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# “They Knock On Our Doors”: Social Representations And Policies On (Im)Migration, From Both Sides Of The Atlantic, Through Online News Media

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## Abstract

*Introduction.* This study is part of the extension in Canada of a larger program on “Migration Studies” launched in Italy in 2017, inspired by the “modelling” paradigmatic approach to Social Representations Theory. After a short review of the literature, cross-results concerning the transversal analysis of the social media sources in the mother research are briefly presented, in order to contextualize the results presented here.

*Aims.* In this paper we empirically investigate the structure and contents of Social Representations and Policies about (im)migration through the analysis of 2404 articles published online in Canadian and Italian news media (between 2014 and 2020).

*Hypothesis.* Based on the background research results of the mother-research, we expect to find more polarised social representations in Italian articles and less polarized tones in the discussion of immigration in Canadian articles.

*Methodology.* The texts of the articles have been analysed through Descending Hierarchical Classification, using the software IRaMuTeQ.

*Results.* Among the six clusters extracted, four classes refer to the Italian sources and two classes refer to the Canadian ones. This highlights the consistency of the polarised discourse on (im)migration that already emerged from the wider research programme launched in Italy, thus confirming our above-mentioned hypothesis.

*Study's limits and possible future developments.* Our research is not without limitations. The limitations of the research open up new opportunities for expanding data collection in a spatio-temporal perspective.

*Impacts of the work.* Moving from research to its application value, specific promotional online campaigns could be supported by experts in Psychology of Communication, to favour inclusive Policies free of stereotypes and prejudices, expressing positive social representations on (im)migration.

**Keywords:** social representations, (im)migration, polarised social representations, ideological and political positioning, communication and multiagent's discourse, online news media, textual analysis.

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## Introduction

The demographic phenomenon of (im)migration is now global. For example, many refugees and asylum seekers have been arriving in Europe, and the different EU countries have responded with solutions such as socio-economic inclusive Policies, measures to limit further arrivals, and relocations to areas with fewer immigrants. Immigration in Europe and North America has been a central issue in both political-institutional discourse and social sciences. In these regions, Italy and Canada have been among the countries most affected by migratory flows in recent years (IOM, 2021). While constituting a demographic phenomenon (Valentino et al., 2017), immigration has thus also become a social problem affecting the globalized world (Verkuyten, Wiley, Deaux & Fleischmann, 2019). In the social sciences, much attention has been devoted to studying the link between (im)migration and populist culture, which can be also analysed in terms of social representations. In light of Social Representations Theory (SRT) (Moscovici, 1961/1976, 1984, 1988, 2000, 2011; Jodelet, 1989; de Rosa, 2013; de Rosa, Bocci, & Dryjanska, 2018; Marková, 2003; Sammut et al., 2015; Contarello, 2022), the two processes of anchoring and objectification can provide useful contribution to the understanding of (im) migration as a social problem (Negura, & Plante, 2021). The anchoring process allows to include foreign elements in a category of what is already known, thus reducing the fear of objects, or phenomena, or groups that are not familiar to us. This occurs alongside the familiarization with the unknown, to which social inclusion practices respond. Once the representation had acquired a meaning and has become familiar, the process of objectification attributes signification to produce the related images, symbols or metaphors and allegories, which individuals may perceive, experience and then communicate to others. In the title of our article, “They knock on our doors,” we recall the monument inaugurated in 2008 in Lampedusa that tries to convey the message of the social inclusion of newcomers. In fact, “Porta di Lampedusa - Porta d’Europa” (by Mimmo Paladino) can help the community to anchor and objectify the values of a Europe that opens up towards Africa, towards acceptance and a newfound solidarity (Sesana, 2008). At the same time, the representation of immigrants as the unfamiliar others tends to legitimize their rejection and social exclusion. Following Valentino (2017), a set of symbolic attitudes, including specific group animosities or general ethnocentrism, can arise, driving anti (im)migrant sentiments. There is a risk that migrants would be treated without the same rights and respect with which members of the host community treat each other, thus opening the door to dehumanizing migrants, allowing them to be understood as “criminals, degenerates, and even parasites, which are infesting the orderly body of the nation” (Teo, 2020). The othering of these groups, which are identified through different images, is based on assumptions about the superiority of the hosts. These differing visions of citizenship in terms of social discourse and social practices (inclusion/exclusion) are closely interconnected with those of political leaders who use the media to formulate communication and Policies. As history informs us, in the face of important economic, social, cultural and political changes/

