

## **Politics, Discourse and Immigration as a security concern in the EU: a tale of two nations, Italy and Britain<sup>1</sup>.**

Alessandra Buonfino, Cambridge University, UK

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The Italian 'North-East Foundation'<sup>2</sup> recently released a poll at the European Conference on immigration organised by the Italian Presidency of the EU which revealed that 33 percent of European citizens consider immigration as 1) a security threat, 2) a threat to jobs and 3) a threat to cultural and religious identity. Moreover, the same poll revealed that European citizens (+ 6%) feel more threatened by immigration today than they felt two years ago.

This poll is only one of many that shows how increasing global interconnectedness combined with post-9/11 security concerns have rendered the phenomenon of movement of people an even more sensitive, politicised and challenging issue for national governments to manage. Since 9/11, the insecurity of the nation state towards the 'silent takeover' of immigration has resulted in the bombarding of anti-immigration discourses by the media and in the adoption of draconian and increasingly more technology-driven measures for securitising borders.

The transnationalism of migration and the increasing inability of the 'lone European state' to manage migration effectively and in the long-term – while providing efficient responses to growing public insecurity - have strengthened the already acknowledged necessity for EU cooperation. The proposal by the EU to establish 'Common policies on immigration and asylum' (2000) to replace national fragmented approaches does however require a certain level of convergence between national policies and the development of a shared vision on immigration and cooperation between the member states. Considering 9/11 and the politics of insecurity of the nation states; the growing suspicion towards migrants and towards what commentators have called the 'Islamization of the West' (Carosa et al. 2002); the rising public fears of immigration made worse by the day by national tabloids and the increasingly restrictive policies and discourses, what kind of 'shared vision' on immigration can we expect as the basis for a common policy at the EU level? This paper aims to address this question by focusing on the development of a shared vision on immigration in two Member states of the EU, Italy and Britain<sup>3</sup>.

The type of shared vision investigated in this paper is *discursive* as the author believes that an understanding of political discourse can ultimately lead to a better comprehension of action<sup>4</sup> (Weldes 2003a, Doty 1996). More specifically, the paper will focus on Italian and British political discourses on immigration and European integration; it will firstly briefly introduce my use of a *discourse theoretical approach* (Laclau and Mouffe 1985)<sup>5</sup> and then, after a basic contextualisation of the two countries – it will set the scene for the period which covers British & Italian political discourse from the time of the Treaty of Amsterdam until December 2003. The paper will then proceed to isolate the rhetorical devices that surround the national political discourses (e.g. how

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<sup>1</sup> I thank Jef Huysmans for his comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.fondazione Nordest.net>

<sup>3</sup> The paper summarises part of a study that focuses on the areas of convergence and divergence of Italian and British political discourses on Europe and immigration.

<sup>4</sup> Elite representation → subject position/identity → action made possible (Weldes 2003; Doty 1996)

<sup>5</sup> Discourse scholarship is regularly criticised as a bad science because of its lack of testable theories or empirical analyses or as a dangerous science seductive but prolix and self indulgent, a dissident scholarship that is situated at the margins of IR. However, discourse analysis in IR offers a truly 'vibrant research programme' (Milliken 1999:248) and enables the reconstruction of the "interpretative endeavours that both guide and legitimise the political action of the government and/or the opposition" (Heins 2002:129).

politicians *speak* and *write* about Europe and immigration) and deconstruct them around the nodal points (privileged discursive points) of ‘Europe/nation’ and ‘immigration’<sup>6</sup>. The deconstruction of discourses will enable the identification of patterns of convergence between the discourses and will hopefully shed light on the type of shared vision that is likely to shape the emerging EU political response to immigration.

### **Discourse theoretical approach & Political discourse**

This paper looks at political discourse, the particular way of speaking to which actors conform when they engage in discussion in the public sphere. Adopting Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse-theoretical approach, based on the assumption that every aspect of social life is governed by power, and their concepts of hegemony and social antagonism, this paper is underlined by the idea that a prevailing ideology or political force that is hegemonic at one time (in a context crisscrossed by antagonistic forces) will produce a hegemonic political discourse through which it will construct and reproduce power relations aimed at the preservation of its hegemony within society. The field of immigration and, even more so, of the Europeanisation of immigration is politicised and governed by multiple forces producing multiple antagonistic discourse-types filling an unfixed discursive space (Laclau and Mouffe 1985). Through the effect of the mass media on societal fears that derive from the definition of boundaries between us and Others and through the pressure exerted by the public sphere on the political elite of a country (Dal Lago 1999; Buonfino 2004a), *immigration as threat* has gradually become the hegemonic discourse-type in government policy. The fears about immigration expressed by the citizens (as in the poll by the Northeast foundation) are in fact enhanced by the media which then exert pressure on the political elite to ‘do something’ about it and to respond by producing a discourse on immigration that is aimed at comforting the citizen. A discourse of this kind, that produces boundaries for the protection of the Inside and legitimises the view of migrants as existential threats, ultimately reinforces the same fears that produced it in the first place. In this paper I will be looking at this level of discourse, that produced by the political elite (in turn produced by the interaction of the discourses of public opinion and other agents) following an understanding that the elite structures the terms of the debate within which the public takes position.

With this view, the paper aims at deconstructing this hegemonic discourse as it is articulated by Italian and British politicians. Rather than looking at the content of the political discourse itself, it will look at the *components* of such discourse, at the nodal points around which such discourse is constructed. In particular, I have chosen to specifically look at the nodal points of ‘Europe/nation’ and ‘immigration’ as these emerge as points around which the discourses on the ‘Europeanisation of migration’ are organised. Methodologically, the analysis will be based on speeches, policy documents, press releases and interviews with senior Italian and British politicians across the main parties<sup>7</sup>.

### ***Political Discourse***

By studying political and, in particular, policy discourse one studies hegemonic discourse, the discourse that is manifest in political action and articulates unfixed elements into partially fixed

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<sup>6</sup> By *deconstruction* I mean the uncovering of ruptures and antagonisms that underlie the social world and that are sometimes concealed. By *nodal points* I mean the privileged discursive points that partially fix meaning in an organised system of differences.

<sup>7</sup> In Britain –New Labour, Conservative party, Liberal democrats; in Italy, the main parties (i.e. with highest no. of seats in the Senate and/or Chamber of Deputies) considered are Forza Italia, Northern League, AN, UDC (centre-right), Democratic Left-Olive Tree; Margherita-Olive tree; Gruppo Misto (greens, Italian social democrats, Rifondazione Comunista, Communists etc). Overall, I conducted a total of 57 interviews with MEPs, MPs, peers in the two countries between April 2003 and October 2004.

moments in a context criss-crossed by antagonistic forces. The hegemony of one discourse-type over another usually occurs because of the beneficial effects that the chosen discourse-type is perceived to have on the preservation and strengthening of existing power relations within society (this being related to the preservation of concepts such as ‘nation’, ‘identity’ etc.). Because the power relations to be preserved by a discourse tend to be national, it is true that also the nodal points that will compose the discourse will be national. There is no doubt that nodal points such as ‘nation’, ‘Europe’, ‘immigration’ and ‘security’ are extremely national concepts because, as Larsen rightly suggests, “the state border represents the boundary of the political discourse” (2001:27). It is indeed possible to speak about a British or an Italian discourse on a given policy area. However, the implications of a discourse in terms of its impact on policy are not always necessarily national. The *securitisation* discourse<sup>8</sup> on immigration (dominant in both British and Italian politics as we will see throughout this paper) may be motivated by entirely national power structures and discourse-types and constructed around national nodal points. On the one hand, national discourses draw on a wider transnational circulation of meanings and on the other hand, when such *national* discourses impact European Union policy, such discourses also become *transnational*. Different political discourses on a certain subject, for example, can be an obstacle to European cooperation, a source of cooperation or a source of strife. In the case of immigration, when two nations produce similar hegemonic discourses (even when constructed around divergent discourse types- as in the British and Italian cases) then that national hegemonic discourse can gradually become transnationally hegemonic. As a result of this power of discourse, different countries’ hegemonic discourses will be antagonistic in international politics in the same way as in domestic politics. With European cooperation on immigration, for example, nation states will attempt to influence the discourse of cooperation (and, consequently, the type of cooperation) through their national hegemonic discourses. As Larsen (2001) suggests, whether states agree or disagree on common policies depends very much on their respective discourses or whether these discourses happen to allow an agreement on a particular policy. The ‘branches’ of national hegemonic discourses will need to overlap for a common policy to be allowed. In the case of immigration and European integration, different countries’ have constructed very similar hegemonic discourses (*securitisation*) around nation-specific nodal points. This may be gradually leading to a common policy based on a very similar hegemonic discourse at the EU-level.

### **Comparing Italy and Britain: different ends of the European spectrum?**

Italy and Britain exemplify different ends of the European spectrum, both with regard to their political orientation and political culture. Over the years, divergent histories of migration in the two countries have shaped divergent attitudes to migration. In order to explore the national discourses of the two countries, it is important to understand these divergences.

Immigration is, today, a phenomenon shared by both Italy and Britain. However, it was not always so. While Britain, since 1948, has received major flows of labour migration from the ex-colonies, Italy only became a country of immigration in the 1980s (there are approximately 60 million people living in Italy and another 60 million Italians around the world!). In complete contrast to Britain, historical legislation on the matter of migration has only developed in the last fifteen years and at the outset, these early legislative decisions were mainly aimed at reducing the number of immigrants in the country, and an overall understanding of the complex phenomenon of migration was lacking. Italy’s recent experience of immigration coupled with the need to

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<sup>8</sup> Securitization is the practice whereby an issue becomes a security one, not necessarily because of the nature or the objective importance of the threat, but because the issue is presented as such.

homogenise its policies with other European countries has produced strict and often contradictory legislation (Pastore 2004) governed by anti-immigrant rhetoric as well as recurrent shifts between inclusion and tough exclusion measures (Bolaffi 1996; 2002).

Migration to Britain has for a long time been characterised by pull factors (demand for labour for example was heavily advertised throughout the Commonwealth) while in Italy, like in the rest of the so-called 'Mediterranean pole', immigration has been and still is mainly dependant on push factors in the countries of origin of the emigrants. For this reason, in Italy, immigration has been passively accepted rather than deliberately encouraged (Bolaffi 1994a; 2002) and has tended to cause recurrent emergencies and continuous precariousness. The geographical position of Italy compared to Britain also makes it more susceptible to migration flows from global trouble spots: primarily, Eastern Europe, Africa, and the Middle East - rendering the phenomenon of immigration difficult to manage. The arrival of the 'boat people' creates the dilemma of humanitarian aid and moral responsibility vs. national security/control. Many European countries, not least Britain, have voiced their concern over inefficient Italian border control and asked for urgent action as many undocumented migrants entering Italy proceed to France, Germany and Britain (75% of arrivals move on to other European destinations).

