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Debating Italy: Nation and People in Political Discourse, 1978-2002

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This project examines the **transformation of debates** in Italy during the last two decades of the 20th century by focussing on shifts in the meaning of the collective ideas *nazione* (nation) and *popolo* (people). Closely linked to these central concepts was the new form of polarisation in debates about the state and society that shaped the political field particularly since the 1990s. Why did these collective ideas change and how did these modifications have an impact on the perception of political issues? This PhD project explores these questions by analysing the transformation of two major debates in Italian politics: the **controversies over immigration and political corruption**. Following the assumption that these debates led to a rethinking with regard to people's sense of belonging and to a realignment of their political role as *demos* respectively, the project analyses fundamental changes in how these issues were perceived. During the period under study, a **new framework for action** emerged, with substantial impact on domestic legislation. The project's starting hypothesis is that these profound changes can be explained by a **perceived loss of security** within Italian society. The project discusses the reasons for this development by assessing factors such as changes in the mass media's dynamics, state scepticism and its link to neoliberal ideas, and a 'securitization' of public debates. Methodologically, the project combines discourse analysis, history of concepts, and critical media analysis and it examines the most relevant print media and television formats. Overall, the project thus not only advances research on 'securitization', but also seeks to refine our understanding of the (political) challenges faced by Italy and Europe in their contemporary history.