crises, such as the latest waves of immigration to Europe and North America, some interrelated phenomena such as nationalism (Schanz, 2018) and populism (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969) arise (Taggart, 2000). The literature describes the close bond between immigration and nationalist sentiments (Lahav 2004; Koopmans 2005). As Koopmans (2005) argues, the issue of immigration in the context of nationalism is so important because it involves the question of sovereign control over external borders, the regulation of access to citizenship and the nation’s cultural self-understanding i.e. national identity. Recalling Tajfel (1978), Schanz (2018) affirms: “Populism and nationalism, but also religion, offer people a guideline in these times. They re-establish boundaries between merging categories and between what is right and wrong, often by simplifying reality. This includes antagonistic ‘us-against-them’ rhetoric—both are in need of a significant other in order to work.” Following this minimalistic definition, populism has been labelled as “a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (Mudde, 2004). While the intention of these movements is to give a voice to the silent majority, after gaining the support of the electorate, rather than implementing the Policies in favour of the “native people” (the in-group), some leaders work for the exclusion of the out-group (non natives). Cultural differences then become grounds for exclusion of different minority groups (Mudde, and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012). In recent decades, scholarly literature has shown how populism, especially right-wing populism, feeds on a conflictual relationship with migrants: the “Others” par excellence (Mannarini, Veltri & Salvatore, 2020), “the bad guys” against the “good” people. This type of relationship is particularly salient in mass-media communication (Mazzara et al., 2020), primarily in social media (de Rosa et al., 2020a, 2020b, 2020c). The phenomenon has been further complicated by the advent of Covid-19 (de Rosa & Mannarini, 2020). According to Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2012) Europe has been affected by exclusionary populism. Between the opposites of inclusion and exclusion, the European populist radical right parties can be labelled as “exclusionary” from three different perspectives: material, political and symbolic. However, all types of populism have had an ambivalent impact on democracy. For example, political leaders and right-wing parties in Europe have played a key role in inciting nationalist and anti-immigrant sentiments (Smith Keller and State College, 2016). In this way, the attention toward internal problems within the countries is shifted to external scapegoats, focusing on the ethnic characteristics or the economic consequences of immigration. These sentiments and politics risk leading to anti-democratic tendencies. The metaphors coined by different authors are those of the “fiction” (Moghaddam, 2019) or “theatre” (Schanz, 2018) used by political leaders to render reality more confusing and to divert attention from the real problems within the society. Recently, *The Guardian* commissioned a study built by the Team Populism, a global network of scholars dedicated to the scientific study of the causes and consequences of populism<sup>1</sup>. Their database provides insights into the extent of

populist rhetoric in the speeches of government leaders across the world over the past two decades. It is based upon populism scores given to 728 speeches by the Presidents, Prime Ministers and Chancellors of 40 countries, including some of the Italians in charge during the period of our research. In today’s political climate, the rising influence of populism and nationalism cannot be understated. It is crucial to examine the media’s influence in propagating these ideologies, especially in order to grasp how they shape perceptions of immigration. This is true in varied contexts, such as Italy and Canada, where the representations of immigration in public discourse can vary widely. In the broader context of rising populism and nationalism, the Canadian approach to immigration serves as a compelling counter-narrative (Gordon, Jeram & van der Linden, 2020). Unlike Europe, where exclusionary populism is more pronounced, Canada largely eschews such tendencies in its immigration discourse. Canada’s political leaders and media generally frame immigrants as an essential part of the national fabric rather than as “the Other.” For this reason, Canada’s handling of immigration in the era of rising global populism and nationalism presents a valuable case study.

#### *Theoretical And Empirical Background Of The Research*

Reading the (im)migration phenomenon through the lens of Social Representation Theory means to study it as systems of shared meanings, values and beliefs, symbols and emotions connected to collective memories and attitudinal dimensions related to social practices and actions that enable individuals to construct meaningful knowledge about social reality (Moscovici, 1961/1976). Such systems are strongly interrelated to communication, influencing and being influenced by social interactions (de Rosa, 2013). It is well known that communication—when highly influenced by its political orientation—instrumentally uses the multiple forms of languages to construct a vision of reality that corresponds to the societal and ideological worldview of the source.

