

Degree Program in Policies and Governance in Europe  
(Double MA)

Course of EU Institutions and Decision-making

Treating migrants as a threat?  
An analysis of the vicious circle of the  
securitization of migration through its impact  
on the underground economy of the receiving  
country: Italy and the Rosarno revolt.

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*Treating migrants as a threat? An analysis of the vicious circle of the securitization of migration through its impact on the underground economy of the receiving country: Italy and the Rosarno revolt.*

***I. Introduction***

Migration is one of the most challenging issues that governments must deal with. This is especially true for the European Union (EU) and its Member States (MSs), which have historically been among the most attractive places for immigrants to settle (McAuliffe & Triandafyllidou, 2022, p.24), thus keeping immigration a very sensitive and contentious issue on governments' agendas. Additionally, migration is now being treated by the EU and its Member States as a security concern. The trend of equating immigration with security was already evident at the turn of the century (Rosina, 2019a, p.89), but it became more pronounced in the wake of the 9/11 attacks and other terrorist attacks on European soil, including those in Madrid in 2004, London in 2005, and, more recently, in France, Belgium, Germany, and the UK, between 2015 and 2017 (Asderaki & Markozani, 2021, p.180).

This phenomenon is known as securitization, and was originally established by the Copenhagen School of Security Studies and its most prominent members Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde. They describe it as the process by which a securitizing actor declares that a non-traditional security matter, such as migration, poses an existential threat to the audience. If the latter recognises it as a threat, then ordinary politics may be suspended, and exceptional measures may be taken to address the issue (Buzan et al., 1998, p.25). Politicians and policymakers frequently relate the issue of migration to security concerns, particularly those related to crime and terrorism, permitting more stringent measures to be used to address the phenomenon (Lindstrøm, 2005, p.589; Schlentz, 2010, p.6). The fact that many migrants participate in the underground economy provides additional arguments for this strict approach to immigration (Quassoli, 1999, p.218). Considering that the underground economy is thriving and growing in an increasing number of states (Crețan et al., 2019, p.93), this contributes to portraying migrants as an undesirable element in society (Reyneri & Ballarino, 1999, p.313).

## *Definition of terms*

Before proceeding any further, it is important to define both the term migration and underground economy. According to the United Nations, the term migrant refers to "a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons" (IOM, 2023). On the one hand, a person who migrates voluntarily (voluntary migration) may do so for family or economic reasons, and this type of migration can be either regular or irregular. Involuntary or forced migration, on the other hand, consists of people who are coerced to leave their countries of origin due to "threats to life and livelihood, whether arising from natural or man-made causes" (European Commission, 2023). They may then apply for refugee status if they meet the requirements for international protection, such as being unable to return owing to a legitimate fear of potential persecution due to their race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or as part of a particular social group (UNHCR, 2023b). It is important to note that it can be difficult to determine whether someone qualifies as a refugee or as a migrant, especially since asylum seekers frequently must enter the EU illegally by taking the same risky routes as irregular migrants (Talani, 2021, p.184). Additionally, securitizing speeches and actions frequently target "migrants" as a group without making a clear distinction between those who qualify for asylum and those who are irregular migrants. For the purposes of this study, the term "migrant/immigrant" will predominantly be used to refer to the group of irregular migrants, because of its more evident connection to the underground economy, which will be outlined below. If there are any exceptions, it will be made clear in the text. Instead, the term "underground economy" refers to unreported income from economic activities which evade any type of governmental oversight, including monetary, regulatory, and administrative controls (Feige, 1990; Portes & Aller, 2005; Medina & Schneider, 2018). These activities can be legal or illegal (Smith, 1994) even though, for the purpose of this paper, only the former will be considered. It should also be noted that the terms underground/shadow/informal/unofficial/black economy will all be used interchangeably in this work.

## *Literature review*

Several academics have focused a lot of their research on the securitization of migration, particularly in the EU. There is general consensus over how migration has been successfully securitized in the EU, by strengthening its link with security (Faist, 2004; Karyotis, 2007; Bigo, 2009; Luedtke, 2009; Bourbeau, 2011). The growing perception of migration as a security issue has resulted in a series of policies leading to the creation of what is now known as "Fortress Europe": while the EU has removed restrictions on its citizens' ability to move freely inside its territory, it has made it more difficult for citizens of third countries to enter and remain within its borders (Geddes, 2003). This has been justified by the necessity to control irregular migration (Triantafyllidou & Dimitriadi, 2013, p. 599) and the security-migration nexus (Huysmans, 2000; Geddes 2000, 2003; Leonard, 2010; Estevens, 2018). Most of the research on the subject is therefore primarily concerned with identifying the discourses and practices that indicate the securitization of migration in the EU (Huysmans, 2000, 2006; Panebianco, 2020; Asderaki & Markozani, 2021). Based on the available literature, and on what is observed on a daily basis, it appears that a securitized approach to migration has become the standard at both the EU and at Member State level. However, despite several attempts to limit and control migration, the number of migrants entering the EU has not decreased, which might lead us to question if this strategy is the most effective (Talani, 2021, p.194). There are in fact several works that criticise the effects of the securitization of migration, highlighting its negative consequences (Jaskulowski, 2018; Bello, 2020, 2021). Other studies have concentrated on exploring the underground economy (Schneider & Enste, 2000; Ihrig & Moe, 2004; Amaral & Quintin, 2006; Dabla-Norris et al., 2008), irregular migration (Borjas, 1994; Djajic & Vinogradova, 2017), and how the two are related (Reyneri & Ballarino, 1998; Maroukis et al., 2011; Camacho et al., 2017; Crețan et al., 2019). This work will instead look at the outcomes of the interaction between securitization, migration, and the underground economy. Although some academics have already advanced certain views in this regard (Talani, 2021), the research on the subject has still not received the attention it deserves.

### ***Aim and purpose of the study***

The purpose of this work is to contribute to the literature on the subject, by combining all the aforementioned components, and answering the following theoretical research question: *What are the effects of the securitization of migration on the underground economy of receiving countries?* The overarching goal is to critically assess the effects of the securitization of migration by examining its impact on the underground economy and the potential negative outcomes that could result from this. The hypothesis outlined herein is that perceiving and treating migrants as a threat triggers a series of consequences that ultimately increase insecurity for both migrants and citizens.

The analysis will be empirically predicated around the case of Italy, the reason for which is twofold. Firstly, Italy is crucial to the migratory dynamics of Europe. Located at the centre of the Central Mediterranean route, it has experienced constant migratory pressure, especially from arrivals via sea. Despite the many efforts made by the various Italian governments to control the flow of migrants, the numbers have by no means decreased. In 2022 the migrants present on the Italian territory hit the historically high number of 6 million, approximately 10% of the whole population (Fondazione ISMU, 2023, p.60). Secondly, Italy features a thriving underground economy that in 2020 accounted for 10.5% of the country's GDP (ISTAT, 2022; p.2). Even though (irregular) migrants are by no means the only ones responsible for it, they are unquestionably the first to be blamed for its proliferation and hence labelled as a threat. This study will concentrate on a particular area of the Italian underground economy, namely the agricultural sector, which has some interesting peculiarities since, especially in the South, it is often intertwined with the *caporalato* – which will be defined and addressed in due course – and the Italian mafia.

