for the ways in which this link manifests itself and the context in which it happens. The focus is not only on what happened, but also on how it happened. It becomes possible to use process tracing to examine the reasons that actors give for their actions and behaviour and to investigate the relations between beliefs and behaviour." (Vennesson 2008: 233)

The multi-method data gathering for the comparative case study has involved covert ethnography of two reception centres in 2016 and 2017, participatory observation of the field from 2014 to 2017, which includes the two small towns in which the reception centres are located, and 9 in-depth interviews in the summer of 2017 for the process-tracing techniques. These in-depth interviews have included 7 semi-structured interviews with managers of reception centres, and 2 unstructured interviews with managers of reception centres. Also, during the participatory observation of the field, a variety of unstructured interviews with citizens, managers and migrants were conducted in the two small towns.

Ethical Issues

For ethical issues and concerns that emerged from a consultation held with an advisory board, the choice for this study was directed towards a covert ethnography of reception centres to mainly guarantee both the researcher's and the respondents' safety and at the same time providing accurate findings on the subject of study[1]. In order to not break the trust between the researcher and the participants in the study, when dealing with the information revealed during the covert field work persons have been asked if they would repeat those affirmations in public occasions and have always confirmed their replies. Such a strategy allowed to adjust the personal level of involvement and remedy the research concealment in ways that

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[1] The persons interviewed in 2017 gave their informed consent to the study and all personal details have been removed and the interviews data were stored in anonymized files. The information revealed from the persons who have been involved by the research, has been reported in the most accurate account and have been used in a way that does not break the trust between the researcher and the participants in the study.

were similarly used and suggested by other researchers (Lewis and Ritchie 2003; Li 2008).

The Context and Cases Selection

The territory of Campania, in the Southern part of Italy, was selected for this field study, for the reason that it is the region hosting most migrants in "extraordinary reception centres" (Centri di Accoglienza Straordinaria - CAS) once migrants leave the first hot-spots in which they are brought after being rescued at sea. The Italian system of reception had, until the recent changes brought about on 4th October 2018 by Salvini's First Security Decree[2], three stages:

1) Upon arrival, the hotspots (CPSA: Cento di Prima Accoglienza e Soccorso): migrants are identified and, supposedly, in a few hours relocated[3]. Sometimes, this relocation can take much longer, up to one or two weeks, depending on several factors that are the consequence of considerations by part of both the prefect (*Prefetto*), who is an administrative official of the state in charge of decision-making for the relocation upon arrival, and the managers of reception centres. It was alluded in one unstructured interview that this delay in the process of relocation could be the consequence of bribes and corruption in that particular area. For instance, five persons, including one member of the staff of the Office of the Prefect (*Prefettura*), one member of the staff of the Ministry of Justice and a policeman, together with two managers of reception centres were arrested in June 2018 for corruption, fraud and revelation of secrets of public acts related to the management of immigration

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[2] Decreto Legge, 04/10/2018 n° 113, Gazzetta Ufficiale 04/10/2018.
[3] Interview number 2 with a manager of a CAS, August 2017. It was all

relocation, as an Italian national newspaper reports (Il Mattino 21 June 2018; Bello

2021 forthcoming).

2) First Reception of migrants: CDA (Centri di Accoglienza - Reception

Centres), CARA (Centri di Accoglienza per Richiedenti Asilo -Reception Centres for

Asylum Seekers) and CAS (Extraordinary Reception Centres). Normally, those who

would immediately express the intention to request asylum would be located in

CARA centres and all the others to CDA. However, due to the high number of arrivals

that exceed room in these centres, CAS extraordinary reception centres were

created in order to remedy this "exceptional situation". However, CAS have now

become the norm rather than the exception (Bello 2021 forthcoming), and most

migrants were hosted here after their relocation from the hotspot, as an Italian

Parliamentary Commission on Migrants Reception has verified[4]. These CAS

reception centres are managed by businessmen or other for-profit associations,

which have responded to public tenders to reorient a no-longer-profitable business

in the care sector or in accommodating services into a migrant reception centre.