This contribution is part of the extension in Canada of a larger program on “Migration Studies” activated in Italy in 2017, inspired by the “modelling” paradigmatic approach to SRT (de Rosa, 2013). In terms of empirical background, a wide research program was articulated in “field” and “media” studies. The research line on ‘field studies’ has been conducted in two EU countries—Italy and Germany—and is aimed at reconstructing significant elements of the migratory experience in different target population, with the principal actors’ direct involvement in the study (2nd generation of young immigrants, adults migrants / refugees, relief agents and host communities) (de Rosa, Bocci, Latini, Balbutin & Silvestri, 2019). The research on “media studies” has been aimed at characterizing the SRs of (im)migration in relation to social inclusion/exclusion, identity affiliations and ideological positions in more than 10,000 media sources. A short overview of the results of this background research is necessary to highlight the emerged consistency of the polarized discourse on (im)migration. The sources were collected from 2017/18 to 2019/20 by university students, organised into supervised research teams, attending the Lab of the course *Social Representation and Communication:*

*New Media and Web Marketing.* Accurate manual collection was applied for source retrieval, using the following keywords: 1) migrant/migrants; 2) immigrant/immigrants; 3) immigration; 4) migration/migration flows; 5) refugee; 6) closed ports; 7) open ports; 8) displaced; 9) stop immigration; 10) borders; 11) asylum seekers. The temporal framework spanned the period 2013-2019 with some differences among the media under analysis. The strategies of analysis included *Correspondence Analysis* (Lebart, Morineau & Bécue, 1989) and *Network Analysis*. Content analysis—based on an *ad hoc* built grid—was carried out. Distinct and complementary research paths have been pursued, consistently with the “modelling approach” to social representations, which claims for hypotheses-driven adoption not only of multiple constructs and techniques, but also of multiple data-analysis strategies (de Rosa, 2013). These include systematic content analysis, as well as thematic and statistical analyses based on multi-dimensional analysis supported by specific softwares. In summary, looking transversally at the results based on the analysis of sources from different social-media channels shows the highly polarised social discourse “pro” and “against” immigration. It is possible to observe the distinct positions anchored into the metaphors of “open ports” versus “closed ports,” leading to opposite Policies. One side of the debate tends to invoke human solidarity in the context of trying to resolve a humanitarian emergency; on the opposite side, emphasis is being put on the legal, economic and ethnic aspects of the situation by invoking national interests informed by sovereignist ideology. The positive attitude appears strongly linked to the SRs of migrants as “victims,” while the negative attitude corresponds to the social representations of the “criminal” migrants. The results confirm—also through the photographic lens of Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and YouTube—the highly polarized social representations of immigration, reflecting the opposite views of political leaders, depending on their political status, being either— in power or in the opposition (de Rosa et al., 2019; 2020a, 2020b, 2020c; 2021a, 2021b, 2021c). We are therefore witnessing a bi-polarization that can be summarized in the dichotomous metaphor of “walls” versus “bridges” a contrast that can be further demonstrated by the comparative systematic analysis, also informed by SRT, of speeches by Trump and by Pope Francis (de Rosa, Bocci & Latini, 2021c).

#### *Aim And Hypothesis*

Our study is consistent with the wider mother-research program mentioned above and is developed within the framework of the transnational project, jointly led by Negura & de Rosa and funded by the Canadian Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC): “*Social representations of (im) migrants from multivoice and multiagent institutional policies driven discourses and their echoes in the media: a comparative analysis between Canada and Italy*”. In this article we aim to analyse the structure and content of social representations about (im)migration through the analysis of 2404 articles published in Canadian and Italian online news media. The main *Research Question* of the comparative study presented in this article can be summarised as follows:

How do social representations (SRs), as mobilized in the media (and in particular in online news media of different political orientations and in different political time-frames from 2014 to 2020) in Canada and in Italy, shape the construction of (im)migration in the two societies and geo-cultural contexts?

Based on the background research results of the mother-research, we expect to find polarised social representations in Italian articles. In contrast, in Canadian articles, we expect to find a less polemical tone and less polarization of the discourse on (im)migration.

## Methods

Starting from the metaphor “they knock on our doors”—taken from many online articles—the study analyses the social representations and Policies of (im)migration on both sides of the Atlantic through the lens of 2404 articles published in the period 2014-2020 in different sources: 1699 published in 4 Italian online news media and 705 published in 8 Canadian online news media. All the sources under analysis are articles from news media, including Ici Radio Canada (the news page of Canada’s public broadcasting company). The years of publication refer to the periods before the pandemics and first year of COVID-19.