### ***Methodology***

The methodology will involve a triangulation of sources, including the existing literature, information from national newspapers and the most recent data from official sources – including national and international organisations, as well as NGOs. These sources will be used to examine a specific case study, i.e. the effects of the securitization on the Italian underground economy and its consequences, as exemplified by the revolt that occurred in the town of

Rosarno in 2010, which involved a group of migrants employed irregularly and exploited in the agricultural sector. The case study approach was chosen as it enables to present a logical and chronological narrative of the research, which can give readers relevant context to help them understand the topics being covered (Gillham, 2010, p.22). Even though only one case study will be taken in consideration, this can often be sufficient and powerful in portraying a topic more effectively than other methods (Ibid., p.101). The purpose of this study is to respond to the following empirical research question: *What are the effects of the securitization of migration for the Italian underground economy and how did these effects manifest themselves in the case of Rosarno?* What this paper expects to find is that the securitization of migration led, among other consequences, to the marginalisation and exploitation of migrants in the Italian underground economy. This created tensions that, in the case of Rosarno, resulted in an increase in violence, reinforcing the securitized perception of migrants as a threat.

### ***Structure***

The paper will be structured as follows: first, a discussion of the main theories and literature produced on the three components (securitization, migration, and underground economy), as well as on the way they interact, will be provided (Chapter II). This theoretical framework will be then helpful when analysing its practical application to the case study of Italy and Rosarno (Chapter III). The latter will begin by providing some background information on Italy, briefly discussing how immigration has been securitized over time. It will be followed by information on the size of the underground economy, with a focus on the agricultural sector and its dynamics. Subsequently, it will investigate the effects that these policies have had on the underground economy and the involvement of migrants in it. The case of Rosarno will then be examined as an example of escalating insecurity, which will aid in providing some comments and conclusions on the subject (Chapter IV).

## *II. Theoretical framework: securitization, migration and the underground economy*

### *Securitization theory*

In the context of the post-Cold War, it soon became apparent that society itself, rather than the state, was the primary referent of new insecurities (Buzan et al., 1998, p.1). The Copenhagen School developed this new understanding by expanding and revising the term "security" (McSweeney, 1996), thus producing one of the most interesting theoretical works for the international security studies field. Indeed, security could refer to five realms: economic, environmental, societal, military and political (Buzan et al., 1998, p.1). In their book "Security: a new framework for analysis" (1998), Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde proposed the idea of securitization, employing a constructivist approach as a starting point for security studies (Özerim, 2013, p.924). Securitization theory is described as the instance in which "by means of an argument about the priority and urgency of an existential threat the securitizing actor has managed to break free of procedures that he or she would otherwise be bound by" (Buzan et al., 1998, p.25). Reframed in other words, the process by which a securitizing actor proclaims a non-traditional security concern to pose an existential threat to a referent object is referred to as securitization. If the audience to which the securitizing move is addressed accepts it as an existential threat, emergency measures may be adopted to deal with the issue quickly (Buzan et al., 1998, p.25) and without the "normal" (democratic) rules and regulations of policymaking (Taureck, 2006, p.55).

According to the theory, securitization has three essential components: the securitizing move, the securitizing actor, and the targeted audience (Stritzel, 2007, p.362; Glover, 2011, p.78). The former mostly consists of a security speech act (Buzan et al., 1998, p.33), demonstrating the importance of discourse in framing a topic as a security issue (Balzacq, 2002, p.9). Secondly, since the process of securitization is actor-based (Özerim, 2013, p.924), actors and agencies are another essential component. The actor initiates the perception of threat to a referent object (Ibid., p.924) and, if it has a certain degree of legitimacy, the likelihood of the security speech act succeeding increases significantly (Baele & Sterck, 2015, p.1124). This is why, according to Buzan et al. (1998, p.40), they are typically, but not always, political, bureaucratic, and governmental elites. Finally, to have a complete and successful securitization, the referent object (or audience) must accept the issue as a security concern and as a threat.



There have been some significant criticisms of the Copenhagen School. The majority of these largely concentrate on criticising the securitization theory for emphasising security speech acts (Huysmans, 2006; Taureck, 2006; Karyotis, 2007; Stritzel, 2007; Balzacq, 2008; Benam, 2011; Glover, 2011; Karyotis, 2012; Baele & Sterck, 2015) and ignoring practises and actors that play a significant role in the securitization process (Huysmans, 2000; 2006; Bigo, 2007; Balzacq, 2008; Benam, 2011; Baele & Sterck, 2015). For example, some authors emphasise the problem of concentrating solely on security-related speeches since anything could potentially turn into a security issue if someone declares it so (Trombetta, 2010, p.137). Finally, McDonald (2008, p.573) claims that the socio-political and historical context, and not just the "utterance" of an existential security threat, determines whether securitization is successful, and therefore must be taken into account.

In this regard, it is important to note that several academics (Bigo, 2002; Bigo & Tsoukala, 2008) have abandoned the conventional definition of securitization as a "speech act" in favour of one that views it as a field effect. The Paris School of Securitization is undoubtedly one of the most renowned. They contend that routines and practices can be used to achieve securitization. A policy area may become securitized by institutional processes, administrative and bureaucratic routines, and a network of actors (Asderaki & Markozani, 2021, p.183). According to Bigo (2002), activities such as "population profiling, risk assessment, statistical calculation, category creation, proactive preparation, and what may be termed a specific habitus of the 'security professional' with its ethos of secrecy and concern for the management of fear or unease" (Bigo, 2002, pp.65-66) can all be used to promote securitization. Balzacq's sociological perspective on securitization, which emphasises the significance of practices, context, and power relations, further develops these concepts. As he explains, "security practices are enacted, primarily, through policy tools" (Balzacq, 2011, pp.15-16) contending that institutionalisation through repetitions of security practices, rather than the power of speech acts, plays a more significant role in the construction of security issues (Ünal Eriş & Öner, 2021; p.167). Therefore, he suggests concentrating on the roles and implications of the policy tools used to address the public issue rather than looking at how threats are constructed at the discourse level (Balzacq, 2008, p.75). Both Schools present strong arguments and will therefore be used in tandem. In fact, it is impossible to disregard the contribution made by the Paris School, particularly because the purpose of this study is to critically assess the implications of securitized policy tools and migration laws rather than only discourses on migration.

### *The securitization of migration*

Despite the criticisms, the securitization theory continues to provide a useful theoretical framework, particularly when attempting to understand how migration has come to be perceived as a security issue. For instance, Stivachtis (2008, p.2) claims that it provides the most extensive epistemological method for studying the relationship between migration and security. In fact, securitization is frequently found in states' responses to migration. Unrestricted migration flows are a particularly sensitive topic to tackle in a security frame since, in accordance with the realist notion of the state, managing borders and being able to track migration is of the utmost importance (Weiner, 1993). The theory of securitization goes perhaps a step further, acknowledging the danger of not being able to manage borders, but also considering the importance of safeguarding social security, meant both as the domestic environment and the socially created values (Wæver & Freedman, 1993, pp.42-43, 149).