3) Second Reception: System of Protection for Asylum-Seekers and Refugees

(SPRAR): These centres were initially conceived by UNHCR Italian Office together

with the association of Italian municipalities (ANCI)[5] to provide refugees and

asylum-seekers with specific language and professional trainings, along with

psychological assistance and support for their mental health, and with a view to

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[4] See Camera dei Deputati- Parlmento Italiano: "Commissione parlamentare di
inchiesta sul sistema di accoglienza, di identificazione ed espulsione, nonché sulle
condizioni di trattenimento dei migranti e sulle risorse pubbliche impegnate".
Available online at http:
<http://www.camera.it/leg17/1281?shadow_organo_parlamentare=2649&shado
w_organo=102&natura=M> (last accessed 14 Novemebr 2018).
[5] SPRAR centres were made official by Italian Law 30 July 2002 on "Changes to
immigration and refugee policies".
http://www.camera.it/parlam/leggi/02189l.htm

make refugees' integration in the country possible. These centres actually strive to mend the main element of criticism in refugee's integration system across the EU, which, as identified in the literature on refugees, lied in their post-traumatic stress disorder (Lindert and von Ehrenstein 2018). With the creation of SPRAR centres, UNHCR Italian Office, along with the association of Italian municipalities (ANCI) aimed to make sure that these persons could eventually integrate more positively after their traumatic experience. These centres' activities, based on the experience that the care service had developed across decades in Italy, seemed to actually constitute a very good practice and framework model in the integration of refugees. Their very existence is currently threatened by the 2018 "Security Decree" signed by the then Ministry of Interior, Matteo Salvini, which has entailed the dismantling of CARA reception centres, an important reduction of the SPRAR's system of integration, and the normalization of the CAS extraordinary reception centres[6] (Bello 2021 forthcoming). Such a fact *per se* provides a hint of how the securitization of migration has spiraled in Italy, as The League party had at first included integration policies for refugees with the Bossi-Fini law, and has instead abandoned the logic of integration more recently, through an executive decision of the then Ministry of Interior, Matteo Salvini.

For the majority of migrants who arrive in Italy are hosted in CAS, these were the centres selected for the case study. The selection of the two reception centres fell on two CAS centres managed by non-state actors, in this special issue categorized as non-state actors with individualist interest (Bello 2020). The two CAS centres are referred here as centre A and centre B. They are perfectly comparable in all aspects: they can host between 10 and 20 migrants each, and they both consist of

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[6] Decreto Legge, 04/10/2018 n° 113, Gazzetta Ufficiale 04/10/2018.

a small independent house at the limits of the territory of two small towns in the same valley. The two small towns are 15 minutes away from each other and of similar dimensions (around 10000 people). They share the same geographical, socio-cultural and economic context. The participatory observation in the two towns was used to take into account changes in populations' feelings towards migrants.

The covert ethnography and the two unstructured interviews concerned on the practices (management and activities of the two reception centres, their relations with local police and with the local populations), the related narratives reproduced in the town and the consequences in local perceptions. The covert ethnography was the only method of investigation that allowed to both access the sites and observe the actual dynamics happening in the two centres and their relations with police and with local populations, and ensuring at the same time safety of all the subjects involved in the research. These centres do not normally grant access to researchers and, whereas they do, the visits happen in particular days, and both migrants and employees of these centres are usually instructed on what to reply, instructions with which they will comply, otherwise they could suffer consequences. The seven semi-structured interviews held with key informants were intended to crosscheck a posteriori for spurious connections and control for eventual confounding variables as requested by the process-tracing method of analysis.

Findings of a Comparative Case Study of Reception Centres in Italy

The field observation of the two centres made clear that one centre (centre A) is managed by a small business made of consultants and managers, already active in

the past in providing social services to specific vulnerable groups in the area; the other centre (centre B) is managed by a private businessman who converted one of his properties into a CAS centre. Both these centres can thus be identified as non-state actor with individualist interests.

Cognitions

Upon covert ethnography, then confirmed in the in-depth interviews in 2017, it became clear that the managers of Centre A started its activities being already quite positive towards migrants and strongly aware of the eventual prejudice that local populations can hold against migrants, for which they often intervene in defense of migrants when they are victims of discriminatory attitudes or narratives. The businessman that runs Centre B, instead, is strongly prejudiced towards them, and views them as "uncivilized" and ungrateful people. It is thus possible to affirm that centre A holds inclusive cognitions of migrants; while, Centre B presents important prejudicial cognitions related to migrants, which, thanks to the information gathered through the covert ethnography[7], could be more specifically considered as cognitions consisting of "ethnopolitical and biological types of racism" (Bello 2017a; Fanon 1967) and particularly towards Sub-Saharan persons, which, in the manager's own words, were compared to "savages" and "wild animals". The two centres therefore represent two most similar cases that only differ for the independent variable: the prejudiced cognition, which is present only in one of the two centres, centre B. It is therefore possible to compare these two centres to consider the outcomes in terms of securitization of their management styles and consequent narratives.

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[7] Covert Ethnography Notes, 16 April 2017. "Visit to the centre on Easter Day".