The data were collected by the authors, with the collaboration of university students in training during the research conducted in Italy (Laboratory of Psychology of Communication and New Media in the degree program in Psychology of Communication and Marketing – Sapienza

University of Rome). The data collection was guided by the authors, as was the compilation of the *ad hoc* Excel grid. The data included in the Excel format have been prepared by the authors, who conducted the statistical analyses.

The articles are published in Italian, English and French. The articles published in Italian- and French-language news media have been later translated into English using DeepL program, which has a good reputation for accurate automatic translation, in order to be able to combine them with those already published in English. All articles (those published in Italian and French and subsequently translated into English and those originally published in English) were included in a single analysis, through the IRaMuTeQ. software. In fact, before carrying out the analysis, it is necessary to specify the language, which must be homogeneous for all the texts under analysis. However, we have kept the original language of publication of the articles as one of the “illustrative” variables under analysis. Table 1 summarizes the articles under analysis published during the period “2014-2020” by 12 online news media, politically oriented.

Key details about the study’s time frame (2014-2020) for Canada, the USA<sup>2</sup>, and Italy include the pertinent political leaders and their respective tenures:

- Political Leaders in Canada: Stephen Harper (*Conservative Party*, period of government February 6, 2006 –November 4, 2015) and Justin Trudeau (*Liberal Party*, period of government November 4, 2015 in force still in 2023).
- Political Leaders in USA: Barack Obama (*Democrat Party*, period of government January 20, 2009 – January 20, 2017) and Donald Trump (*Republican Party*, period of government January 20, 2017 – January 20, 2021).

Tab. 1. Number of articles analysed for each Italian and Canadian news media by year.

COUNTRY/ ORIGINARY LANGUAGE OF THE PUBLISHED ARTICLES	ONLINE NEWS MEDIA	POLITICAL ORIENTATION	YEARS							Total
			2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	
CANADA FRENCH (219)	LE DEVOIR	Left wing	0	7	10	7	14	12	4	54
	ICI RADIO CANADA	Center left wing	1	5	5	14	18	7	7	57
	LA PRESSE	Moderate	0	7	5	12	10	8	6	48
	LE JOURNAL DE MONTREAL	Center right wing	2	3	4	15	20	10	6	60
CANADA ENGLISH (486)	TORONTO STAR	Left wing	27	40	29	26	34	38	72	266
	CBC	Center left wing	5	7	12	7	31	20	13	95
	THE GLOBE AND MAIL	Moderate area	3	15	7	5	11	16	23	80
	NATIONAL POST	Right wing	2	1	3	3	14	8	14	45
ITALY ITALIAN (1699)	IL FATTO QUOTIDIANO	Left wing (Termometro Politico, 2021)	0	50	52	142	79		41	364
	LA REPUBBLICA	Center left wing	35	92	93	112	190	36	34	592
	IL MATTINO	Moderate area	0	44	50	94	202	37	26	453
	LIBERO	Center right wing	0	0	0	58	180	37	15	290
	Total		75	271	270	495	803	229	261	2404

- Political Leaders in Italy: Enrico Letta (*Democrat Party – Center left*, period of government April 28, 2013 -February 22, 2014); Matteo Renzi (*Democrat Party –Center left*, period of government February 22, 2014 –December 12, 2016); Paolo Gentiloni (*Democrat Party –Center left*, period of government December 12, 2016 –June 1, 2018); Giuseppe Conte I (*5 Stars Movement and Lega for Salvini Premier*, period of government June 1, 2018 –September 5, 2019); Giuseppe Conte II (*5 Stars Movement and Democrat Party*, period of government September 5, 2019 –February 13, 2021).

Specifically, the contents of the articles are organized according to the following variables and related modalities:

- *ORIGINARY LANGUAGE* of the published articles: Italian, French and English
- *ONLINE NEWS MEDIA*: Le Devoir, Ici Radio Canada, La Presse, Le Journal De Montreal, Toronto Star, CBC, The Globe And Mail, National Post, Il Fatto Quotidiano, La Repubblica, Il Mattino, Libero
- *POLITICAL ORIENTATION*: left-wing, center-left-wing, moderate area, center-right-wing, right wing
- *YEARS*: 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017, 2018, 2019, 2020
- *CANADIAN POLITICAL FRAMEWORK*: Stephen Harper and Justin Trudeau
- *USA POLITICAL FRAMEWORK*: Barack Obama and Donald Trump
- *ITALIAN POLITICAL FRAMEWORK*: Enrico Letta, Matteo Renzi, Paolo Gentiloni, Giuseppe Conte I and Giuseppe Conte II.