Britain failed to ratify the Schengen agreement. The presence of a sea and border controls makes it more difficult for migrants to enter the country illegally. Favell (2001) recognises that the characterisation of Britain as a country of immigration has been driven by its 'exceptionalism' as an island, as a partially committed Member of the European Union and as a traditionally multicultural society. Britain was one of the earliest nations to move towards open naturalisation for post-colonial immigrants. This was followed by a zero immigration regime in the 1960s and *avantgarde* policies of immigrant integration, crystallising around race relations legislation and multicultural education policies. The movement towards an 'official' multiculturalism can be seen not only as an attempt to acknowledge cultural differences but should also be seen in its wider political context (i.e. way of defining national character).

In 2000, Britain received the largest number of asylum applications (97,860) of any EU country, leading to concerns about the 'soft touch' of the British government in regards to asylum. Thus, despite its 'exceptionalism' and famous euroscepticism, Britain today is very much politically affected by immigration and asylum and faces the same challenge as other European countries: how to manage migration effectively.

On the other hand, Italian politicians' concerns lie not with asylum (only 18,000 applications in 2000) but more specifically with clandestine migration. Recent estimates tell us that there should be more than 300,000 clandestine migrants in Italy (Caritas 2000), a seventh of the total number of migrants in the country. Italy is mainly a country of transit but the impact of 'clandestines' is perceived to affect both the labour market (i.e. competition for jobs) and internal security, above all after 9/11 2001.

Overall, the parties and coalition in government in the two countries, New Labour and the House of Liberties, share the challenge of migration and both introduce 'new' discourses compared to the past (past being the Conservative government for Britain and centre left governments for Italy) on both Europe and immigration. While New Labour has been in power since 1997, the House of Liberties was elected in 2001 – year that was also characterised by the events of 9/11, which may have influenced its tough stance on migration (also Pastore 2004). What is shared between the two leaders (Blair & Berlusconi) and their parties is the willingness to cooperate (in principle) to *tackle* the political challenge of migration. However, as the analysis below will show, different priorities, interests and attitudes may stand in a way of a comprehensive agreement.

## **Discourses on *Europe & Immigration* -**

Wrapped up in New Labour's and House of Liberties' language and rhetoric, the nodal points 'Europe/nation' and 'immigration' determine the way political discourse on immigration and European integration is articulated and delivered. The *nodal points*, despite legitimising the dominant power structures, inherit and derive some of their substance from past discursive articulations as no discourse exists in a *vacuum*. The discourses on immigration and Europe/nation are very different in the two nations – subject positioning, national interest, history, antagonisms between domestic discourses, are all factors responsible for the production of nation-specific discourses. However, the active power of these discourses is similar; the comparable construction of immigration as an 'Other' in direct, threatening opposition with the nation and its identity leads to similar attitudes of closure in the two nations, which faced with the migration challenge, retreat to the necessity of intergovernmental cooperation for security in the European Union framework. However, the different experiences and concerns of migration for the two nations lead to a limited convergence which only relates to the need to securitise migration<sup>9</sup> and prevent entry<sup>10</sup>.

### **Nodal Point: Europe/nation**

The nodal points 'nation' and 'Europe' are closely interlinked. This can be seen in the case of Italy under the centre-left governments (1996-2001) when the need to re-invent national identity (weakened after WWII) led to a discursive identification of Italy with Europe. This changed under the centre-right government of Silvio Berlusconi (2001-present) who, while still supportive of Europe, embarked in an attempt to rebuild national identity and national interests<sup>11</sup> by enhancing Italian external relations and reputation within the framework of the European Union. In Britain, while during the Conservative governments of Margaret Thatcher (see Bruges speech, Sept 1988) and John Major, Europe was seen in almost direct contrast with Britain, under Tony Blair's government, even if some forms of euroscepticism survive in British politics, Europe is seen in constructive engagement and policy towards Europe is to an extent treated as domestic policy. In both countries therefore the definition of 'Europe' (the Other) is closely tied to the definition of the Self - for this reason, my analysis of the nodal point(s) of *nation* and attitudes towards *Europe* will be dealt simultaneously.

### ***'Europe/Nation' in British discourse 1997-2003***

Britain has always been well-known, for better or worse, for its Euroscepticism. Many scholars (Favell 2001, Mautner 2001) have argued that because of it being an island with a strong sense of identity<sup>12</sup> and having enjoyed political stability for centuries very much counted towards Britain's lack of enthusiasm for European integration. According to Driver and Martell (2002), "Britain is a country still not ready to throw away the legacy of leading the world rather than being a junior partner in a regional club and is Atlanticist as well as European in its allegiances" (2002:126). The multiple allegiance of Britain as an obstacle to full participation in Europe is evident in this extract from an interview with Michael Ancram, Conservative MP:

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<sup>9</sup> Hence locating migration in a 'security logic' (Huysmans 1995; 2000)

<sup>10</sup> As Didier Bigo (1998) suggests, migration is embedded in a security continuum and securitisation cannot be separated from non-discursive practices.

<sup>11</sup> As Jutta Weldes (2003a) argues, it is generally in relation to the state that so-called 'national interests' are defined. In the Italian example it is through the redefinition of identity that Italy is perceived to obtain the 'bargaining power' to have its national interests respected.

<sup>12</sup> According to Michael Cashman, Labour MEP, the UK is a country "with an island mentality, fearful of change" (interview, June 2003) or according to Lord Corbett of Castle Vale: "geography makes us different" (interview, April 2003).

*“I see our (Britain’s) role as being that of a major player in Europe but as one of the partners in a partnership ... as we are also partners in other types of partnerships. Our strength is that we are not part of the inner circle of Europe and we can move in between partnerships...The transatlantic relationship...and the Commonwealth as well which is this extraordinarily unique partnerships of 75 countries, some big some small, some strong, some weak, and there is a lot of potential... We should not leave any but be a bridge. If you leave one then you exclude the opportunity of being a bridge” (May 2003).*

The emphasis on what is almost a rhetorical equation between ‘fully belonging to the European Union’ and ‘losing Britain’s traditional position of centrality’ in the world is evident in this statement. This kind of discourse constantly recurred among the members of the Conservative Party I interviewed. However, it is also partly extended to most British political discourse on the ‘nation’ across party lines. The equation changes and assumes different overtones but the feeling of centrality/exceptionality of Britain in being able to act as a bridge through partnerships remains (Gamble 2003). In the political discourse of New Labour, for example, emphasis is on the reaffirmation of British strength as a nation (weakened by globalisation) through being a member of different partnerships. As Tony Blair observed in 1998 and 2003:

*“...We can be pivotal...Britain does not have to choose between being strong with the US or strong with Europe; it means having the confidence to see that Britain can be both, that Britain must be both; that we are stronger with the US because of our strength in Europe; that we are stronger in Europe because of our strength in the US” (15 December 1998).*

*“What are our strengths? Part of the EU, and G8; permanent member of the UN Security council; the closest ally of the US; our brilliant armed forces; membership of NATO; the reach given by our past; the Commonwealth; the links with Japan, China, Russia and ties of history with virtually every nation in Asia and Latin America; our diplomacy; our language” (Blair, 7 Jan 2003).*

The ‘strength’ of Britain as a nation is firstly identified with the British ‘past’ and secondly with the maintenance of partnerships aimed at retaining Britain’s place in a world (gained through its glorious ‘history’) that is now characterised by inevitable cooperation between states. As Tony Blair often observes, ‘*the world has never been more interdependent*’. The strength consists in being able to succeed in maintaining the strong national identity which was formed through history while, at the same time, acting strategically as a catalyser in and between regional organisations. The role of Britain as a bridge is also supported by Jack Straw, Foreign Affairs secretary:

*“There is no contradiction between being pro-American and pro-European. I do not share the view of Romano Prodi, the President of the European Commission, that Britain’s relationship with the US somehow gets in the way of playing a full part in Europe. I reject the idea that relations with the US and EU involve a zero sum – that an individual has to prove ‘his pro-European’ credentials by being anti-American” (Straw, 8 May 2002).*

The characterisation of the role to be played by the nation-state within partnerships is very relevant to understanding the way Britain sees itself and sees cooperation with the rest of Europe. Since ever, from the Empire to WWII, Britain has retained a proud position in the world (‘a world island’, Gamble 2003). The political discourse of exceptionality and triumphant isolationism derives from British history and has been constructed over the centuries. After WWII, as nation-states struggled to come to terms with their diversity, they also strived to work together for the preservation of

stability, peace and a new world order. The forces of globalisation have brought to a demise of the power of the 'lone' nation-state and as a result, today, states need to cooperate in order to maintain their share of control. Control and 'cooperation for national interest' are evident elements in New Labour political discourse. It is for this reason that nation and 'Europe' (as a form of cooperation) are so closely tied and that Tony Blair's 1997 election was centred on a more active engagement of Britain in the European project compared to the past: "*Let me first clear away any remaining doubts about the new British Government's position. Britain's future lies in being full partners in Europe*" (Blair, 24 March 1998).

As part of his vision of modernisation, Blair understood that old concepts of nation-state and old discourses of exceptionalism (what he often termed 'Old government') would not make Britain succeed in the new world order.

*"Last year, the new Labour Government came to power determined to make a fresh start. A fresh start at home and a fresh start abroad. Britain had lost its way; our relations with Europe were strained; our standing in the wider world was diminished"* (Blair, Oct 1998).

*"the Britain of the 21<sup>st</sup> century should surely be the Britain I grew up believing in: not narrow minded, chauvinistic or isolationist; but a country open in its attitudes, engaged with the outside world, adventurous in taking on the future's challenges and having the confidence to know that working with others is a sign of strength not weakness"* (Blair, 14 Oct 1999).

The emphasis on the freshness of New Labour's approach to politics ('fresh start, Britain of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, open, adventurous, engaged') in antithesis to the previous Conservative governments ('strained, diminished, weakness, chauvinistic, isolationist, narrow-minded') is evident. In this case, the statements reflect the belief that Old Government based on old concepts of nation in New times will lead to international decline. Cooperation is what is needed to retain the prime position that Britain has always held throughout history. Hence, the discourse of *exceptionality* is still retained in New Labour language but the strategy employed to maintain such exceptionalism has changed (from isolationism to constructive cooperation) because times have also changed. As Martell et al. argue (2002), overall, New Labour's attitude and novelty consists in seeing the EU as an opportunity rather than a threat or, even better, as a *necessity* in changed times: "*We live in a world where isolationism has ceased to have reason to exist. By necessity we have to cooperate with each other across nations... On the eve of a new Millennium we are now in a new world. We need new rules for international cooperation...*" (Blair, 24 April 1999).