Those in support of a securitized view of migration highlight the many dangers and challenges that migration could bring. One such challenge could involve a threat to identity, since migration brings many cultural, ethnic, and linguistic features to host communities and has the potential to modify them (Wæver & Freedman, 1993, p.23). Other negative repercussions could include those on public order, crime rate, demography, politics, society and economy (Karyotis, 2007; 2012; Todor et al., 2014; Iancu & Nechita, 2016). For instance, even though some evidence indicates the positive economic effects of migration in receiving countries (Peri, 2012), others claim that a state's welfare system, housing market, and unemployment rate may all be affected by a sudden increase in population brought on by migration (Sasse, 2005, p.674; Karyotis, 2007, pp.8-12; Karyotis, 2012, p.391). Furthermore, when immigrants have a criminal tendency, the public order of the receiving country is in danger: the view of immigrants as security threats and sources of criminal and terrorist activity leads to the perception that they pose a threat to national security (Karyotis, 2007, p.1). Public actors in Europe, including politicians and the media, have therefore started to increasingly view migration as a threat to society's safety and survival as well as an economic and cultural menace (Huysmans, 2000; Ceyhan & Tsoukala, 2002).

When securitization is translated into practice, it inevitably entails some negative effects that are researched by many. The Copenhagen School claims that securitization is a form of panic politics that emphasises the need to act immediately in order to safeguard society (Roe, 2012,

p.254). This undoubtedly affects the democratic process, since it limits debate and deliberation and encourages people to circumvent normal procedures (Ibid., p.254). The aim of this paper is, however, to examine additional forms of negative effects of securitization aside from the democratic implications of such a strategy. Specifically, the following paragraphs will try to investigate what effects the securitization of migration can have on the underground economy of receiving countries.

### ***Underground economy, migration and securitization: a complex interaction***

First and foremost, it is crucial to clarify what the term "underground economy" means and the potential factors from which it could originate. According to Schneider & Williams (2013, p.23), the term generally refers to "currently unregistered economic activities that would contribute to the officially calculated gross national product if the activities were recorded". Furthermore, Smith (1994) distinguishes between legal or illegal activities, the latter of which include prostitution, drug dealing, and the illegal sale of weapons. The OECD offers an additional definition of the phenomenon, although it excludes activities that are inherently illegal. It defines the underground production as consisting of activities that are "deliberately concealed from public authorities for the following kinds of reasons: a) to avoid the payment of income, value added or other taxes; b) to avoid payment of social security contributions; c) to avoid having to meet certain legal standards such as minimum wages, maximum hours, safety or health standards, etc.; d) to avoid complying with certain administrative procedures, such as completing statistical questionnaires or other administrative forms" (OECD, 2002, p.228). This description is very useful as it hints at both the potential factors that could originate the underground economy as well as the problems that may arise. Regarding the former, several researchers (Caballé & Panadés, 2007; Torgler & Valev, 2007; Schneider & Buehn 2018) indicate the regulatory, tax and social security burden, institutional quality and efficiency, citizens' tax morality, corruption, the size of the economy, unemployment, and the size of the agricultural industry as determining factors. Along with them, the availability of illegal migrants as workers may also encourage businesses to become involved in the informal industry (Camacho et al., 2017, p.1051). As for the latter, in addition to not allowing an accurate calculation of a nation's GDP (Smith, 1994), these underground activities also violate labour and administrative laws and, by evading tax authorities, do not support the social security systems of the countries (Geddes & Pettrachin, 2020; p.153). Combining the detrimental

effects that the shadow economy has on society with the evidence of a clear connection between migration and the underground economy (Bracco & Onnis, 2016, p.19), only serves to cast a negative light on migrants, further supporting the need to restrict and reduce migration.

However, additional information is needed to fully grasp how migration is connected to the underground economy. Firstly, a significant number of migrants typically work in sectors including manufacturing, industry, agriculture, domestic work, construction, catering and hospitality (Quassoli, 1999; Castles et al., 2016; ILO, 2016, 2019). These are also areas that are heavily represented in the shadow economy and offer both local workers and migrants, particularly unauthorised ones, an extensive number of irregular jobs (Talani, 2021, p.252). All these occupations have low skill requirements (Bracco & Onnis, 2016, p.2;19), and frequently entail heavy and dangerous tasks (Reyneri, 1998a, p.311), especially when safety and health regulations are disregarded (Palidda, 2005, p.66; Reyneri, 1998a, p.311). The nature of these jobs makes them unattractive to native workers, who prefer better paid positions, and who have been allowed to move upwards in their careers by migrants' willingness to take on these jobs (Baldwin-Edwards, 1998, p.3; Baldwin-Edwards, 2008, p.1455). Truth be told, more frequently than not, migrants are unable to choose or aim for higher positions, regardless of their preferences. It should be highlighted that this is true for both regular and irregular migrants, as those in the former category may be forced by their employers to work illegally to avoid paying taxes and social security (Ambrosini, 2008, p.569). They are free to leave their jobs, but they must then leave the country, or risk being charged with the offence of illegal stay (Anderson, 2008, p.11). Thus, even regular migrants find themselves in a precarious and reversible position (Reyneri, 1998b; Calavita, 2005).

When looking at the vulnerabilities of migrants – both regular and irregular – they are first and foremost in a precarious position due to their limited educational attainment, lower professional skills (Quassoli, 1999, p.218), lack of a network of connections (Bracco & Onnis, 2016, p.2), and cultural, linguistic, legal, and administrative barriers, which increase the likelihood of them being recruited into the underground economy, and exposed to additional abuses and inequalities (ILO, 2023, pp.17–18). Additional factors that make them more willing to accept any job that is offered to them, regardless of the poor working terms and conditions, include their need to support their families (Crețan et al., 2019, p.93) and their reluctance to return home and accept failure (Reyneri & Ballarino, 1998, p.313; Talani, 2021, p.249). For irregular immigrants, the situation becomes even more precarious. For them, any chances of employment in a foreign country exclusively consists of finding a job in the underground

economy (Bracco & Onnis, 2016, p.19; ILO, 2023, pp.17–18). As a result, they lose their negotiating power as workers (Quassoli, 1999, p.218), which raises the risk that they will be involved in forced labour or other types of abuse (ILO, 2023, pp.17–18). On the employers' side, they benefit from employing irregular workers since this allows them to reduce labour costs by not having to pay for income tax, social security contributions, and other labour-related costs (Reyneri, 1998a; Ambrosini, 2001). Employers are also assured that this category of workers cannot complain about treatment or inability to abide by an agreement (Anderson, 2008, p.9) due to the restricted or non-existent rights that irregular migrants have in the host nation (Maroukis et al., 2011, p.130).

Overall, the relationship between the underground economy and migration could be described by the term "strategic complements": while a large informal economy can encourage illegal immigration, a large population of irregular migrants can increase the incentive for businesses to operate informally (Camacho et al., 2017, p.1052). However, when it comes to establishing a causal relationship between migration and the underground economy, the factors examined thus far seem to indicate a clear direction. Although it is true that immigrants – and more specifically, undocumented migrants – are one of the primary sources of labour in the informal economy (Maroukis et al., 2011, p.130), the underground economy appears to act more as a catalyst for (irregular) migration than the other way around (Talani, 2019, pp. 115–116). The body of research on the subject written thus far seems to support the idea that, while migration undoubtedly aids in the expansion of the underground economy (Reyneri & Ballarino, 1998, p.311), it by no means creates it (Crețan et al., 2019, p.94).