The study was carried out according to the Ethical Guidelines 3.0 provided by the Association of Internet Researchers, and only publicly available articles were included in the study.

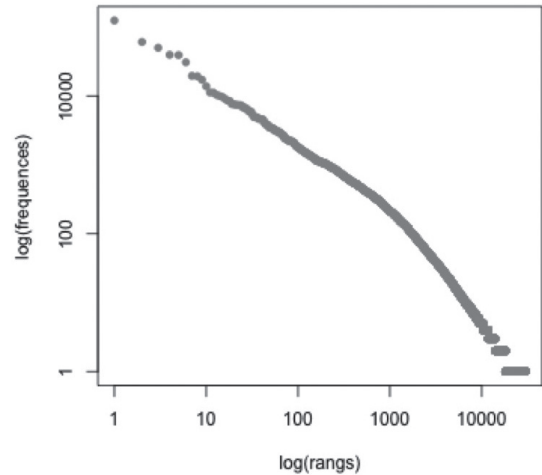
This study focuses on the results obtained by applying IRaMuTeQ. (Camargo and Justo, 2013) to the 2404 articles. Ductility and complexity, the two basic characteristics of the program, are utilized above all by applying the program to free texts. IRaMuTeQ. considers statements as the smallest part of a speech; the basic hypothesis is to consider the vocabulary of a particular sentence as a pertinent trace of the point of view of the enunciating subject. The most significant sentences represent the point of view, what Reinert (1992) calls the “lexical world” and which, in this context, we have read in terms of social representations. The *Reinert’s method* that was used is part of the *clustering* category in the *text analysis* menu (Reinert, 1992). The structure of the social representations will be inferred from the *Descending Hierarchical Classification*.

The *Descending Hierarchical Classification* returned 6 classes.

- Number of texts: 2404
- Number of occurrences: 1597677
- Number of forms (words): 29953
- Number of hapax: 11865 (0.74% of occurrences 39,61% of forms)
- Mean of occurrences by text: 664,59

The analysis is stable, as shown by the compact and aligned points of the line (Figure 1).

Fig. 1. Analysis of the stability by the Zipf Diagram



### Results<sup>3</sup>

The terms with the highest frequency contextualize the phenomenon of “(im)migration” in different “Countries:” “Italy” (in “Europe”) and “Canada”, for “refugee,” “immigrants” and “migrants” (Figure 2 and Table 2). In Italian, “migrant” is considered to be a *politically correct* word; it indicates a more active role of these people on their destiny than the word “immigrant” (Sensales, Di Cicco & Baldner, 2021).

Fig. 2. Descriptive results through the frequencies of the words (Italian and Canadian corpora)



Tab. 2. List of the most frequent words appearing in the articles (Italian and Canadian corpora)

WORDS	FREQUENCIES
MIGRANT	7325
IMMIGRATION	5285
YEAR	4925
PERSON	4852
COUNTRIES	4631
REFUGEE	4566
GOVERNMENT	3884
WORK	3445
WORKER	3413

WORDS	FREQUENCIES
ITALY	3393
CANADA	3324
MINISTER	3031
IMMIGRANT	2896
ASYLUM	2738
NEW	2626
RIGHT	2411
BORDER	2386
TIME	2279
EUROPEAN	2209
EVEN	2194