The 'new' Europeanism of New Labour retains a strong element of continuity in the sense that it constitutes a strategy to preserve the classic concept of nation as a strong and sovereign entity. The success of Blair's new language consists in being able to juggle pro-European thinking with patriotic sentiments (Holden 2002), making Europe more acceptable to British citizens and despite cooperation, never losing sight of national priorities:

*"We are now the fourth largest economy in the world and a leading country in world politics. We have a population of 58m and a bigger and more diverse economy. If we were outside the EU, we would suffer"* (Hain, 7 May 2002)

*"(if we were out of Europe) we would be a diminished country. We would be poorer. Our weight in Washington and the world would be less. We would find it harder to project power and influence beyond our borders. We would be less*

*safe...I want us to be a player on the world stage, That is our history and our destiny." (ibid.)*

The antitheses of ‘largest economy/poorer’, ‘leading country in world politics/diminished country’ are articulated to constitute a strong argument for being part of the EU. The traditional and historical feeling of superiority of British politics and economy is part of the discourse of exceptionality. However, the necessity of cooperation is highlighted: without it, such superiority would be lost; our people would be poor and unsafe.

According to Holden (2002; 1998), the domain of policy towards the European Union is, under New Labour, progressively treated like the domain of domestic politics<sup>13</sup>. In New Labour political discourse, the new Europeanism, so criticised by some members of the Conservative party, is made acceptable by the benefits that this brings to the preservation of the unity and strength of the nation. In order not to lose sight of national priorities, however, the discourse on Europe is always constructed around the notion of cooperation for national interest and for the maintenance of sovereignty.

*"The EU member states do try where possible to pursue common policies. We do try to act together when we can. Not out of some ideological commitment. But out of self interest. Because by acting together we are more successful...a strong Britain, in control of its own destiny, advancing its own interests, working with our neighbours to make all of us safer, richer and stronger" (Hain 7 May 2002).*

*"It is a world in which love of ideals is essential but addiction to ideology can be fatal. It is a world in which people seek from their Governments not dogma or doctrine but a strong sense of national purpose underpinned by clear values" (Blair, 24 March 1998).*

The listing of terms ‘richer, safer, stronger’ and ‘in control’ once again highlight the primacy of the nation-state (‘strong sense of national purpose’) and the lack of ideology inspiring Britain’s involvement in the EU; after all, as Tony Blair observed in 2000, “*the British are too pragmatic to believe in visions*” (23 Nov. 2000). The sentences ‘where possible, when we can’ highlight the cautious politics of New Labour towards the EU, one that argues for conditional commitment - *as long as* that guarantees full benefits to Britain as a nation:

*"To be pro-British you do not have to be anti-European. We treasure our national identity, as you do. But in creating the European Union we have the chance not to suppress our national interest but to advance it in a new way for a New world by working together... We are proud nations and we work together" (Blair, 20 May 1999).*

*"We want a Europe that works together as a team. A Europe in which our countries retain their distinctive identities but work together to tackle common problems for the practical benefit of all." (Blair, 6<sup>th</sup> dec 1997).*

*"To be part of Europe is in the British national interest. So far from submerging our identity as a nation in some Eurosceptic parody of a federal super state we believe that by being part of Europe we advance our own self interest as the British nation. This is a patriotic cause" (Blair 14 Oct 1999)*

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<sup>13</sup> As also Blair suggests in his 2003 New Year Message, “*the blunt truth is that there has never been a time when domestic and foreign policy were so closely linked*” (1 Jan 2003)

The conceptualisation of the European Union for New Labour is clear in these statements: the EU is a union/team of nation states. In a world characterised by insecurity and interdependency, New Labour's Britain needs to confront the New times and become a player in the 'the outside world' to avoid exclusion. In particular, the recurrent use of the terms (*over-wording*, Fairclough 2000) 'sovereignty, nation, pride, self-interest, patriotism' which have always characterised British political discourse throughout the centuries, alongside terms such as 'work together, team' and 'suppress, submerge' highlights the tension between *nation* and *Europe* and between *identity* and *new times* in the British discourse on Europe under New Labour.

This tension is part of a British 'superiority' complex which, according to Shearman, "was accompanied by a realisation that Britain had long been suffering from relative decline" (1999:95). It also indicates how New Labour discourse retains the concept of 'Britain as a strong nation' which characterised traditional Conservative discourses on Britain and Europe. As Smith suggests "many Tories saw a strong Britain outside or against Europe; new Labour's policies are built around the idea of a strong Britain leading the European Union" (1999:129). Adapting to the New times, breaking with the past and with the traditional British eurosclerosis is a challenge for New Labour - above all when it comes to convince a nation that has always felt far removed from the rest of Europe that cooperation is the way forward.

The strategy adopted by New Labour to 'make Europe acceptable' to the electorate is one that employs one of the favourite elements in British discourse: leadership. The importance of this concept is that it offers a way of preserving national interest at the same time as promoting cooperation. Leadership means power - being in the driving seat when decisions are taken; after decades of Euroscepticism (still latent today in many spheres of British society), New Labour could not argue for unconditional support of the European project. It could, however, argue for a different role for Britain, not at the margins as it used to be but leading European developments. Being at the centre of European activities, in prime position as it was in the past, would constitute an acceptable move as long as national identity would not suffer:

*"I am a patriot. I love my country. The British, at their best, have two great characteristics, creativity and common sense. As history shows, we have never lacked boldness, or courage... We are pragmatic visionaries rather than utopians...we have I hope much to contribute to the European Union."* (Blair 20 May 1999).

The appeal of this speech is in the successful rhetorical mix of patriotism and Europeanism. Lack of a strong sense of nation in New Labour's rhetoric would lead to lack of support from the electorate and to harsh criticism by the media<sup>14</sup> and the Conservative party. It is part of New Labour's new but cautious politics. The new leadership aspect of New Labour's discourse also makes a standpoint: in the past, Britain was at the 'margins' of Europe –independent but marginal. Today, Britain can once again be a leader but will have to give away part of its independence. This kind of discourse is very significant for understanding today's subject positioning of Britain in the discourse on Europe. The discourse on the role to be played by Britain is usually expressed by the over-wording of active terms such as 'shape, influence, control, guide, lead': "If we wish Europe to *be guided* by the common sense part of our character we must also use our creative vision to see that only by

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<sup>14</sup> The mass media in Britain often portray Europe as a grey, bureaucratic and undemocratic area which will eventually absorb British national identity. As Blair also observed in one of his speeches, "of course our position is made more difficult by our media. One part has abandoned all sense of objectivity and is essentially hostile to the European Union. The other part is supine in the face of that hostility" (23 Feb. 2000).

*participating can we shape and influence the Europe in which we live...Half hearted partners are rarely leading partners...*’ (Blair, 20 May 1999).

The primacy of national interest and the assurance of leadership for Britain are all part of a very cautious politics and specific strategy for comforting the electorate. Such strategy also tells us a lot about the political tension between ‘Europe’ and ‘nation’, which is so evident in the British political discourse on Europe. The message that is received by the public is one of reassurance: ‘the government is doing all it can to preserve your interests, the interests of the British people, its stakeholders’. For this reason, when the benefits of being part of Europe are listed in interviews, speeches or press releases, the areas of improvement mentioned are generally the ones that most directly appeal to the public: employment, pension schemes, family, security, and pollution.

*“There are people in Britain today who are safer because of our membership of the EU....There are people in Britain today who have a job because of our membership of the EU...There are people in Britain today who are healthy because of our membership of the EU...There are people in Britain today who are able to spend time with their families because of our membership of the EU... there are people in Britain today out walking on hills or forests which are cleaner and greener and safer from pollution because of our membership of the EU.”* (Peter Hain, 7 May 2002).

New Labour has since its inception been about civic engagement and stakeholding. Not only would cooperation with Europe be about national interest but also the discourse adopted by New Labour would be mainly directed to the British public, the stakeholders. In order to persuade and create the case for cooperation in terms of citizens’ wellbeing and national interest, the political discourse of New Labour fails to create an affective dimension to the EU. The lack of an affective dimension and of an attempt to make British citizens identify with a ‘social’ rather than a merely political or economic Europe can be observed in the following statements:

*“My passionate belief in Europe is not born of any diminishing of my belief in Britain. On the contrary, I believe in Europe because I believe membership of the European strategic alliance is a crucial part of the British national interest. Anti-Europeanism is not British patriotism. It is an out of date delusion”* (Blair, May 2003).

*“Fundamentally the EU is a means to an end – consisting of security and prosperity”* (Straw, Dec. 2001).

The strategic underpinnings of what is, seemingly, a ‘failure’ are clear: firstly, the political discourse employed by New Labour does not aim at creating a feeling of identification or attachment to a ‘social’ Europe (the nation-state is central) but wants to give the idea of the ‘necessity’ and strong functional benefit of cooperation (the strength of the benefit is expressed by the repetition of the terms ‘*belief, passionate, I believe*’). Secondly, the political discourse is strategically aimed at convincing the public that Europe will not constitute a threat to national identity; in a country which is traditionally known for its euroscepticism, carrying an image of a ‘social’ Europe to identify with could be interpreted as the negation of Britain as a nation and would be doomed to failure<sup>15</sup>. As a result of pressure by media (Stanyer, 2003) and opposition, the European Union is thus cautiously portrayed by the political elite as a grey, functional ‘box’, as a

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<sup>15</sup> The perceived threat in Britain of a concept of social Europe often seems to be equalled to the formation of a European super-state – almost if creating a feeling of identity with Europe would mean giving up the identity of the nation-state (also Teubert 2001).

background for the cooperation of self-interested nation-states: “*what we want is a Europe of nations, not a Federal Super-State*” (Blair, June 2003). An empty and controllable institution does not constitute a threat after all: “*Our electorates feel a close connection to their own national Governments; they do not feel the same towards European Institutions*” (Blair, 28 Nov 2002).

The lack of drive to portray a more accessible Europe for British citizens has, on the other hand, resulted in a lack of understanding for the European project and suspicion towards its workings (i.e. Euro). Europeanism in Britain is a Europeanism of the political elite and not of the people (Papadakis 1999). The discourse strategy adopted by New Labour has been successful at maintaining a balance between the feeling of nation and the drive to cooperate by constraining Europeanism to pure benefit and national necessity in changed times. In so doing, however, it has created a Europe which is peripheral and far-removed from the people<sup>16</sup>. This is of little surprise when one considers New Labour’s strategic lack of civic engagement in discourse when it comes to policy towards Europe, often undermined by the counter-discourses of, for example, the Conservative party and the tabloids.

In general, an analysis of political discourse of New Labour offers the conclusion that there has been, since 1997, a more constructive and positive approach to Europe compared to the past (Driver and Martell 2002), even if this is motivated more by necessity than pure internationalist will. As a result of pressures from antagonistic discourses, however, New Labour presents the European project as a way to preserve Britain as a strong power in an increasingly interdependent world; it articulates the discourse around an opposition between Britain and Europe (although a constructive rather than a threatening opposition) rather than around increasing identification between the two and retains the traditionally nationalistic discursive construction of ‘nation first’ making Europe into a functional framework for survival. The strength of New Labour is, as Driver and Martell recognise, its “willingness to confront new times: the world is changing and political ideologies need to keep pace; what worked yesterday may not work today” (2002:224). To do so, however, ‘Blairism’ has not proposed a radically different type of discourse (which might have hindered its acceptability) but has adapted old discourses of British uniqueness to the new times and the consequent necessity to open up. In particular, the new re-articulation of ‘Europe’ alongside the old articulation of ‘nation’ have resulted in a reinvented political discourse, composed of rhetorical strategies to make it acceptable to both British citizens and the international society.