A further aspect must be added to the framework, namely how the securitization of migration relates to the underground economy. One aspect that can lead to the perception of migration as a threat is undoubtedly the economic one. In this case, those in favour of a securitized approach to migration argue that it poses a threat to the labour market, and puts pressure on the welfare state and the social security system (Özerim, 2013, p.925). This perception of immigrants as an economic threat is surely exacerbated by their participation in irregular employment because of their unequal competition on the job market, and their failure to contribute to the social security system, while taking advantage of it (Ünal Eriş & Öner, 2021, p.313; ILO, 2023, p.18). A second aspect to consider is that, when migrants participate in the underground economy, the threat is no longer just economic but can also impact internal security. This perspective supports the idea that migrants involved in the underground economy constitute a threat to citizens' daily lives because of their potential for criminal activity (Özerim, 2013, p.926),

especially when legal and illegal activities in the shadow economy overlap. Overall, the tendency to associate migrants with crimes and insecurity, as well as to regard them as enablers of organised crime and as an indicator of corruption contributes to reinforcing the migration-security nexus (Huysmans, 2006).

### ***How the state responds to migration***

What remains to be analysed is therefore how the state responds to the perceived threats mentioned above, and to investigate its (in)ability to control migration. In the context of current globalisation processes, the question of whether states can manage migration has long been a major source of worry for Western governments, and a topic of intense debate among academics (Rosina, 2019a, p.88), from which several theories have originated. The liberal institutionalist perspective (Hollifield, 1998, 2004; Geddes, 2003; Geddes & Korneev 2015) contends that supranational organisations may successfully manage migration and promote collaboration among states on the matter. The realist viewpoint adopts a more state-centred approach, since it assumes that states can unilaterally and autonomously manage and regulate migratory flows (Weiner, 1985, 1995, 1996; Borjas, 1989; Freeman, 1995, 1998; Teitelbaum, 2002; Freeman & Kessler, 2008). Authors such as Borjas (2014) assert that there may be some adverse economic consequences related to migration. He highlighted a decline in native worker wages resulting from migration inflows, and claimed that members of disadvantaged groups had to disproportionately bear the consequences (Borjas, 2014). The risk of social and political repercussions would be too great for states to allow unrestricted migration flows, hence the need to avoid these risky outcomes by adopting a range of restrictive (securitized) measures. It is difficult to provide a complete list of all the actions undertaken by states that reflect a securitization of migration. However, some of these measures might include tightening controls on entry to the country, more restrictive requirements to legally reside in a territory, broadening the scope of what constitutes a criminal offence, increasing the possibility of prosecution and of more severe penalties, facilitating the process of expulsion, and revoking citizenship or residency permits (Fauser, 2006, p.7). The transnationalist approach provides a final viewpoint on the state's capacity to manage migration. More accurately, transnationalists (Sassen, 1996; Castles, 2004a, 2004b; Talani, 2010, 2015; León and Overbeek, 2015) contend that migration is largely an uncontrollable phenomenon. Many academics have suggested that stronger border controls, and other strategies for restricting migration, are not as effective in

achieving their objectives (Albahari, 2015; Jones, 2016). This is because, on the one hand, migrants who are committed to travelling to Europe will develop more sophisticated (and risky) methods of crossing the borders (Cornelius & Salehyan, 2007). On the other hand, if the pull factors connected to the labour market are not addressed first, not much can be done in the form of tighter border restrictions and deterring measures (Ibid.). Among these shortcomings, the existence of a thriving underground economy in the country of destination plays a significant role in reducing the efficacy of any attempt to curb migration (Ambrosini & Triandafyllidou, 2011, p.272; Camacho et al., 2017, p.1051). Thus, the paradoxical nature of a securitized approach to migration: while the amount of migrants entering through legal channels will decrease (Yilmaz & Solano, 2022, p.3), this approach most likely modifies the composition of migration flows (Ibid.; p.3) by increasing the number of undocumented migrants entering a country (Zincone, 1998; Donato & Armenta, 2011), who will most likely be recruited in irregular (if not criminal) activities (Anderson, 2008; 2010).

In order to analyse the connection between securitization, migration, and the underground economy, this last viewpoint seems to be the most appropriate. The research will therefore proceed by investigating, through a transnationalist perspective, what are the negative effects of the state's attempt to securitize and control migration. Specifically, it will look more closely at the negative effects of the securitization of migration on the Italian underground economy, and the social consequences that might result from this interaction. Due to space and time constraints, it will mostly focus on one specific sector of the underground economy, namely agriculture. This is also due to the case study of choice: the Rosarno revolt of 2010, which involved migrants irregularly employed in the agricultural sector. The aim is to address the empirical research question: *What are the effects of the securitization of migration for the Italian underground economy and how did these effects manifest themselves in the case of Rosarno?* The hypothesis is that the restrictive approach to migration, justified by the perceived sense of insecurity, only incentivised migrants' participation in the Italian underground economy, eventually leading to more insecurity for both migrants and citizens.

### ***III. The negative effects of securitization in Italy: impact on the Italian underground economy and the Rosarno revolt***

#### ***Italian migration policy: a securitizing trend with little effectiveness***

The increase in the number of migrants on the Italian territory, which began at the end of the 1970s (Colombo & Sciortino, 2004) but notably accelerated in the past 20 years, has made migration a structural phenomenon in Italy, with over 6 million migrants present on the territory (Fondazione ISMU, 2023, p.60). At the same time, however, this sparked concerns about immigration levels (Barbulescu & Beaudonnet, 2014, p.218), which have grown in importance for the Italian population, and have been embodied by the securitizing trend that has shaped immigration laws and policies since the turn of the millennium.

The Bossi-Fini Law of 2002 was promoted by the centre-right Berlusconi Government, and amended the prior Turco-Napolitano Law of 1998 by introducing stricter measures on migration (Holloway et al., 2021, p.5). The Bossi-Fini Law is considered to be the first clear indication of the securitization of migration in Italy (Bello, 2021, p.66), since it linked migration to public order and state security (see Art.4b(3)). As for the securitizing practices, it established procedures for migrant identification (such as population profiling by collecting fingerprints) and stricter measures for expulsion (Bracco & Onnis, 2016, p.4), broadening the list of circumstances that can lead to it, and lengthening the period of detention time (from 30 to 60 days) while awaiting expulsion. Finally, the Law strengthened requirements for migrants already living in the country, by tying their residence permits to contracts of employment, and tightening procedures for permit renewal.

The continued view of immigration as a threat led to the introduction, in 2008, of the Security Package, which was promoted by Interior Minister Roberto Maroni, a member of the far-right party *Lega*, with the intention of prioritising security for the Italian population (Rosina, 2019b, p.93). Firstly, it extended the detention before the expulsion up to 18 months (Bello, 2021, p.66). Secondly, and more important, the decree changed irregular presence from an administrative offence to a penal one, punishable with imprisonment from 6 months to 4 years (Art. 9) (Miggiano, 2009, pp.7-8). The Security Package is therefore considered another cornerstone in the process of securitization, because it formalises the criminalization of the