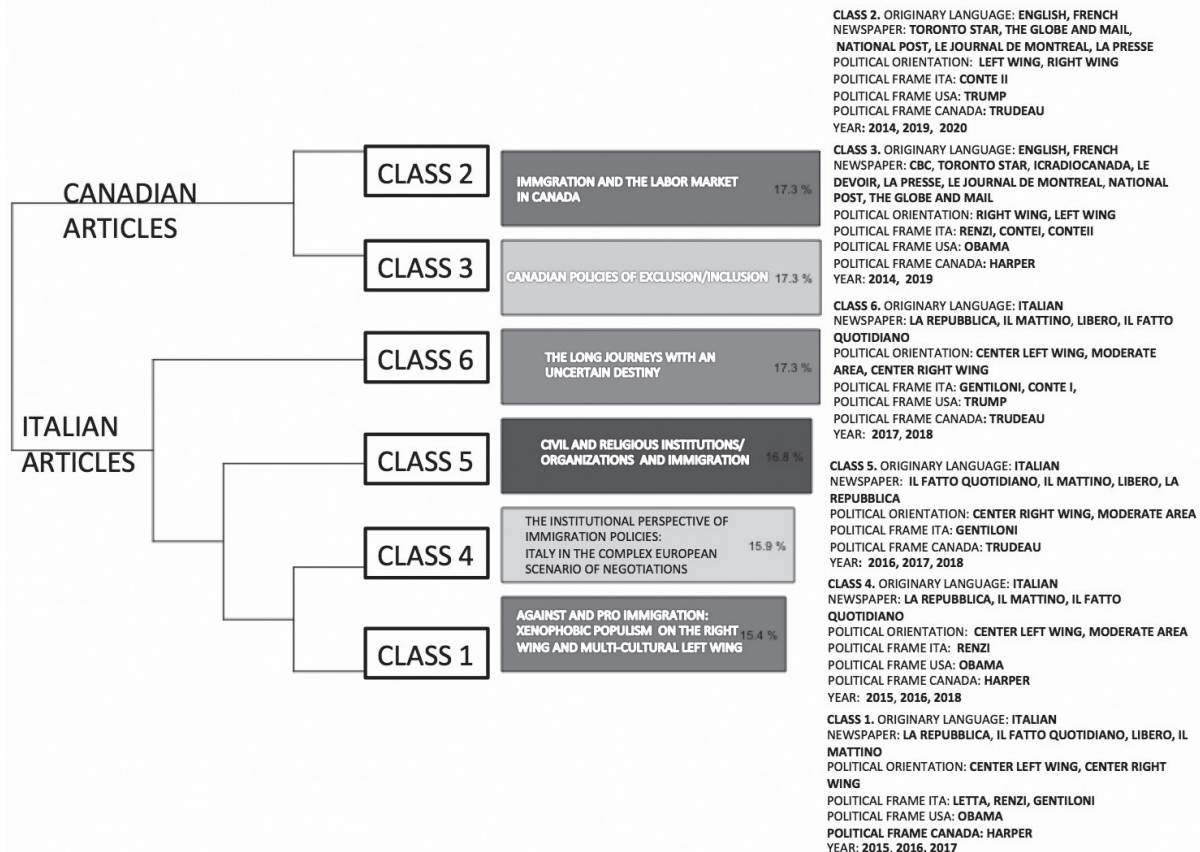
Among the words with lower frequencies, the metaphor of the “door” has been used from different online news media in order to anchor and objectify the issue of (im)migration (Extracts 1), translating the concepts of inclusion/exclusion into images and focusing on the politics of different political leaders and Countries from both sides of the Atlantic. The keyword “door” appears in the list of the “active forms” with frequency of 257. Among the texts where it appears, extracts 1 shows eleven examples from different news media. The sentences are extracted from the whole corpus (not related to the single classes) and have been chosen as significant examples of the role played in Social Representations by the keyword “door”. The difficulties and precariousness in keeping the doors open emerge powerfully. The Figure 3 shows the Descending Hierarchical Classification.

The interpretation of the clusters does not follow the sequence from one to six, but instead a reading of the contents in geo-cultural terms was privileged, first favouring the interpretation of the classes relating to Canadian news media and then the interpretation of the classes relating to the Italians news media.

*Class 2 – Immigration And The Labor Market In Canada*

Class 2, dedicated to articles taken from Canadian online news media, considers immigrants as workers (or students), highlighting their background and the contribution they have made to the Canadian economy and society. The aspects related to the inclusion process from an administrative point of view are also underlined. The most important word “worker” clarifies the perspective adopted by Canadian online news media on the subject of immigration: immigrant=worker in his various roles and sectors, “professional” or “essential.” This connects with the background of the “newcomers” and their geo-cultural origin (see the 1967 Immigration Act - Negura et al., 2021). The direct consequence of the arrival of qualified personnel is the enrichment of the “economy” and of Canadian society which, for its part, offers important “benefits”. But sometimes benefits don’t always seem enough (see Extract 2). The regulation of flows follows precise processes that do not escape the attention of the media; ample space is left to the “pathway” that regulate arrivals. This is the only class that contains references to the pandemic situation of the first year of Covid-19, 2020; immigration has suffered a setback due to

Fig. 3. Graphic display of the Descending Hierarchical Classification



the multiple problems generated by the "pandemic" (Extracts 3 and 4). One wonders about the post-pandemic future of immigration (Extract 5).