### ***‘Europe/nation’ in Italian discourse 2001-3***

Given the number of governments (and resulting discontinuity in discourse) that succeeded each other in the Italian political scene between 1997 and 2001 (Pasquino 2002), the case of Italy will focus on the discourse of the House of Liberties, the centre-right coalition elected in May 2001. Before looking at the discourse on Europe by the centre-right, however, it is important to introduce one of the elements that characterises Italian political discourse, the weakness of the nation<sup>17</sup> - as this is essential for understanding the subject positioning of Italy within Europe.

During Romano Prodi’s government (1996-98), Italy took an important step towards Europe by staging a determined fight to respect the economic parameters established by the Maastricht treaty

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<sup>16</sup> Shearman also observes, “although inter and intra – party squabbles over Europe have often resulted in saturation coverage in the media, mass opinion surveys have consistently shown that the wider public have relatively little knowledge or interest in these matters” (1999:61)

<sup>17</sup> The weakness of the nation is a much debated subject in Italy (Rusconi 1996;1993) and relates to what Galli della Loggia (1996) called the ‘death of the motherland’ a powerful phrase he uses to refer to the crisis of the idea of nation in Italy after WWII.

and qualify as one of the countries that would participate in the launching of European monetary union in 1999 (Ginsborg 2003). The step was taken by the Prodi government and then managed by the following D'Alema and Amato governments. Since the decision to be part of the euro zone had been taken, the centre-left rhetoric assumed an enhanced pro-European tone, one of pride towards having reintroduced Italy in the world stage. This is a recurrent feature of the political discourse of the time (1997-2001), the representation of the two identities as interchangeable: *"There is no contradiction at all between the love of one's city or region, the love for the motherland and the love for Europe. I love my city, Livorno, Tuscany, Italy and Europe at the same time and in the same way"* (President Ciampi, 31<sup>st</sup> Dec 2000).

This inter-changeability which is symptom of the weakness of the nation and the need for strengthening national identity was seen as fundamental by the centre-left which somehow filled the 'hole' left by history by diluting Italian identity into European identity. This meant that Italy under centre-left governments became more active in the EU (i.e. entrance in the euro and the Italian participation in the war in Kosovo) in an attempt to move away from the image of the Cinderella of Europe<sup>18</sup>. European identity and the often acritical participation in the European Union political project replaced for Italy the crisis of the idea of nation. This *embracing* of the affective dimension of the European Union can be understood in terms of the Italian conception of 'nation' and 'Europe', a conception that sees identification rather than suspicion (as it is the case in Britain) and a relationship that is determined and motivated by a weak sense of national identity<sup>19</sup> (contrary to Britain). If in the case of Britain, Europe is 'talked' about by New Labour as a union worth joining because of the presence of transnational challenges that nation states cannot face alone, Italian centre-left politicians also introduced the dimension of 'need' but this 'need' also implied the necessity of Italy to be part of the EU for its own legitimation as a nation state:

*"I leave this Parliament today to take over new responsibilities but I do not leave this country, I do not leave my country because the destiny of Italy is now finally fully integrated within a project of a more united Europe, closer to its citizens and more prestigious in the world. Europe will be able to do a lot to help Italy to complete its process of... modernisation started in these past few years. ... But Europe also needs a strong contribution from Italy. Without Italy, in fact, there is no Europe. There must be a contribution of trust and full participation in the European idea"* (Prodi Sept, 1999)

As this quote by Prodi suggests, now that Italy has entered the EU as a full member (thus re-legitimising Italy as a country), the question of 'need' is complemented by the discursive identification between the identities and the destinies of Italy and the EU. As a rhetorical device, the association of Italy's newly found place in the world with the 'last few years' show the pride of the centre-left administration concerning the European achievement, which becomes the 'flag' of the centre-left during its years in power and in the opposition. In the words of D'Alema (prime minister who followed Prodi), in fact, *"if, for the first time after many years we can finally substitute in our vocabulary the word 'crisis' with 'opportunity', it is thanks to us...who guided Italy out of the swamp where it risked drowning, freeing it from the ghosts of its recent past"* (March 2001). While in Britain the importance of the nation was (and is) first and foremost, in Italy worries about national identity were not prime at the time – in fact, giving up sovereignty was part of the process of reinvention of the nation. In the words of Cavalli, in fact, *"all Italians love Italy; they love it so much that they*

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<sup>18</sup> Even if in many examples of discourse, the real potential contribution of Italy to Europe was not by all means clearly stated – hence retaining the presence of an overall underlying perception of Italian inferiority. Italian identity was submerged in order to redefine its identity as European (after 'Italian' identity was perceived as de-legitimised by history) and in so doing the subject positioning of Italy within Europe was transformed into one of inferiority.

<sup>19</sup> In terms of public opinion Diamanti (2002) notices that the pro-European feelings of the Italians is more due to distrust in the State than to actual pro-European nature.

would like it to be different from the way they see it every day. They would, in fact, like to see it more European, more projected into the future, less provincial, less quarrelsome, more democratic. But in order to make Italy more European, there is no need to be nostalgic for the nation” (1998).

With the 2001 elections, the political landscape changed. The House of Liberties won by articulating competing antagonistic discourses to those of the centre-left, in order to secure votes and propose novelty that would appeal to disillusioned electors. The discourses were packaged around a rhetoric of anti-communism, anti-politics, liberty, democracy and citizens’ concerns. Berlusconi, the leader of the new coalition, represented change, a self-made man. His success in business and his optimism (contra posed to the perceived negativity and internal quarrels of the centre-left) were seen as hopes for a new Italy: “*Our ‘key words’ are clear to the Country: trust in the future, optimism, commitment to make things better no matter what, understanding and confidence with people and their hopes, with their ways of speaking and living. They (the opposition) adopt other means: critical aggression, blackmail rather than promise, and an oligarchic mentality which is far from citizens’ feelings*” (Berlusconi, *Panorama*, Feb 2004). Moreover, the involvement of the Northern League and the National Alliance brought in two parties that mirrored in many ways the practical concerns of a large part of the electorate both in the North and in the South of the country<sup>20</sup>.

During the *Berlusconi II* government the nodal point ‘Europe/nation’ changed focus and meaning. If in the previous governments Italy and Europe (and their destinies) were identified as one, the present government made an effort to reaffirm the weak Italian identity in a different way: by building the external profile of Italy, not *as Europe* anymore but as a visible country *in Europe*. The difference between this objective and the European engagement of Blair in Britain is in the consciousness that, to start with, Italy had a feeble and marginal identity (while Britain had a very strong sense of nation) and transforming Italy into an international player after so long would have enhanced the dying sense of nation (Galli della Loggia 1996) and hopefully make the Italians ‘feel proud’ to be Italian<sup>21</sup>. In order to do so, the House of Liberties adopted national branding (even the name of two parties in the coalition have nationalist overtones: *Forza Italia* – Go Italy, evoking football hymns- and *Alleanza Nazionale* – national alliance); the colour blue (the colour of the national football team as well as the colour of ‘infinity’, Amadori 2002) and a rhetoric of national interest which would appeal to the citizens. These were steps towards change and the new government was aware that in order to cause change one needs to operate on different fronts: not just through a change in rhetoric and political choices but also through new partnerships (e.g. support to the Bush administration during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq), branding and psychological devices such as reliance on opinion polls to understand citizens’ concerns. All these elements put together constitute the innovation of the *Berlusconi II* government which according to Berlusconi himself, “*concerns our philosophy of governance: contrary to the Left we do not just rely bureaucratically on ordinary administration, we do not ‘float’ on events: we work 24 hours on 24, we intervene on everything, and we always try to invent positive solutions. We ‘protect’ the Country from difficulties, anticipating circumstances, not certifying the inevitable after it has happened and asking*

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<sup>20</sup> Direct response to citizens’ concerns is exactly the strategy taken by this government. Articulated around the notion of democracy and liberty (discursively contra posed to the previous governments), the rhetoric and political strategy of the *Berlusconi II* government was one of complete ‘dedication’ to the citizens. The grass-roots rhetoric indeed matched a practical concern with policies that would enhance Italian identity and address the fears and concerns of the Italians. As the Declaration of Values of Forza Italia states, “*our conception of democracy is mainly based on a direct relationship between the premier and the electorate*” (2004:7). This is an important feature of this government, a feature that sheds light on the *Berlusconi II* government’s policies towards Europe and towards immigration.

<sup>21</sup> Before this time, duelling on the sense of ‘nation’ was seen by many as reminiscent of the nationalism and the celebration of the nation under Fascism and therefore not a legitimate argument to be made in a political context.

*citizens to pay for the consequences. Ours is a philosophy of positive and preventive action”* (Liberal, 2004).

Together with innovation, however, Silvio Berlusconi’s government also worked on continuity with the previous governments - commitment to Europe was in fact reconfirmed<sup>22</sup>, although the positioning and balancing act between the degree of European integration and national interest changed. As Berlusconi recently clarified, according to him, *“the leader of the Italian government has been elected as leader of the party with relative majority and as leader of the coalition that has received a clear mandate: to change Italy, do reforms, defend the Italian national interests in Europe and in the world”* (February 2004, *Panorama*). Emphasis on change and national interest<sup>23</sup> means positioning Italy at the centre – rather than losing its identity at the margins of Europe. The search for prestige which characterised the entry into the euro-zone and the intervention in Kosovo (during the centre-left governments) was continued and enhanced by the Berlusconi government through the active role of Italy in foreign policy<sup>24</sup> and external relations aimed at projecting a renewed image of Italy. The feeling of belonging (as a founding member) to the Union is also part of the image and role that Italy wants to play on an international scene:

*Traditionally, Italy has had the role of the mediator; not a revolutionary type of politics but one that is in the middle between two positions. Italy has always been in the search for a position of prestige, always. For whoever reaches such a position, Fassino (leader of the Democrats of the Left) or Berlusconi, there will be success. This is the importance of image. For example, bilateral foreign policy does not necessarily bring international prestige but if conducted within a ‘European’ framework then it can bring great benefits” (Jas Gawronski MEP, Forza Italia interview, June 2003).*

The political strategy of the centre-right government is therefore one of changed focus; away from a politics of subservient identification with the European Union and moving towards a politics of regained national prestige – a politics that makes Europe *need* Italy.<sup>25</sup> The strategy is one that aims at transforming Italy into an influential, visible player: *“I retain that Italy should exalt in every circumstance its historic vocation to be a permanent ‘bridge’ of dialogue between civilisations and an active factor for the solution of controversies. We work to unite, not to divide the people and countries of Europe. We work to unite, not to divide Europe from the Unites States...I am very sorry to see how the Left, even if for instrumental reasons, does not recognise how with the action of my government, Italy has re-achieved a prominent international role” (Berlusconi, Liberal 2003)*

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<sup>22</sup> Differently from the British, most Italian politicians interviewed (across party lines) in fact spoke of sovereignty as something worth losing for the sake of cooperation and national good, rather than something sacred to national identity.