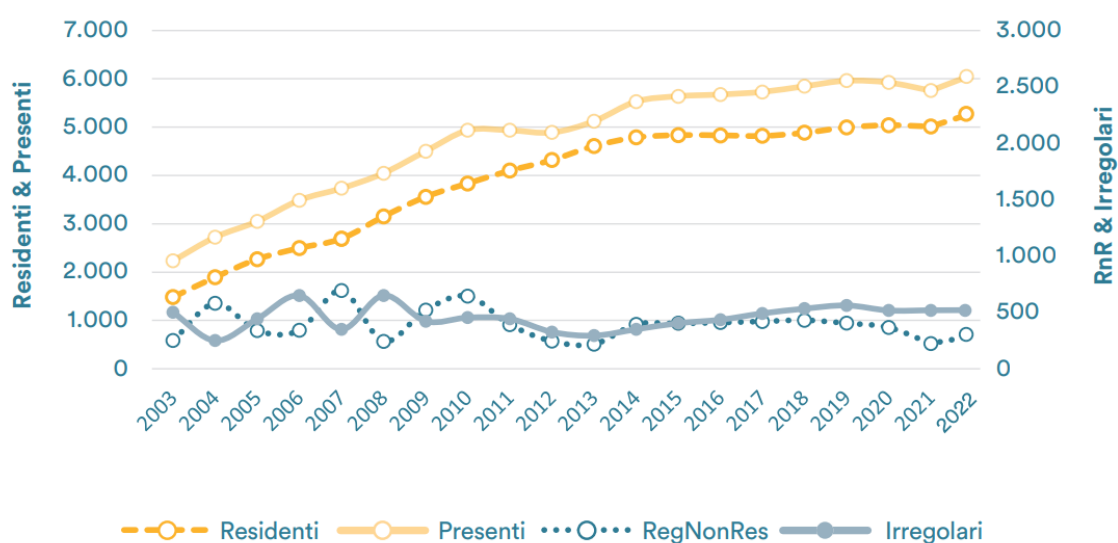
immigrant (Dennison & Geddes, 2022, p.448), who is assessed based on a subjective condition rather than their behaviour (ASGI, 2008, p.13).

The securitization of migration has more recently been noted in the Security Decree (Decree Law 113/2018) issued in 2018 by Matteo Salvini, the current *Lega* leader, while he was Interior Minister under the Conte I Government. In an effort to make Italians feel safer (la Repubblica, 2018), it reduced barriers to citizenship revocation, prolonged the naturalisation process, made it more difficult for asylum seekers to enter reception facilities, and established a rapid expulsion procedure for "dangerous" asylum seekers (Geddes & Pettrachin, 2020). Additionally, it eliminated the humanitarian protection status for migrants, which, until 2017, was the most common form of protection granted to asylum seekers, as it gave beneficiaries access to basic services and the right to work (Ibid., 2020, pp.236-237). This was replaced with "special permits", which can only last for one year and cannot be turned into a residence permit, making migrants' condition in the country extremely precarious (Ibid., pp.236-237).

Far from being an exhaustive description, it is however clear how the case of Italy perfectly fits within the overall trend of securitization of migration that distinguishes Fortress Europe (Panebianco, 2022, p.1408). Indeed, there has been an ongoing tendency, over the past 20 years, towards securitizing and criminalising migration, of which the aforementioned laws are merely the most explicit manifestations. Although the examples made have been mainly advocated by right-wing parties, it is important to note that the changing of governments has not necessarily resulted in significantly different policies (Zotti & Fassi, 2020). Indeed, this securitized framing of the issue has only sometimes been strongly opposed by the political left (Campisi & Sottilotta, 2022, p.1), highlighting the difficulties for mainstream parties in depoliticizing such a subject (Rosina, 2019a, p.83).

From a transnationalist perspective, however, the results of these regulations are extremely dubious, particularly when it comes to evaluating how well they control and restrict migration. The Bossi-Fini Law, the Security Package, and the Security Decree, among others, do not appear to have made a significant difference in the likelihood of potential migrants fleeing (Rosina, 2019a, pp.90–91). Indeed, as it can be seen in Figure 1, the number of migrants present on the territory has been constantly increasing, regardless of the many restrictions imposed. Paradoxically, in line with a transnationalist perspective, these laws pose the risk of increasing the volume of unauthorised migration, which they claimed to tackle, by introducing stricter conditions for immigrants to legally reside in the territory (Villa, 2022).

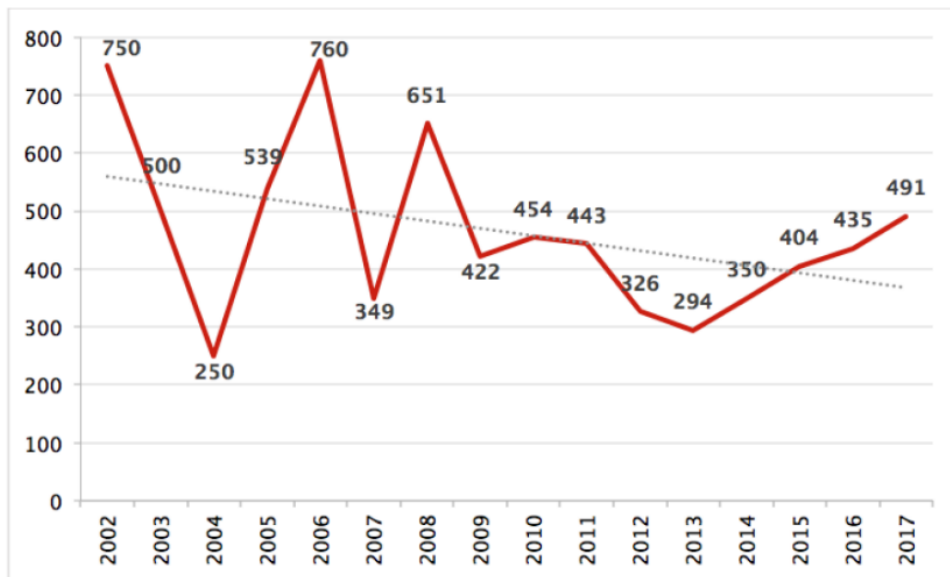
Figure 1 - Stock of migrants present in Italy on the 1st of January 2003-2022 for category (in thousands)



Source: Fondazione ISMU (2023) on data retrieved from ISTAT  
 Translation: Residenti=resident; Presenti=present; RegNonRes=regular but not resident; Irregolari=irregular

At a first glance, it seems that the number of irregular migrants present on the territory has been fluctuating around 500,000 for many years. It is however important to read beyond these numbers. In fact, they conceal the role that periodic amnesties and regularisation programmes have played over time in regularising migrants who were already illegally present on the Italian territory (Ambrosini, 2008, p.568). Indeed, whenever there is a sharp decline in the number of irregular migrants – as shown in Figure 2 – this is attributable to the amnesties enacted in those years. The most recent ones occurred in 2002 (approximately 647.000 migrants regularised, hence the name "great regularisation"), 2009 (almost 300.000), 2012 (around 100.000), and 2020 (still incomplete, as only 83.000 permits have been released, whereas more than 127.000 requests have been accepted but need to be processed) (Buonomo & Papparuso, 2018; Open Migration, 2023).

Figure 2 - Estimation of irregular migrants present in Italy, 2002-2017 (in thousands)



Source: Neodemos (2018) on data retrieved from Fondazione ISMU

Furthermore, these numbers conceal the role of the Government's Flow Decrees, which set annual quotas for migrant workers allowed in the country, and that frequently tend to regularise irregular migrants already present on the territory and working in the underground economy (Bracco & Onnis, 2016, p.3). This is why, despite the growing number of migrants present in the territory, the share of irregular migrants seems to be stable. However, it is by no means proof of the effectiveness of these laws and decrees in tackling irregular migration. Finally, it is also worth mentioning that these restrictive policies hindered migrants' integration into the host society (Bello, 2021, p.68; Bello, 2022, p.1463) as they made their legal status even more precarious, leading to detrimental effects that will be analysed in the following paragraphs.