Practices: Management styles

The two centres presented akin characteristics in terms of number of migrants hosted but, as a consequence of the different cognitions, the management style of the two centres significantly varies. Centre A leaves migrants to autonomously organize their daily life in the centre, but provides a lot of support in external activities and intently collaborates with the local police and receive their support in dealing with administrative issues, always acting as intermediaries between the local police and the migrants. Centre B is much stricter when it comes to situations internal to the centre, but disengages from migrants' activities outside the centre and with their relations with both the police and the local population. Centre A regards local police as a strong ally in their activity and report to have learnt with surprise the kind and patient work that local police do with migrants. Centre B has very few exchanges with local police, and views them as controllers. The seven semi-structured interviews checked that these managements styles' differences were present with other reception centres holding inclusive cognitions. Such a fact confirmed that the connection was not spurious and that the management style does not constitute a confounding variable that depends on other factors but a direct outcome of specific cognitions.

Outcomes of Different Cognitions and their Management styles

The participatory observation showed that both the local population of centre A town and centre B town are prejudiced towards migrants; many persons present racist attitudes either based on ethnopolitical forms of racism -based on elements of ethnicities and related civilizational ideas-, or biological forms of racism -based on

physical elements[8]. However, while centre A's managers recognized in the unstructured interview that neighbours became increasingly positive towards their guests, thanks to personal contacts, in the town of centre B, most neighbours do not have any contacts with the persons hosted in these centres, with the exception of those interactions happening when migrants beg for money in the street, in the proximity of supermarkets and malls.

The observations emerged in the participatory observation of the field in town B, were also confirmed in the unstructured interview with the manager of centre B during the covert ethnography. According to the man, local population would make sure not to stay too close to "them", as, in his own words, "they are dangerous and dirty savages". These interactions have often increased negative attitudes in the local population. Despite the stereotypes, a few people still interact with them positively, and when the manager of centre B was asked why some persons have personal exchanges with them, he considered that such a circumstance might be a consequence of Christian elements of charity. According to this man, therefore, there is never the possibility that local people could interact with these migrants as they would do with any other person. Said cognition has actually framed the way he has managed the centre and has had further consequences, particularly in terms of violent behaviours and tensions in the centre.

In reception centre A, migrants have never had problems with local police and have never been involved in crimes or accidents, except in one very isolated

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[8] Persons who present an ethnopolitical form of racism believe that people of different ethnicities are less civilized and less useful to the society. While persons who present a biological form of racism, consider that individuals who present different physical features, namely in this case skin colour, are inferior to other human beings. Both forms of racism can arrive to the point of dehumanizing persons who present these characteristics (Bello 2017a).

situation that was occasioned by one migrant who stole money from one of the managers of the centre. The incident however did not engender stereotypes for all migrants. Instead, the migrants hosted in centre B have more often been involved in accidents and disturbs. They seem to be more hostile towards other migrants and fight for getting the best spots where to beg for money. Police has had to intervene in several occasions.

Such contrast is evidently the outcome of the divergent cognitions and management styles of the manager of Centre B. Because of the very negative and prejudiced behavior that he shows towards his guests, then they are subjects to a variety of verbal abuses and dehumanized treatments. Obscene language and degrading manners increase tensions in centre B, and they very often aggravate some of the aggressive behaviours that those migrants who suffer of post-traumatic stress disorder actually present (Lindert and von Ehrenstein 2018). In CAS centres, differently from what happens in SPRARs, migrants receive no regular help or support by specialized psychological medical staff. They can request it and then, as per extraordinary measures, they will be assigned a psychologist if a CAS manager asks for it. In centre A, the manager has asked on some occasions the help of a psychologist. In centre B, the manager has never asked the support of a specialist at any time.

Some examples of these dehumanized treatments in centre B were: constant verbal abuse, the denial of the need of medical attention for pregnant women or for other guests who had health issues, and the scarceness of food provided to pregnant women or other guests. These examples were reported by a local citizen who found

some of these migrants in very bad health conditions in the street one night and consequently drove them to a doctor's clinic[9].

As a consequence of these increased tensions in centre B, guests often have issues with each other, but such conflicts cannot be solved within the centre, due to the strict management style of the manager of centre B, who supervises all activities in the centre and threatens to send migrants away and report to the police if they have altercations within the centre. A menace alike substantially represents a way to menace them to suffer consequences on their visas requests, because visa are always denied in case either migrants flee centres or are reported to police and thus expulsed from centres. Migrants who are hosted in Centre B discuss all those issues that arise among them outside the reception centre. Because of the prejudiced managements styles, important tensions actually arise in centre B, which often entail true fights among guests, with the development of aggressive behaviours and violence.