<sup>23</sup> As Weldes (2003) points out, ‘national interests’ or ‘preferences’ articulated by decision-makers – are two-fold: they can be a logical function of the identity itself, or a function of specific threats constructed in relation to the identity. In this case we are looking at the first type of national interest, one articulated and produced by the definition of identity itself, or better, produced in order to aid the definition of identity.

<sup>24</sup> *“Europe is not just a great market, a monetary reality, or a financial space but a great political project: a strong Europe, a politically strong Europe, with a common security and defence policy which would legitimise a common foreign policy able to promote peace and defend the strategic interests of the Union in an international context. This is the only way in which Italy will be able to assume an international role and defend what you (Berlusconi) have defined as the value of the ‘superior’ interest of our country”* (Senator Forcieri, Ulivo, 19 June 2001)

<sup>25</sup> After all, as Bezzi argues in the centre-right online magazine *Ideazione*, the ‘European Union needs Italy, this Italy of Berlusconi’ in Bezzi A, 2003.

Despite the widespread accusations of anti-Europeanism<sup>26</sup> made by the centre-left because of the change in focus and the introduction of statements of national interest in the discourse on Europe (interviews: Napolitano MEP, 2003; Segni MEP 2003; Di Pietro MEP 2003 acknowledged by Rivolta MP 2004; Bigliardo MEP 2003) and despite an occasional disillusionment of the centre-right coalition towards the European project, a *United* Europe is still very much a feature of the discourse of the House of Liberties (contrary to the British case). As Silvio Berlusconi suggests, in fact, “*We work so that Europe can speak to the world with one authoritative political voice and can equip itself with its own security and defence policy but also with a constitution and an army*” (Liberal, 2003).

In summary, the Italian engagement in Europe has changed focus since 2001. Overall, since 1997 Italy’s role within the EU has always been one of unquestioned commitment. However, while between 1997 and 2001 Italy’s role was articulated as that of a weak nation joining uncritically the European project (its ‘dying’ identity becoming identified with European identity), between 2001 and present day the re-building of Italian identity was approached through policies and discourses aimed at projecting national reputation in Europe and overseas. Even if Italy’s commitment to Europe has been maintained, it has become less uncritical in the attempt to change subject-positioning and build a unique Italian image abroad, through external relations and foreign policy. If in the case of New Labour’s Britain, policy towards Europe has become closer to domestic policy, in Italy, the centre-right’s policy towards Europe has gradually shifted from being linked to domestic policy to becoming closer to external relations and foreign policy.

**Discussion-** Overall the British and Italian discourses of New Labour and House of Liberties show two main important differences, one relating to the concept of nation and the second relating to the subject-positioning of Britain and Italy within Europe. One could argue that the different constructions of national identity are directly responsible for the positioning of these very identities in relation to the Other, Europe in this case. Selves are in fact constructed in relation to other multiple selves as well as to others. In the case of the nodal point ‘Europe’, for example, the otherness of Europe changes according to circumstances. In Britain, Europe remains Other but, compared to the past Conservative governments, it changes positioning and becomes a constructive Other, almost a self when it comes to fighting a common challenge inter-governmentally (that is, when this Other is internalised to contra pose the Self to a more threatening Other). In Italy, the positioning changes from a Europe which was seen as a Self during the centre-left governments to a Europe which is seen as Other but in very close connection to the Self. While in Italy the commitment to Europe is confirmed, in Britain suspicion and multiple allegiances still drive debates but an increasing understanding of necessity in a changing world is gradually moving the rhetoric towards the development of a British Europeanism, some say for strategic reasons (Holden 2002), some for *inevitable* necessity (Fairclough 2000). Moreover, the framework of Europe is articulated differently by the two countries: in Britain, Europe is seen as the *locus* for solving those transnational challenges that the nation state cannot solve alone and for maintaining centrality in a globalised world while in Italy, Europe is seen as the locus where to renegotiate national identity and reputation and create a bargaining environment where to realise national interests.

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<sup>26</sup> To this accusation (the last one of a long series was made by Romano Prodi), Berlusconi recently answered by re-stating its commitment to the European project: “*We are europeists without reservation but with a connotation that differentiates us from our opponents. We are for a Great Europe in a great West, following the tradition of anti-totalitarian freedom which comes from far away and following the sacrifices started with the Normandy landings and continued with the Marshall plan and the creation of EEC and fulfilled with the wonderful victory of democracy during the long Cold war. They (the opponents) are for a small Europe of national selfishness, subject to interests and bureaucracy which has nothing to do with civil liberty and freedom of enterprise*” (Panorama Feb 2004).

### **Nodal Point ‘Immigration’**

Both nodal points, *immigration* and *Europe*, are about the ‘Other’. The confrontation with the Other is part of the process of negotiation of identity (Connolly 1991). While in the case of ‘Europe/nation’, the subject-positioning changes according to the changed needs and circumstances of the subject, the second nodal point, ‘immigration’, has been seen both today and in the past in negative contraposition to the Self. There has not been, so far, a strategic political motive (like in the case of ‘Europe’ for Britain) to justify a transformation of attitude towards immigration (although in Britain in the post-war period, immigration was welcomed for economic reasons); after all, as the Labour MP Michael Wills observed, “*every wave of immigration brings political fire*” (interview, 15 May 2003). Softer or harsher policies on migration and asylum have succeeded each other in British and, to some extent, in Italian history but the discursive articulations of immigration has not dramatically changed context or overtones.

### **‘Immigration’ in British discourse – 1997-2003**

The first way in which the British immigration discourse is constructed is based on history and is aimed at presenting an image of liberalism and uniqueness, product of the long tradition of immigration to Britain (Steiner 2000). This type of articulation is usually adopted to indicate the tolerance that Britain has traditionally demonstrated vis-à-vis migrants and to highlight the existence of ‘a limit’ to how many migrants Britain can welcome. According to a Labour MP, “*our country has a very long tradition of immigration and hospitality but now there is a limit to how many people we can give shelter to*” (anonymous, interview, May 2003) or according to Michael Ancram, Conservative MP, “*our immigration policy must be fair and must accept that we have had a very long history of immigration since the Second World War and that there are limits to how much further you can extend immigration*” (interview, May 2003).

The emphasis on the ‘long tradition’ of hospitality seems to recur alongside the repetition of the proposition ‘but’ and the noun ‘limit’ in this way conveying an idea of *historical* tolerance that justifies a present intolerance. This rhetorical contraposition and justification of the two opposite discursive elements (rhetorically linked by the ‘but’) is what Wodak et al (2000) have termed an *argumentational fallacy* and serves the purpose of stating the uniqueness of the national experience while justifying a restrictive approach/attitude towards immigration. Such frequent discursive articulation which underlines a traditionally liberal approach is aimed at highlighting the uniqueness of Britain as a pluralist nation. The recurrent mention of the ‘past’ (in actual facts characterised by very restrictive attitudes and policies) is also adopted as a sort of justification for adopting a strict attitude to migration and making this acceptable today.

The second way in which the discourse on immigration is constructed is based on the notion of Otherness and security. Immigration as the Other and as a threatening dimension for the nation (and for Europe - the two often become one in the discourse on immigration), needs to be *securitised* in order to be discursively controlled and, in practice, needs to be subject to restrictive policies. For this reason, in most of the speeches and government press releases and, more so, in the interviews, the opposition between the ‘us’ (Britain and its citizens) and ‘the Other’ (immigration, the threat<sup>27</sup>) is a recurrent discursive strategy and is aimed at drawing clear ‘borders’ between the two, to exclude and differentiate.

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<sup>27</sup> That is, the insecurity faced and suffered by the particular identities (the Self).

The depiction of Britain in liberal terms can be contrasted with the association of immigration with security, even more so after 9/11. The reason for this is clear: borders<sup>28</sup>. By differentiating Britain from immigration, British politicians aim at creating a fortress and a sense of community within this fortress which is contra-posed to the chaos of the Outside (in the words of Oliver Letwin MP: “*everybody who comes here should be civilised*”, interview, 14 May 2003). As Fairclough (2000) and Shaw (2003) argue, the discourse of new Labour tends to be inclusive and consensual and based on the notion of Community, essential to the maintenance of social cohesion. Inclusion in the political community and across social classes is a distinguishing feature of the New Labour government. One of the main priorities of New Labour is to ensure that all have the right to participate fully in the life of the community. However, if one pays attention to the articulation and construction of collective identities and to the way the lines are drawn within the body politic, one is able to understand the strategic adoption of a subtle construction of the ‘community’ versus the Other:

*“What worries us today is less some neighbouring country invading us than the spread of nuclear weapons, missiles, biological or chemical weapons. We have seen also how Aids can spread from continent to continent, how crime can operate with global networks, how terrorists can transport their bitterness and their bombs across borders, as can religious fundamentalism”* (Blair, 13 nov. 2000).

In this statement the emphasis on ‘borders’ and ‘us’ is evident. The way this duality is articulated conveys the idea of safety, unity and comfort of the area ‘within the border’ and the threat that lies beyond that border (‘worries’, ‘invasion’, ‘bitterness’). Also, by listing all the dangers that could undermine the safety of the ‘us’, the statement implicitly links the security aspect to the phenomenon of movement of people (‘terrorists’, ‘AIDS’, ‘religious fundamentalism’). The particular articulation of this duality Us /Them is based on the conceptualisation of a safer and more prosperous ‘us’ through the control and restriction of ‘them’. This same concept can be also observed in the title of the 2002 White paper, *Secure Borders, Safe Haven*: only if the borders are protected from uncontrolled entry of the Other, will we be able to maintain the prosperity of the Community. As Ann Widdecombe stated, “*Britain should be a safe haven not a soft touch*” (interview, July 2003) implying that a safe haven can only be reached through applying strict regulations.

The securitisation of the immigration phenomenon is recurrent in government discourses:

*“And the definition of a refugee problem in Adenauer’s Germany was quite different to what it is today, with hundreds of thousands of migrants moving across the continents. We need policies that recognise the magnitude of that shift. For example, we need common asylum rules that are enforced in an equal and fair way across all EU countries. And our national interest demands an effectively policed common EU border...”* (Blair, 23 Nov. 2001).

*“There is increasing public concern about organised crime, drugs and illegal immigration and their international scale”* (Blair, 20 Jan 1998).

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<sup>28</sup> Both in the British and Italian cases, the use of the term ‘border’ (construct of identity) is not only seen in association with the territorial dimension of the state (borders as territorial markers) but also as a construct of identity which relates to the cultural identification through the nation (i.e. identity produces cultural ‘borders/boundaries’ between us and them: borders as cultural, symbolic markers). Merely looking at the territorial aspect of borders would not for example account for techniques of control which are not related to the border, i.e. databases etc.