### ***The effects of securitization: migration and the Italian underground economy***

These laws and regulations reflecting a securitized view of migration have further limitations that cannot be ignored. The first is their incongruity with the reality of the situation, especially when considering the needs of the labour market (Ambrosini, 2014, p.211). While society may view immigrants as undesirable, calling for tighter border controls, there are indeed some sectors of economic activity in which migrants have become crucial (INPS, 2017, p.127; Dennison & Geddes, 2022, p.442). This is particularly true in those areas where there is a

shortage of Italian workforce (Cornelius et al., 1994; Calavita, 2005; Düvell, 2006) due to the unappealing jobs that they offer (Palidda & Reyneri, 1995; Reyneri, 1996). The sectors with the highest incidence of migrants – both regular and irregular (Maroukis et al., 2011, p.131) – are therefore those with low skill requirements and low retribution (Zanfrini, 2023, p.110), such as other services to the person (34.3%, including domestic service), agriculture (18%), construction (15.5%), and hotel and catering (15.3%) (Ibid., p.110). These industries are, however, also heavily represented in the shadow economy: according to ISTAT (2022), the largest percentages of unreported labour are found in other services to the person (34.2%), trade, transportation, hotel and catering (22.1%), construction (19.3%), and agriculture (16.9%). In fact, another shortcoming that prevents these regulations from working effectively is that they do not take into proper account the existence of a vibrant underground economy. On the one hand, this serves as a pull factor for unauthorised migrants (King, 2002; Baldwin-Edwards, 2008; Maroukis et al., 2011; Triandafyllidou & Ambrosini, 2011; Talani, 2021), who undertake the journey to Italy knowing that they can find employment in the country anyway. On the other hand, in a context of strict legal entry and stay policies (Maroukis et al., 2011, p.146), working in the underground economy becomes migrants' only means of surviving in the country (Geddes & Pettrachin, 2020, pp.230-231), particularly if they are unable to fulfil the requirements to obtain or renew their residence permits (Palidda, 2005, p.67; Locatelli et al., 2018, p.38).

Evidence of migrants' involvement in the underground economy (Ambrosini, 2013a; 2013b; 2014) therefore seems to indicate an undeniable connection between the two. However, for many migrants – whether regular or irregular – working in the underground economy becomes a matter of need rather than a choice. Indeed, the securitization of migration, by making migrants' conditions more precarious, unintentionally creates a vicious cycle between unauthorised entry and stay in the country and involvement in the irregular or even illegal labour market (Talani, 2021, p.220). The following paragraphs will show that the vulnerabilities that immigrants face are obvious in the agricultural industry and, more specifically, in southern Italy.

Agriculture is primarily characterised by seasonal labour, which involves hard work over a short period of time. As it entails low levels of productivity, salaries tend to be low, making it unappealing to the locals (Baldwin-Edwards, 1998, pp.7-8). This explains the growing contribution of young, flexible, and frequently vulnerable migrant workers (Jinkang, 2022, p.3), which, according to estimates, can reach up to 45% of the sector's entire workforce

(CGIL-FLAI, 2021). In Southern Italy, agriculture is particularly relevant, and yet it is also one of the sectors where irregular work is most prevalent (Reyneri & Ballarino, 1998, p.293; Devitt, 2010, pp.232-233), employing many migrants in jobs with working conditions well below the acceptable standards (Zanfrini, 2015).

The widespread prevalence of *caporalato* in the south makes the already bleak situation even worse. According to Art.603 bis of the Italian Penal Code (as modified by Law n.199/2016), this refers to the unlawful hiring and exploitation of workers in the agricultural industry by individuals – either Italians or, more frequently, migrants themselves (Barbieri et al. 2015, p.16) – who act as intermediaries between employers and migrant workers (Jinkang, 2021). They handle the logistics by selecting the fittest migrants and transporting the work teams to the job site in exchange for a share of the migrants' pay (Barbieri et al. 2015, p.16; MEDU, 2017, p.2). The *caporalato*, in conjunction with the widespread influence of the Italian mafia – which, for time and space constraints, will not be analysed in detail – makes southern agriculture a free area where migrant workers' rights and dignity are suspended (Barbieri et al. 2015, p.21), with societal repercussions that will be further examined in the chapter.

### ***The consequences of migrants' involvement in the Italian underground economy***

Among the consequences that result from migrants' participation in the underground economy of the host nation it is first important to mention their stigmatisation. As already anticipated, their involvement in the shadow economy contributes to worsening their reputation as criminals and limits the possibility of seeing them as enhancing the welfare of the host country (Reyneri, 2003; Talani, 2021, pp.364-365). Due to their irregular employment, they do not entirely pay taxes or social contributions, and they are seen as free riding on public resources (Reyneri, 2003; Bello, 2017). Furthermore, it is believed that immigrants who work in the underground economy are more likely to commit crimes (Reyneri, 2003, p.26). There are two possible explanations for this. On the one hand, the fact that illegal migration is a crime in Italy strengthens the connection between migration and security. Therefore, those migrant workers holding irregular status are often regarded as criminals because illegal entry and stay constitute a criminal offence (FRA, 2014, p.2; ILO, 2023, p.18). On the other hand, the belief that migrants are a threat to the host society might be exacerbated by their connection with the organized crime, which often controls the underground economy of southern Italy and uses

migrant workforce to enhance its power. Along with the stigmatisation of immigrants, there is a process of antagonisation between them and the native population. In fact, categorising migrants as clandestine or illegal encourages prejudices that see them as a threat and as undesirable in the country, amplifying racial and xenophobic sentiments among local populations (Ferreira, 2018, p.5) and sustaining discriminatory practises (ILO, 2023, p.18).

In a pessimistic scenario, the risk posed by this stigmatisation and antagonisation is an increasing division between citizens and migrants (Jaskulowski, 2018, p.716). Indeed, strict immigration and integration policies foster a vicious circle of exclusion that feeds feelings of mistrust and separation (Yilmaz & Solano, 2022, p.3), further marginalising migrants and escalating residents' hostility towards them. (Talani, 2019, p.118). In southern Italy, this takes the form of the marginalisation of migrants in agricultural ghettos, where they are kept on the periphery of society in the absence of the most fundamental rights and services (Jinkang, 2022, p.5). Consider the Gioia Tauro Plain in the province of Reggio Calabria, where Rosarno is located. Every year since 2014, MEDU (an NGO operating in the area) has observed and documented the appalling living conditions endured by migrant workers. The hundreds of migrants who come to work as seasonal workers in the plain have no option but to find shelter in improvised camps, abandoned buildings in the countryside, and shuttered factories, all of which are at the margins of society (Locatelli et al., 2018, p.14). The situation has grown to alarming levels, particularly in the area of San Ferdinando, which hosts the biggest tent city in Italy – about 2000 migrants annually (MEDU, 2017, p.3). Given the absence of any essential service (light, water, heating, and waste disposal), it goes without saying that the living conditions are well below any dignified and acceptable standard (Zambelli et al., 2020, p.20). The only sources of heat are gas cylinders and camping stoves, outdoor latrines have been built due to a shortage of hygiene facilities, and most migrants sleep on mattresses or on the ground (MEDU, 2017, p.3). Despite the tragic situation that persists year after year, all the action taken so far has mainly consisted of emergency measures, which have only made the precarious living conditions of migrants worse by putting them at a greater risk of social exclusion, vulnerability, and hardship (Locatelli et al., 2018, p.18).