The narratives

For such plethora of reasons, the local population of the town where centre B is located often sees most of these migrants as aggressive and dangerous. Narratives of migrants fighting, robbing and being more generally dangerous start to circulate in the town. Even those persons who have never had contacts with migrants sooner or later are told of "these negros who fight, rob and do not want to work but only beg in the streets". Narratives clearly socially construct migrants as threats in local population's views in the town. Only those who are already very politically active for the creation of inclusive policies resist these narratives in centre B town.

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[9] Participatory observation notes, 13 July 2016.

Migrants suffered of post-traumatic stress disorders and sometimes showed aggressive attitudes also in centre A, and at times important tensions arose in centre A as well. However, the different cognitions and consequent management style reproduced in the centre allowed these tensions to be resolved in more or less peaceful ways, depending on occasions, but always within the centre, and with the mediation of centre A's managers. As previously mentioned, the tender terms of CAS' management do not include the provision of psychological or medical staff who could help those in need within the centre. Therefore, in centre A the managers did all the possible in order to provide support with reasonable talks and mediation. However, in some cases, Centre A's managers have requested to hospitalize some of their guests so as to provide them with medical and professional help. In any case, these situations have never entailed issues or tensions outside the centre or with the local population of the town where centre A is located. Migrants have always solved all their personal issues within the centre. Their contacts with local population were absolutely normal. Some pregnant women after the labour have for example received gifts for their babies by part of neighbours, as this is the local tradition in such occasions[10]. Narratives concerning migrants are mostly about unfolding of family life, or personal stories, and much less stereotyped. Some of these migrants have actually found work in town and stayed when they got their visas. These facts show that migrants' relations with the local population in the town where centre A is located and narratives about migrants are completely discordant from those developing in the town of centre B.

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[10] In-depth interview with the managers of centre A, 23 August 2017.

Conclusions: The spiralling of the securitization of migration seen through the activities of reception centres

The findings of the comparative case study corroborate that only in the case of the individualist non-state actor holding prejudicial cognitions (reception centre B), violence among migrants has increased and has both produced practices and reproduced stereotyped narratives that have entailed negative relations between migrants and local population, socially constructing migrants as a threat. In such a case, it is possible to confirm that prejudice increases the spiralling of the securitization of migration. The comparative case study has shown that, at all effects, prejudice can represent a decisive element in explaining the role of non-state actors in the securitization of migration, while a non-state actor holding inclusive cognition, such as centre A, will not play a role in securitizing migration; at least not in ways that could be highlighted through this case study.

In particular, the use of a comparative case study with process tracing and multi-method approach has been appropriate to understand that actors holding prejudicial cognitions eventually intervening in the activity of reception centres entail a mismanagement of these places, for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it worsens migrants' capacity to cope with post-traumatic stress disorder. Secondly, it engenders aggressive behaviours that negatively affect relations both among migrants, and between them and local populations. Thirdly, it exacerbates tensions ultimately leading to conflicts and violence that request the intervention of the local police. Finally, it produces stereotyped narratives among the local populations, which can hardly be taken as different from the truth, because they are recounted on the basis of a personal experience or story that has started to circulate within personal networks. A finding of this kind also corroborates that narratives,

differently from speech-acts, do not need to be accepted to establish a securitization of migration but, as Lyotard puts it (1979), share the quintessence of "true knowledge", composed of stories included into the narrative of a subject granting them legitimacy. The aforementioned stereotyped characterizations are also likely to affect other newcomers, by both self-reinforcing prejudices and increasing those perceptions and social constructions of migrants as security threats.

To conclude, this study confirms that prejudicial cognitions and consequent narratives spiral the securitization of migration, with an escalation of social and inter-group conflicts. More studies in this direction would help cover the gap about the role of diverse non-state actors, the influence of narratives in the management of migration, and possible measures to foster positive dynamics rather than negative ones. One of these measures would be to ensure that all persons who participate either in the governance of human mobility or in tenders from public authorities to deal with the management of human mobility, prove that they do not hold prejudicial cognitions[11]. Such a simple policy could help achieve that securitization dynamics do not spiral over time.

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[11] There are several social psychology studies explaining how to evaluate if a person is prejudiced even when the prejudicial attitudes are not openly expressed or when there are attempts to conceal these faulty cognitions. Measures of implicit prejudice are based on associations between race-related stimuli and word valence (Arkes and Tetlock 2009).

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