*“...It will mean integrated and effective action on issues to do with organised crime, drug dealing, asylum and immigration that affect all of Europe, cause huge distress and cannot be seriously tackled by nations alone” (Blair, 28 Nov. 2002).*

The power of the expressions ‘magnitude, international scale, hundreds of thousands’ is discursively significant as it is intended to give an alarmist impression of the threatening scale of the phenomenon. For this reason, immigration is explicitly termed as a ‘problem’ or a ‘new threat’ which causes ‘public concern’ (the government assumes here the role of the protector in a child/guardian relationship, Doty 1996), ‘huge distress’ and implicitly negative ‘consequences’ (*presupposition*). The nuances of these statements are not accidental and represent an inherent part of the securitisation strategy. The words used are meant to convey the urgency of the phenomenon and the need for action (repetition of ‘effective, effectively’) through securitisation and control. The measures suggested to deal with migration are also strictly control-oriented measures: ‘enforced rules, effectively policed borders’ and only a mention of ‘fairness and equality’ is made in passim to make the argument acceptable. The role of the government as protector not only of the citizens but also of the victims of migration is seemingly the cause for the call for *action*: in reality, the enhanced use of over-wording discloses a deeper anxiety about government efficiency in tackling public concern. As Steiner observes, mentions of ‘fairness and equality’ are often “rather bland and unrevealing assertions about national interests” (2000:137). The securitisation strategy is not only reinforced by the claim that action should be effective but also that it should be ‘urgent’:

*“...we need a radically new approach to delivering the reduction of asylum seekers number that we need. We cannot let the people traffickers and the organised criminals go on profiting from this evil trade and we must take radical steps to actively deter abusive applications too” (David Blunkett 27 March 2003).*

*“It is vital that the EU continues to attach overriding priority to encouraging partnership with third countries in tackling illegal immigration” (Blair, 31 March 2003).*

Both statements underline the urgency (‘overriding priority’) of controlling the phenomenon. The over-wording adopted here (‘evil trade, criminals, profiting, traffickers’) highlights the pressing concern of the government with the phenomenon but does not indicate the real reasons for such concern. The *securitisation* strategy of migration is also expressed through the usage of ‘lists’: by listing immigration and asylum with other terms which are felt to have the same connotations, political discourse fixes the meaning surrounding immigration. The items in the lists are *equivalences* (Fairclough 2000):

*“Intermestic political organisation is now required in place of narrow nationalistic perspective of old political thinking. The new challenges of terrorism, of the handling of asylum seekers, of fraudulent money transactions which fuel the trade in drugs, in prostitution and arms demand an intermestic approach” (Dennis MacShane 26 June 2003).*

The *securitisation* discourse is also articulated through the use of derogatory terms and concepts attached to immigration and asylum, which, above all after 9/11, have become matters of security. According to the Conservative MEP Neil Parish, for example, “*Immigration brings the potential for problem. Not every Muslim is a potential terrorist but if you were bringing in 30-40,000 Muslims a year then you would have a problem....Human rights are important but we cannot get carried away*” (June 2003). On the other hand, a Labour MP who preferred to remain anonymous told me that the association between migration and security “*exists not so much in the practical world but it*

does exist in the political world and migration does feed a perception of threat” but after all, he added, “migration should continue, otherwise what kind of pathetic, sad, impoverished, miserable country that does not help people would we be?” (May 2003). The use of lists can also be seen as part of the process of not only spatial securitisation but also temporal securitisation, the strategy of controlling time. Discourses that associate migration with crime legitimate non-discursive practices such as police and intelligence databases/profiling of people who *may* commit crimes. These practices are based on the conception of temporal control (prevent crimes by identifying ‘criminals’ before they commit crimes) rather than spatial control.

The adoption of negative terminology and derogation are also expressed through the use of another important discursive strategy which can be found in New Labour political discourse: *objectification* or *de-humanisation*. Treating immigration and asylum, which are two very human phenomena, as ‘things’ to be curbed eases the process of securitisation and partly avoids the political confrontation with issues such as human rights, public feelings about the destiny of migrants etc:

“A common approach to the way in which Member states deal with applications for asylum, to remove the incentive for asylum seekers to shop around, and to ensure that asylum seekers are dealt with in the first EU state they enter” (Blair, Oct. 1999)

“People will be refused entry to the UK before they cross the channel and the latest technology will make it increasingly difficult to hide in lorries or trains” (Blunkett, Feb 2003).

The migrants are transformed into problematic and Kafkaian subjects of authority. Their actions are objectified and emptied of any significance: they ‘enter, cross, hide, shop around, seek work’. On the other hand, the government ‘refuses, deals with, delivers, ensures’. The antithesis between the policing (or guardian) State swiping away the parasitic intruder who, at any good occasion, attempts to overcome authority is quite significant. There is no space for an understanding of the motives and human feelings nor there is space for the public to empathise. In particular, most parliamentarians do not generally speak of the benefits that refugees or economic migrants bring to their countries (Steiner 2000:147). This is also part of the de-humanisation process of migration in political discourse.

The concept of Europe as a necessity also comes back heavily in the immigration discourse as only with Europe’s help, will Britain be able to tackle the difficult challenge of controlling migration flows. The reason for this is that, aware of the difficulty that the nation-state has encountered in finding a solution to migrations, the nation-state will have to seek the help of the European Union: “We will also be safer and more secure through better cooperation on border controls, asylum and immigration, joint efforts to tackle cross-border crime and shared environmental standards” (Blair 29 Nov. 2002). Again, there is no ideology nor vision involved but pure functional necessity for security. The use of terms such as ‘secure, safer’ indicates the purpose of cooperation (‘active’ cooperation – see the recurrent use of the term ‘tackle’) while the terms ‘organised crime, abuses, border controls’ indicate the need for securitisation of the issues at hand and the seriousness of the challenges.

The political discourse on immigration, Europe and Britain is also strategically articulated: Europe in many occasions becomes the ‘us’ to indicate the will to form a ‘fortress’ for the security and prosperity of those who are ‘included’.

*“For Europe the central challenge is no longer simply securing internal peace inside the European Union. It is the challenge posed by the outside world, about how we make Europe strong and influential, how we make full use of the potential Europe has to be a global power for good” (Blair, 20 May 1999).*

The emphasis on words such as ‘outside, inside’ significantly highlights the discursive importance of boundaries and divisions. In particular, the *openness* of barriers *within* fortress Europe is in sharp discursive antithesis with the *closure* to the outside world. In front of a major threat such as immigration (the Other) even the ‘less Other’ Europe becomes part of the Community. The importance of the use of the pronoun ‘we’ is significant and is part of the New Labour strategy for creating the feeling of ‘community’<sup>29</sup>. The pronoun ‘we’ can be referred to indicate ‘New Labour’, ‘Britain’, ‘British people’, ‘Europe’ - the collective identity of the ‘we’ is often left ambiguous in order to give a feeling of equivalence between people, government and, frequently, Europe. As Fairclough observes, in fact, the ambivalence is politically advantageous for a government that wants to represent itself as speaking for the whole nation (2000:35-6). The occasional inclusion of ‘Europe’ in the collective identity refers to the political strategy of New Labour to create a constructive relation with the European Union. Moreover, the feeling of ‘Community’ that this rhetorical strategy creates is also indicative of an attempt to articulate a discursive fortress in antithesis with the chaotic Outside. However, the undecidability of Britain in terms of seeking cooperation from the EU on a ‘national’ subject such as migration is often expressed by an oscillation of the term ‘we’ which often refers to Europe but not always, indicating the will to strategically make Europe part of the collective identity when needed but also maintain intact the space of identity of the nation.

Thus, the discourse on immigration since 1997 has been characterised by a primacy of *identity*, expressed through the recurrent reference to a liberal history, borders (territorial and cultural) and control (spatial and temporal). Identity therefore becomes both the main component of the ways in which immigration is discursively produced and the justification for closure and securitisation. Compared with the pre-1997 discourse, the construction of immigration as an empty signifier has not changed dramatically in terms of ‘closure and otherness’. What has changed, however, is the language surrounding immigration – a language which calls for functional cooperation with the EU and third countries; a language whose novelty is the occasional identification of Europe as ‘we’; a language which objectifies migration and makes it more rhetorically prone to be securitised and finally, a language which adopts subtle rhetorical devices to identify immigration and asylum with security issues.

### **‘Immigration’ in Italian discourse 2001-2003**

As it is the case in politics, at election time the party/coalition in opposition needs to present itself as the ‘better alternative’ to the party/coalition in government on a wide range of policy arenas. In 2001 it was not difficult for the centre-right to interpret public feelings and introduce a different discourse on immigration from that of the centre-left<sup>30</sup>: the proposed programme with its strong accents on individual liberty and choice, on limitations of the powers of an oppressive and

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<sup>29</sup> This is done through the strategy of ‘interpellation’ which is facilitated by the multiple subject-positions into which concrete individuals can be interpellated (Weldes 2003). That is, the use of the ‘we’ draws on a ‘representation of belonging’ (Tomlinson 1991:81) to a wider imagined community because of the ambiguity of the ‘we’.

<sup>30</sup> The centre-left discourses on immigration, when in government, were generally characterised by the contradiction between Left ideology and the political pressure to respond to citizens’ fears. Despite the relatively tough policies enacted by the centre-left government (Turco-Napolitano legislation), the centre-left rhetoric of solidarism (Berselli 1993) often aimed at minimising the phenomenon in the eyes of the citizens, combined with the increasing public perception of migration as uncontrolled played against the centre-left coalition at election time.

inefficient state, on personal initiative in the context of public security struck deep cords in Italian society.

If in the case of Britain both nodal points of immigration and Europe clearly represent the 'Other', in the case of Italy, while 'Europe' is not necessarily represented as Other, 'immigration' is very much seen in political discourse to be in contraposition to Italian (and Western) identity. In the process of reinvention of the nation and rebuilding of national cohesion with a nationalistic coalition such as the House of Liberties, immigration has in fact become once again an important point of reference for the definition of Italianity. As Connolly (1991) argues, identity is often defined through difference: when identity is weak, the Self expresses itself even more through the definition of what is the Other and what makes it different from itself (difference that is often described by Silvio Berlusconi in terms of 'religion, democracy, civilisation'). While Otherness and securitisation have been embedded in British political discourse for centuries, in Italy, being immigration a relatively new phenomenon, these are still explicit elements in debates.