Finally, the social and economic marginalisation of migrant workers encourages cases of exploitation and human rights breaches (Ibid., p.29), which have grown pervasive in a context of criminalization of migrants (Palidda, 2005, p.64). In fact, studies have shown a link between the exploitation of migrants and the restrictive policies put in place by the Italian government to manage and limit migrant influxes (Amnesty International, 2014, p.6). For irregular

migrants, the risk of being subject to exploitation and forced labour is particularly real (ILO, 2023, p.24). The threat of being reported to the police and subsequently expelled from the country serves as a powerful deterrent when it comes to reporting the abuses to which they are subject (PICUM, 2020). However, the likelihood of exploitation is not any lower for regular migrants. In this situation, individuals are constantly in danger of losing their jobs if they claim their legal rights (Locatelli et al., 2018, p.28), which would cause them to become irregular as – ever since the Bossi-Fini Law – their residence permit depends on a working contract. As a result, migrants must agree to longer hours and lower pay than what would be required by law while searching desperately for any type of job (Zambelli et al., 2020, p.31). MEDU reported shifts between 8 and 10 hours, with a pay of about 25 euros per day (Barbieri et al., 2015, p.15) – the average in this sector would be about 42 euros – part of which is given to the *caporale* for the transportation to the field (Ibid., p.16). As for the composition of migrants employed, it is true that the percentage of those legally residing rose from 77% in 2014 to 94% in 2021, as did the percentage of migrants holding employment contracts, which went from 18% in 2014 to 56% in 2021 (Zambelli et al., 2021, p.52). Nevertheless, migrants' living and working conditions are still precarious and have de facto not improved. This is because black/irregular labour has been largely replaced by "grey" labour (Ibid., p.52), which includes, among other things, the employer declaring fewer working days than the ones actually completed (Locatelli et al., 2018, p.28), migrants working longer hours than stated in the contract, not receiving a payroll, and not having their contributions paid (Zambelli et al., 2021, p.52).

Unsurprisingly, the ultimate risk of all this is that immigrants will exhibit the same criminal conduct that was first predicted by a securitized view of migration. Marginalising and criminalising migrants encourages them to engage in criminal behaviour (Ambrosini, 2018): because illegal immigration is already a criminal offence, they are less concerned about committing additional crimes. Conversely, it has been shown that having access to legal status and consequently to chances for regular employment deters migrants from engaging in criminal activity (INPS, 2017, p.130). Furthermore, the harsh conditions that migrants face in the underground economy raise the possibility of violent outbursts caused by their disappointment with the lack of any real progress (Jinkang, 2022, p.5). This will be demonstrated by looking at the Rosarno revolt, discussed in the following paragraph.

### *When insecurity reaches a peak: the Rosarno revolt*

The following paragraphs are going to provide an account and reflection on the facts that came to be known to the public as the Rosarno revolt. This case study is extremely pertinent to examine the potential effects of the securitization of migration in a context of migrants' participation in the underground economy. Rosarno exemplifies the myriad contradictions of the Italian system: a context where immigrants are perpetually marginalised from society, while being used as a weak and affordable labour force to support an agricultural sector pervaded by *caporalato*, and with strong ties to the Italian mafia (Zambelli et al., 2021, pp.45–46). The events that occurred between the 7<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> of January 2010 are therefore an appropriate illustration of the severe consequences of the marginalisation, exploitation, and hostility towards immigrants, which ultimately resulted in an escalation of tensions, violence and insecurity.

Located in the southern part of Calabria, Rosarno is the largest centre of the Gioia Tauro Plain, a territory renowned for the agricultural production of citrus and olives (Perrotta, 2020). Since the 1990s, the area has seen an increasing share of migrants working in agriculture (Ibid.), making Rosarno one of the cities in Italy with the largest migrant concentration (La Stampa, 2010). However, the housing and working conditions were appalling. Before the uprising, most migrants would live in two abandoned factories, "la Rognetta" and "Opera Sila," which could accommodate up to a thousand migrants during times of the highest work intensity (Reuters, 2010). Here, migrants would sleep on mattresses or directly on the floors, if not within oil siloes (Barbieri et al., 2015, pp.16–17), and the most basic utilities such as power, gas, water, and hygienic services were absent (la Repubblica, 2020).

On the 7<sup>th</sup> of January 2010, the situation of utter unease and abuses came to a peak. According to the reports, at least one<sup>1</sup> migrant was shot with a pellet gun while returning to the shelter after a day of work for no apparent reason. After learning about the gunshot, hundreds of migrants decided to head to the town centre, where their rage quickly erupted into violence (La Stampa, 2010). Reports from many newspapers<sup>2</sup> described the various crimes committed by

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<sup>1</sup> Based on the accounts, some newspapers reported the news of one migrant (see, for instance, Greene, 2010; Reuters, 2010; Donadio, 2010; Candito, 2017) or two or more migrants being shot (see, for instance, The Guardian, 2010a; The Guardian, 2010b; Human Rights Watch, 2010; Randall, 2010; Il Sole 24 Ore, 2010; La Stampa, 2010; Vassallo Paleologo, 2010)

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, Donadio, 2010; Greene, 2010; Human Rights Watch, 2010; La Repubblica, 2010b; Il Sole 24 Ore, 2010; La Stampa, 2010



immigrants. They threw rocks at windows of stores and homes, turned over garbage bins and set them on fire, stopped passing cars and struck them with rocks and sticks, sometimes even setting them on fire. The police's attempt to disperse the crowd was unsuccessful, and throughout the night the clashes continued, with some locals encouraging the police to open fire on the mob (La Stampa, 2010).

The following day was when the violence really peaked. More than a thousand migrants gathered on the 8<sup>th</sup> of January in a peaceful demonstration to protest the mistreatment they had to endure (The Guardian, 2010a; Reuters, 2010). However, the violent events of the previous night sparked a furious reaction from the local population, who chose to seek revenge by organizing a "migrant-hunt", which lasted for a few days. Reports<sup>3</sup> described a series of punitive raids against unarmed migrants, which included beatings, shootings, running them over with cars, and setting their lodgings on fire. A threat message was reportedly broadcast from a van instructing migrants to leave Rosarno or they would have been killed (Greene, 2010). The toll of people wounded at the end of those days was above 50 between migrants, police officers, and citizens (The Guardian, 2010b; Reuters, 2010).

All the action taken following the uprising consisted of purely emergency measures. Some of the migrants living in Rosarno were sent to other reception facilities in Crotone and Bari while others left the city voluntarily (Human Rights Watch, 2010; Reuters, 2010), perhaps to avoid imprisonment and expulsion. After having evicted both "la Rognetta" and "Opera Sila", the former was immediately taken down (Devitt, 2010, p.222). The Government of that time – a right-wing coalition led by Silvio Berlusconi – made very harsh comments on the facts. Particularly contentious were the remarks made by Interior Minister Roberto Maroni. He asserted that this was the outcome of an excessive tolerance for irregular migration, which only served to strengthen organised crime and resulted in severe cases of social degradation, as the Rosarno episode demonstrated (la Repubblica, 2010a). He continued by stating that the Government would make every effort to combat clandestine immigration, emphasising the necessity of enforcing stronger controls (Devitt, 2010, pp.222–223). Only later, when it became apparent that most of the migrants present in Rosarno had a regular residence permit but no regular employment contract, did Maroni shift the emphasis to the larger problem of illegal work, *caporalato* and organised crime (Ibid., p.225). Members of the opposition sharply criticised the Government's approach, claiming that it was using irregular immigration as a

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<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, Candito, 2017; Donadio, 2010; Greene, 2010; The Guardian, 2010b; Human Rights Watch, 2010; Randall, 2010; Reuters, 2010; Vassallo Paleologo, 2010

scapegoat while failing to adequately address the problems of exploitation, xenophobia, racism, and the mafia's involvement (Ibid., p.224).