Similarly to the British case, the first way in which the Italian immigration discourse is constructed is through reference to history in the attempt to convey the idea of tolerance and 'uniqueness' of the Italian experience. Discourses on immigration are often accompanied by references to Italian emigration to the United States and Italian understanding of the suffering of the migrant<sup>31</sup>. Despite the strict approach established with the latest Bossi-Fini legislation (2002) and despite the general anti-immigrant attitude articulated by the coalition-party *Northern League*, Italian politicians stand by the uniqueness and exceptionality of the Italian experience as being one characterised by 'an open-heart, a warm welcome' that are typical of Italy and its people. In the words of Roberto Bigliardo, MEP for Alleanza Nazionale:

*After the Risorgimento, Italians were emigrants. We have been to America and many of us have died of hunger and hypothermia in New York; they used to wash our teeth with water pumps and we used to sleep in the under-stairs of American houses. Nobody else can know or understand the dilemma of immigration better than us Italians (interview, June 2003).*

The identification of the 'we' of the Italians of yesterday with the Italians of today and the contraposition with the 'they' (the oppressors, the Americans in this case) are significant<sup>32</sup> - the particular feeling of uniqueness and 'big heart' is often re-adopted in the political discourse of Silvio Berlusconi and related to the Italian Christian tradition. According to him in fact, "*our Christian tradition induces us to look at migrants with a welcoming spirit worth our level of civilisation*" (23 Oct 2003). However, this 'big heart of Italy' (interview, On. Segni MEP, June 2003) is not necessarily matched by policies of understanding and openness to immigration. The reason for this is also explained by one of my interviewees:

*Our country has always been very generous but immigration is also a question of security. In Turin, taxi drivers are scared, in the North of Italy the Northern League adopts racism to counteract immigration, in the South there is more*

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<sup>31</sup> This is a feature of discourse which characterises the overall Italian political representation of migration and not just the discourse between 2001-3.

<sup>32</sup> Past policies aimed at favouring entry and citizenship acquisition for the descendants of Italians abroad (second or third generations, who often did not speak Italian or had ever been to Italy) over and above newly settled migrants shows that after all, blood is thicker than borders. On a superficial reading, one would almost be tempted to think that the 'we' (through a shared sense of crisis and suffering) could extend to the migrants – associating Italian migrants with the Italians and the Italians with today's immigrants – but this does not happen and the 'we' is kept 'national' and is limited to conveying the idea of 'understanding', 'tolerance' and uniqueness of the Italian nation and its people compared to other EU states.

understanding. *As a result, the government adopts an approach based on increased control, through immediate expulsions, for example* (anonymous, interview, *Alleanza Nazionale*, June 2003).

Similarly to Britain, the Italian political rhetoric is also one that highlights the uniqueness of the national experience which makes it so open-hearted and so difficult for other countries in the EU to understand. However, in both cases, such liberality and open-heart are also used as justifications for the fact that there is a limit to everything, as seen in the quote above. Many politicians interviewed were able to differentiate discursively between the Italian migrants to the US ('entrepreneurs, skilled, hard working') and the migrants coming into Italy today (frequently described as 'lazy, criminals, illegals'). The historical reference to Italian migration ('argumentational fallacy', Wodak et al. 2000) is adopted to describe the potentially generous approach of the Italians towards migration, an approach which is however betrayed by the perceived lack of collaboration and good intention of the migrants.

A second way in which the discourse on immigration is constructed is through reference to the notion of 'clandestine'<sup>33</sup>, a word that *in se* and *per se* already defines the abusive status of some migrants. The statement that most 'migrants are clandestines' and 'most clandestines are criminals' is a worrying topos in interviews I conducted with politicians from the centre-right, particularly from the Northern League. According to Mario Borghezio MEP (Northern League), for example, "*the invasion of clandestines is the cause of the progressive corruption of traditions and costumes and the main vehicle for spreading diseases and criminality*" (interview June 2003). This point of view is certainly not common to all politicians interviewed but is a symptom of intolerance and scapegoating of migrants as sources of all problems (Sciortino et al 2000). If migrants are labelled as *clandestines*, the accusations and the alarm are discursively 'justified'.

In general, while British political discourse reflects society's fears of asylum-seekers, Italian political discourse does indeed reflect citizens' fears of 'clandestines'. This difference in terms of focus of discourse in the two countries can be explained by numbers: while Britain in 2000 counted about 97,860 asylum applications, Italy only counted 18,000 in the same period. On the other hand, Italy also accounted for more than 300,000 'clandestine' migrants, a seventh of the total number of migrants in the country (around 1,700,000 according to Caritas 2000). The 'illegality' aspect in turn links immigration and security and simultaneously legitimises the link itself:

*"In 2003 we will continue to guarantee the right of citizens not to be scared. With the New Year, there will be more police on the streets and together we shall fight clandestine immigration with more energy ... Already we have seen a decrease in the number of crimes: homicides have gone down by 16%, robberies by 10% and 24% more Italians than before feel more secure"* (Berlusconi 2 Jan 2003)

In an increasingly ageing country however the need for security is also combined with the discourse-type of *legal* migration as a 'resource' (economisation of migration), hence reinforcing the boundary between legal and illegal migration:

*If today immigration is perceived as a problem, we also need to be able to look at it as a resource, if it is true that regular migrants ... are relevant in determining the economic and social vitality of our continent... in fact if Europe had not had migration in the last ten years it would have lost 2 % of its active population. If Italy in the next ten years does not have migration, considering its current*

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<sup>33</sup> Clandestine migration is defined by the Minister for Internal Affairs Pisanu as "the pathological aspect of the wider, more complex, generally positive phenomenon of migration" (9 July 2003)

*demography, it will lose 4 and a half million citizens between 20 and 40 years old”*  
(Pisanu, 22 October 2003)

If irregular migration is seen as dangerous to Italy, regular migration is seen as beneficial to Italian future generations. Migration becomes positive when it has something to offer, when it is ‘relevant’. Overall, however, the economisation of immigration and the representation of migration as a ‘resource’ remain secondary discourses (not antagonistic as they concern an area, legality, which does not necessarily overlap with the alleged focus of securitisation). This becomes obvious when the economisation and the securitisation discourse types are combined in the same articulation. The economisation discourse type becomes dependent upon security concerns:

*“Foreigners can be a resource for the Country, if they want to come to our country and give us a hand. But We Want to be able to decide how many are the guests that we can receive in our house... We do not want them coming to our house and putting their feet on our table”* (Berlusconi 16 Oct 1999)

As the concept of clandestine migration has become more linked to security after 9/11<sup>34</sup>, clandestine migration has been subjected to suspicion for its potential association with terrorism. As the website of the Italian Navy reports: *“the phenomenon of clandestine migration remains one of the central problems for national and regional security... above all because it clearly constitutes a channel which feeds into illicit activities and activities that link, potentially or in actual facts, to the networks of international terrorism”* (www.marina.difesa.it). After 9/11 the already existing securitisation of the phenomenon of migration increased, legitimised by terrorist concerns – after all, *“from a good government you should expect that it would defend the life, physical and economic well-being of the citizens and, equally, freedom in all its forms: political, religious, economic freedom but also, freedom from fear”* (Pisanu, 15 august 2002).

A further way in which the nexus security-immigration is articulated in Italian political discourse relates to the construction of Islam as Other. While in the more ‘multicultural’<sup>35</sup>, multi-religious Britain<sup>36</sup>, the threat of migration is interpreted as a threat to security and national identity, in Italy migration is also seen in terms of religious threat. In a country which lacks a strong sense of nation, national identity can be defined through other markers – i.e. religion<sup>37</sup>. The perceived threat posed by Muslim migrants (Islam is numerically the second main, unrecognised, religion of Italy, Allievi 1996a/b, 1994) produces a re-interpretation of religion as an identity marker for the definition of national boundaries in Catholic Italy that is actualised through a process of othering of Islam. According to Segni MEP, for example, *‘Immigration brings issues such as arms trafficking, prostitution, drugs - the best solution is inter-governmental cooperation for control and security (...) Islamic religion is also a big problem as it brings values that cannot be easily integrated in our society’* (interview June 2003) and according to an anonymous MP from Alleanza Nazionale, *‘common criminality is typical of immigrants from the East but terrorism and terrorist networks are typical of immigrants from some Islamic countries’* (interview September 2003). The concerns with Islamic religion and the effect that this is perceived to have on post-9/11-security of citizens/nation and on the values of the traditionally Catholic Italian society have also resulted in the pressure (through Gianfranco Fini, leader of *Alleanza Nazionale* and Italian representative at EU

<sup>34</sup> Although it is indiscernible whether the progressive securitisation of migration in Italy was due more to the election of a centre right coalition than to the effects of 9/11 or to both.

<sup>35</sup> I use this term with caution.

<sup>36</sup> British politicians like Denis MacShane MP have publicly stated that ‘Europe must embrace Islam’

<sup>37</sup> One would then be inclined to refer to Huntington’s claim that “As people define their identity in ethnic and religious terms, they are likely to see an “us” versus “them” relation existing between themselves and people of different ethnicity or religion” (1993).

Convention) in 2003 to (unsuccessfully) include in the draft of the European Constitution a mention in art. 2 that the 'EU recognises the common Judaic-Christian roots as founding values of its patrimony' (pressure exerted by Italy, Spain, Ireland and Poland). The attempt to construct Islam as Europe's Other (Diez 2004) represented a significant political and discursive attempt to reinforce Europeanness by way of excluding Islam. In late October 2003, a vigorous cultural-political debate erupted following a court order to remove crucifixes from classroom walls in a state-run school in Abruzzo. The ruling by the presiding judge at the local tribunal upheld a complaint by an Italian citizen, Adel Smith, president of the Union of Italian Muslims. The judgement provoked rage, opening a debate about maintaining Catholic symbols such as the crucifix in schools where a growing number of Muslim children attend classes. Except for *Rifondazione Comunista*, the left-wing, radical, 'pluralist' party, Right, Centre and Left all agreed up to a certain point that religious symbols are a fundamental aspect of Italian identity, accepting that those symbols should have their place in the culture to which newly-settled communities are introduced as part of their integration process (Buonfino 2004b). The debate soon moved away from the contents of religion and towards a construction of religion as a tool for the reproduction of the 'imagined national community'; religion (both Muslim and Catholic) became almost devoid of meaning and filled with a new political and discursive significance in an active attempt to construct the Self through the exclusion of the unwanted. Thus, although the nexus religion-immigration would not normally evoke images of intolerance<sup>38</sup>, in a security logic this very same nexus comes to assume a new meaning. The definition of Islam and Islamic migrants as Others means that Islamic identity becomes the point of reference for the definition of the otherwise weak Italian identity. The two identities (Christian & Muslim) therefore come to be in 'radical interdependence' with each other (Campbell 1993).

The Italian predominance of Catholic values across all spheres of society (Garelli 1991) aids the construction of an identity-community, imagined through the shared belonging to traditional Christian values and roots. In the case of the House of Liberties, for example, references to Christianity are often adopted as rhetorical devices for the mobilisation of a discourse of the 'West', a discourse that links Italy to Europe and to the U.S. while at the same time differentiating it from Islam. The Clash of civilisation-style references<sup>39</sup> by the Prime Minister, which in some unfortunate cases have been criticised by foreign leaders and intellectuals<sup>40</sup>, are part of his political strategy of simplicity of language and projecting Italian reputation beyond national borders. As described in the Forza Italia 2004 Declaration of Values, '*Forza Italia gives great value to the concept of West as the expression of liberal and Christian civilisation...It is wrong to assume that there are two Wests: the European one and the American one. The west is one...the European nations lacerated by the wars of the 1900s find, together with the United States, their ancient common culture*' (2001:29-31). Discourses of this kind based on concepts of cultural superiority of the West, democracy and freedom are not just rhetorical tools, but active and changing components of policy. The linearity of

<sup>38</sup> On the contrary, as Rusconi (1997) argues, in Italy it is first and foremost in religious contexts that one can see hospitality and help towards migrants.