#### ***IV. Discussion and conclusion***

The Rosarno revolt may give rise to certain reflections that can be extended to Italy more generally. The first is that, considering the context in which it took place, this episode of extreme violence was “only a matter of time” (Unimondo, 2010), as stated by Don Pino Masi, a spokesman of "Libera" – an Italian NGO engaged in the fight against the mafia. It was the result of the living conditions of migrants, who had to "live like animals" (Ibid.), without access to even the most basic services and adequate food. Therefore, the appalling working conditions, abuse, and extortion they were subjected to at the hands of the *caporali* and the mafia, combined to produce an explosive mixture (Scalfari, 2010) that, eventually, erupted in all its violence. Second, this episode illustrates the potential consequences of years of violence against migrant workers (Devitt, 2010, p.221) and hostile rhetoric towards them, resulting in racial tensions and intolerance from locals, who claimed to have "put up with them for 20 years" (Donadio, 2010). Thirdly, and most importantly, the way the episode was framed and dealt with contributed to the ongoing sense of emergency, insecurity and fear that characterises migration. This can be observed, for instance, in the words of Domenico Ventre, a former town councillor, who said that the migrants' response was beyond proportion and that it was unacceptable to allow migrants to destroy the town and instil fear among the locals (The Guardian, 2010a). Perhaps even worse, the use of irregular migration as a scapegoat by the Government, and the clear connection made between migrants, *caporalato* and organized crime, only served to strengthen the link between migration and security. These actions and rhetoric fed into the perception of migration as an emergency and, even worse, the belief that migrants pose a threat to the country and its citizens, which is entirely consistent with the logic of securitization. What is important to understand is that the Rosarno revolt should not be considered a local and isolated episode. The reason why it was chosen is that, even though the dynamics leading to it were specific to the area, the whole framework in which it occurred is a scenario that similarly concerns the entire country (Barbieri et al., p.21). Even more alarming is the fact that, despite the event taking place more than 10 years ago, little has changed about how migration is handled and how migrants are exploited in the underground economy.

According to the research, which has taken a transnationalist stance, the securitization of migration has paradoxically encouraged more insecurity (Talani, 2021, p.230) through the establishment of increasingly restrictive laws and policies, creating a vicious circle. This has been analysed by focusing on one negative aspect of securitization, namely its effects on the underground economy and the related implications. In fact, these restrictions have increased the number of unauthorised migrants on the territory, by decreasing the means of legal entry into Italy. By excluding them from any sort of regular employment, their only option is to find a job in the thriving underground economy that exists across the peninsula. Adding up to this, even regular migrants often find themselves involved in the underground or grey economy, as their precarious legal status – worsened by the restrictive laws implemented over time – has made them more vulnerable to accept jobs that are less paid and where the employer declares fewer working hours.

The enhanced insecurity affects both migrants and citizens (Talani, 2021, p.230). Regarding the former, the research has demonstrated how their participation in the underground economy widens the gap between them and the host society as they become more stigmatised and marginalised, which could result in xenophobic and intolerant behaviour, as it did in Rosarno. Additionally, their weak legal standing and lack of negotiating power increases their vulnerability to exploitation and deprivation of the most fundamental human needs. Regarding the latter, the perception of migrants as a threat by the local population grows because of the criminalization of irregular migration, and because of migrants' involvement in the underground economy, where the distinction between legal and illegal activities gets more blurred, particularly when organised crime is involved. The securitization of migration can therefore be described as self-fulfilling and self-reinforcing (Maguire, 2015). Viewing migrants as a threat, and acting accordingly through laws and policies, sets off a chain of consequences that increases insecurity and may eventually lead to violence and criminal behaviour – as shown by the case of Rosarno – justifying a securitized view of migration and calling for more restrictive measures to contain the threat.

However, this does not necessarily mean that the problem is going to endure endlessly. Studies have demonstrated how inclusive practices may genuinely bring about positive changes, just as exclusive and restrictive policies have had a detrimental spiralling effect (Bello, 2021, p.69). What the Italian policymaking is lacking, though, is a broader understanding of the phenomenon, as there are many aspects that are not being addressed when dealing with migration. Indeed, policymakers are trying to address it within the existing framework, without

realizing that the system itself is part of the problem. Little can be done by unilaterally tackling migration if the issues of the underground economy, exploitation, *caporalato* and the involvement of the organized crime are not addressed simultaneously (Locatelli et al., 2018, p.27). As part of a transnationalist approach, it is also necessary to recognise migration as a structural phenomenon (Rosina, 2019c, p.16) – as opposed to the dominating narrative that sees it as a crisis that needs to be managed (Bello, 2022, p.1334) – and to understand that it is nearly impossible to completely stop it (Mlambo, 2020, p.105).

Better responses to the phenomenon are required, as the situation cannot get any better if migration laws continue to be restrictive (Perrotta, 2014). This is easier said than done, though, as the high degree of politicisation has made it exceedingly challenging for policymakers to address migration from a different perspective and to de-escalate the securitized narrative (Rosina, 2019c, p.16). Indeed, as shown by the numerous – though not all-encompassing – examples provided, the link between immigration and crime has become increasingly integrated in Italian migration policies (Bello, 2021, p.69). A transnationalist approach would suggest that legalising and regularising migration is a possible solution (Talani, 2021, p.256), thereby increasing the range of rights for migrants and decreasing their likelihood of being employed in the underground economy, with all the consequences that this entails. However, far from being a panacea, this solution is difficult to translate into practice (Ibid., p.366), considering that Italian immigration laws are not isolated, but are a part of a larger global securitizing trend (Strazzari & Grandi, 2019) that characterises Fortress Europe.

To conclude, this research examined the effects of the securitization of migration by concentrating on its impact on the host country's underground economy and the potential consequences that can result from it. This was done by first considering the problem from a theoretical perspective (Chapter II) and then applying it empirically (Chapter III) to Italy and, more specifically, to the case study of the Rosarno revolt. This research has been restricted to critically assessing and criticising securitization. It is only able to hint at one potential, and yet hardly feasible, solution, which is to expand the area of legality for migrants. Due to time and space constraints, the functioning of the Italian immigration system, and the laws that constitute it, could not be addressed in detail. Furthermore, additional factors that would have helped to complete the picture, such as the functioning of the reception and asylum system, the effect of labour regulations, structural problems in the Italian agricultural sector, etc., had to be omitted from this study. Finally, by using only the Rosarno revolt as an example, the research has not provided a virtuous example of inclusive policies that can increase safety for both citizens and

migrants, which would have further supported the initial hypothesis. Future research in the field could perhaps address one or more of the shortcomings highlighted above. However, by examining its negative outcomes, this work has attempted to critically assess the securitization of migration, which has up until now been taken as a given in migration policies. In light of the research, it is clear that securitizing migration is by no means the best approach, as it results in a vicious circle of insecurity that affects both migrants and citizens.

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