<sup>39</sup> By Clash of Civilisation, I refer to Samuel Huntington (1993) according to whom: "the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs, but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future".

<sup>40</sup> Edward Said for example notes Berlusconi's use of "Huntington's ideas to rant on about the West's superiority, how "we" have Mozart and Michelangelo and they don't. (Berlusconi has since made a half-hearted apology for his insult to "Islam)" (Said, 2001:1). Berlusconi indeed apologised by saying: "*I am sorry that a few words taken out of context have been badly interpreted and may have hurt my Arabic and Muslim friends. However, both before I became Prime minister and afterwards, my thoughts were and are known and my actions are there to demonstrate exactly the contrary to what the criticisms of the past few days argue*" (29 Sept. 2001).

the division West/ Islam, division that ignores internal complexity and differences, is aimed at both talking to the public in simple terms (good/evil)<sup>41</sup> and at preparing the platform for a political standpoint through the mobilisation of collective passions (i.e. legitimising the intervention in Iraq). In order to justify the support for Bush and Blair's anti-terrorist initiatives, Berlusconi appeals to endangered common values which need to be defended against threat:

*“...we need to be proud of the values in which we believe: tolerance, pluralism, political and economic freedom, the protection of the rights of individuals and minorities; the promotion of the equality between men and women; the freedom of culture; freedom of press; ... religious freedom; ....A certain doses of cultural relativism is essential to tolerance but absolute cultural relativism, that is the idea that all values and all behaviour have the same dignity, is simply false. It is an idea that weakens our pride and above all the strength of the principles in which we believe and for which we have fought and will continue to fight against totalitarianism and fanaticism of all sorts in the absolute respect for different beliefs, from Christianity to Islam” (29 sept 2001).*

The contraposition between the value-driven democratic, free Western society and the undemocratic, culturally inferior and potentially dangerous non-Western society creates a discourse inspired by geopolitical/cultural boundaries. The ‘Other-civilisation’ is associated with regression, political danger and needs to be fought on a cultural level should this affect the values of the West.

The construction of the immigration discourse by reference to Islam has shown the combination of a) an *internal* dichotomy Islam-Christianity – which resulted in the association of Islamic presence with post-9/11 security concern and in the simultaneous redefinition of the Italian nation as a Catholic nation and b) an *external* dichotomy Islam-West (the externalisation of the internal dichotomy) that has resulted into the further securitisation of migration (particularly Islamic migration) on the basis of ‘shared values’ of the Western ‘community’ and into the reconstruction of the nation as not just Catholic, but also Western. This further exemplifies the simultaneous construction of identity and difference in every process of othering, showing how discourses on immigration are first and foremost discourses on the nation<sup>42</sup>.

A further way in which the discourse on immigration is articulated is through reference to Europe. As it is in the case of Britain, even in Italian discourse, Europe & nation are seen in enhanced identification in their coordinated action against migration (the ‘we’ shares the challenge against ‘them’). If in Britain, the otherwise ‘Other’ Europe almost becomes a ‘we’ in the action against the transnational problem of migration, in Italy the (almost) unproblematic question of national commitment to Europe demonstrates renewed loyalty and intent. Italy, criticised in the past by other European Member states for its porous borders and inefficient patrolling of coastlines (Foot 1995), is one of the louder advocates of financial and administrative burden-sharing on common management of entry and border controls. According to Berlusconi, *“the last European Council has identified important and concrete initiatives such as the realisation of a common policy on repatriation, which would be very important to our country as we pay a high price for the repatriation of clandestine migrants who would otherwise go to other European countries. The Thessaloniki Summit also stimulated further the idea of integrated management of external frontiers with burden-sharing of relative costs”* (26 June 2003). While commitment to European action is confirmed and almost implied in the discourse, national interest is also brought to the fore (‘burden-sharing, high price, important to our country’). This is clear when one considers the priorities

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<sup>41</sup> Also through the strategy of ‘interpellation’ (Weldes 2003)

<sup>42</sup> As Sayad also recognised, we can in fact say that thinking about immigration means thinking about the state and that it is the ‘state that is thinking about itself when it thinks about immigration’ (2004:279).

voiced by the House of Liberties in the occasion of the 2003 Italian Presidency of the Council, where the major themes prioritised upon were those with the closest links to internal matters and Italian national interests (also Di Quirico 2003). In the words of Minister Pisanu, the programme of the Italian Presidency could be summarised “*with this brief formula: immigration, organised crime and terrorism*” (2 Dec 2003) thus highlighting, through the use of a list, the security focus of the Justice and Home Affairs priorities of the Italian government. The ‘listing’ of immigration alongside crime and terrorism in fact identifies the priority of security in the cooperation with the rest of Europe. Because of the Italian concern with ‘clandestine’ migration and its exposed coastlines, the need for a European immigration policy is felt particularly acutely in Italy. Such a policy would encourage opposition to illegal immigration and coordinated diplomatic measures vis-à-vis the countries of origin (i.e. countries on the Mediterranean coast of Africa) to persuade them to block illegal immigration or accept those illegal migrants expelled from the EU: “*I am very convinced that the European response should focus on assistance to development of countries of origin and transit; regulation of legal flows; integrated management of terrestrial, maritime and air borders; the fight against clandestine migration and the fight against criminal organisations that exploit it*” (Pisanu, 2 Dec 2003). The emphasis is clearly on securitising flows (‘regulation, fight, management of borders’). Moreover, the programme of one of the parties within the House of Liberties, the Northern League, has historically focused on the fight against illegal immigration as a key aspect for ensuring domestic security. This is the main area of agreement between the Northern League and Alleanza Nazionale, which projects itself as the party of public order - and in fact the most recent immigration law introduced by the *Berlusconi II* government bears the names of the leaders of the two parties, Bossi and Fini. There are therefore convergent interests in the ruling coalition which are encouraging Italy to focus on the Europeanisation of immigration and asylum with particular emphasis on fighting illegal migration and burden-sharing. The adoption of lists is also complemented by the rhetoric of ‘urgency and emergency’ (Bolaffi 1994b; 1996) which follows every arrival of migrants’ boats on Italian coasts. These events which Minister Pisanu argues “*should be on the conscience of Europe*” (July 2003) highlight the “*absolute necessity of a European politics on immigration*” (DiLuca MP, Forza Italia, July 2003). Cooperation with Europe is seen as the obvious framework for action because of decades-long commitment (Europe is articulated in Italian discourse as the ‘*only possible way*’, Di Luca MP 2003). Once again, however, this commitment takes the form of national interest under the House of Liberties: as Di Quirico argues, “in Italy no party has declared itself anti-European but all are in favour of a Europe which privileges and supports certain values and policies which are in turn those proposed by the party in question” (2003:42). Thus, the House of Liberties’ commitment to the Europeanisation of immigration is surely alive –focusing however on the coalition’s interest, securitisation of migration.

## Conclusion

“Democracy is the only system of governance that is able to fully guarantee respect for the rights of the individual and at the same time insure development, peace and prosperity” (Berlusconi Sept 2003)

Looking back at the question posed in the introduction, can we see a ‘discursive’ convergence between the current political discourses on Europe and immigration in Britain and Italy? Earlier on, I suggested that national hegemonic discourses could be seen as ‘branches’, composed by nation-specific constructions such as national interests, identities, threats and historical experiences. For a common policy to be allowed, these national ‘branches’ would need to overlap. In view of the deconstruction of British and Italian discourses on Europe and immigration, the overlap does take place and it mainly concerns the issues of *necessity* and *security*. Despite very different conceptualisations of national identities, involvement in the EU and national interests (all derived from divergent political cultures, histories, geographies) which in turn shape different hegemonic

discourses on the nation, Europe and immigration, the two countries overall share 1) a conceptualisation, in global times, of the necessity of European cooperation for national security and interest and 2) a construction of migration as existential threat. The latter is articulated through the powerful use of techniques for the transformation of immigrants into dangerous ‘internal Others’ - this is done differently in the two countries as the othering of specific groups of migrants serves the interests and identity of the dominant nation but, overall, the discourses achieve the same effect, to powerfully locate migration in a security logic, linking it to terrorism and emergency. This deconstruction-exercise has shown how the existence of transnational ‘threats’/crises and the drive to self-preservation are what ultimately draw states together. It has also tried to uncover the discursive strategies adopted by the most visible actors in the making of immigration policy, the political elite.

Considering the analysis of Italian and British discourses on ‘Europe/nation’ and ‘immigration’ and combining it with above-quote by Silvio Berlusconi, it appears that democratic, Western societies are not just able to secure prosperity of the Inside but that they “can go very far in the pursuit of their national security interests” (Lahav 2003). The existing nexus migration-security is further legitimised in today’s post-9/11 world of increased fear and insecurity (as shown by the poll quoted at the beginning of the paper). With enhanced public support after 9/11, liberal states have increased their move towards securitisation of migration and as a result, immigration policy has shifted to more nuanced forms of control (Lahav 2003), framed, as seen in this paper, by an optic of West/Other or Us/Danger. As Triandafyllidou et al. (2003) also observe, in fact, the events of 9/11 and their aftermath have shown how the West and with it the EU (not ‘Other’ anymore in the common fight against migration), readily define themselves in opposition to migrants (mainly Muslims) as their most important threatening Others. Thus, the events of 9/11 have legitimised the national hegemonic security logic rendering it more powerful through discursive and non-discursive techniques and making it transnationally hegemonic.

As this paper has shown, however, the ‘shared vision’ and discursive convergence between two different EU member states on immigration and Europe are limited. Nation-specific constructions prevent discursive convergence on areas other than restriction of entry and fight against illegal immigration<sup>43</sup>. The resulting pressures to ‘securitize migration within the framework of the EU’ exerted by the Member States on the European Commission are likely to have a significant impact on the development of a fair and just European approach to immigration (Pastore 2004). De-securitising<sup>44</sup> migration is difficult as the nexus security/immigration is deeply rooted in the way the nation (and the Union, by extension) thinks of itself – it can only be successfully actualised through a conscious change in discourse and a relocation of ‘symbolic territories’. The risk is that today’s Italian, British or, generally, European drive to restrict immigration and cooperate for security may eventually lead to a secondary positioning of human rights and tolerance and ultimately lead to further insecurity. After all, ‘one man’s imagined community is another man’s political prison’ (Appadurai 1990:295).

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<sup>43</sup> On a non-discursive level, Guild (2003) observes that the fields in which the European Council has been more successful in reaching an agreement are control and illegal migration (not, for example, family reunification or long term third country nationals).

<sup>44</sup> Desecuritisation is, according to Weaver (1995), the undoing of migration as a threefold existential threat – threat to the welfare state, the public order and the identity of the nation.

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*List of interviews/speeches not included. Translation of Italian speeches and interviews is mine.*