### *Class 3 – Canadian Policies Of Exclusion/Inclusion*

Class 3 refers also to the Canadian context. "Canada" is followed by "immigration" and "Quebec". Quebec refers to the francophone migratory waves. Although "Legault" (Premier of Quebec, marking the end of many years of Liberal and Parti Québécois rule in the province) has reduced the number of immigrants coming to Quebec, he favored French-speaking newcomers according to its policy based on "identity" (Extract 6).

"Harper" is also present in this class; he proposed several laws to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act. The class focuses on the control ("security") through: "CBSA", "IRB", "IRCC" connected to "border", "illegally" and "irregular" (Extract 7).

The point of view expressed in this class often refers to the US President Donald "Trump". In the same class we also find "Trudeau". In contrast with the predecessor Harper, he adopted a policy of reception, through his minister of immigration "Hussen," who - in 2017 - announced the "Government" of Canada would welcome nearly one million immigrants in three years (Extract 8).

The dark side of irregularity and the fight against illegal immigration is somewhat mitigated in this class thanks to Trudeau's inclusive Policies and in the presence of "sanctuary" cities (Extract 9).

### *Class 6 – The Long Journeys With An Uncertain Destiny*

Class 6 refers to the whole social discourse revolving around rescues at sea, the Libya-Italy bridge across the central Mediterranean route to get to Europe. Like a movie, class 6 refers to places along the continuum between *originary* and *destination* (Extract 10) and means of transportation.

There is some white and black in the film. The protagonists play opposite roles: illegal transporters, rescue personnel, and migrants ("*victims*") (Extract 11). Acting as anchoring and objectification, consistent with SRT, the metaphor of "hell" is used, referring to Libya. The rhetorical figure sums up well the obscure storytelling that takes place during the whole long journey (Extract 12). "SOS" and "rescue" "operations" end with "death" or "land". The metaphor of "lottery of the migrant" used effectively captures the high level of risk (Extracts 13 and 14). Relief does not ensure the end of hardships, which may come in the form of local riots by residents against unwanted guests, as emphasized by the newspaper *Libero* (Extract 15).

### *Class 5: Civil And Religious Authorities Institutions/ Organizations And Immigration*

Class 5 emphasizes geo-localization, contextualizing the scenarios of different "regions" of Italy. Several "Institutions" and "Mayors" ("*Lucano*" Mayor of "Riace"—the so-called *country of hospitality*— and "*De Magistris*", Mayor of "Naples")

are mentioned. The names of political parties and their leaders are shown (right wing and left wing, "M5S"...). The debate is animated in the confrontation among the different political parties (Extract 16).

The figure of Salvini (*Lega for Salvini Premier*) is also salient during the Gentiloni Government, to then become, during the Italian Government, Conte I together with Luigi Di Maio (*5Stars Movement*) Vice President of the Council of Ministers. Numerous religious authorities, including "Pope" "Francis", are also mentioned (Extract 17).

Despite the different approaches to the migratory phenomenon, which are personified by the two figures of *Pope Francis* and *Matteo Salvini*, the semantic field of hospitality is here enriched with terms taking on meaning as part of the inclusion solutions adopted by the Italian Government of Gentiloni. The keywords refer to the immigrant-reception measures introduced by Legislative Decree 142/2015: (*rescue-assistance-identification-reception*) followed by the more restrictive Salvini Decree on security and immigration (04/10/2018 n°113).

Moreover, in this class also structures of the volunteering/ third sector traditionally involved in aid and hospitality are mentioned ("Caritas").

The difficulties in the approach to the phenomenon of immigration are highlighted by different articles (Extract 18). In the domain of encounter and arguments around the numerous realities involved, the issue of immigration appears full of problems and conflicts as we can see in the case of the "protest" against the perceived invaders (Extract 19). Finally, the issue does not appear free from judicial issues: "mafia", "corruption"...as for example in the case "Odevaine" (Extract 20).

### *Class 4 – The Institutional Perspective Of Immigration Policies: Italy In The Complex Eu Scenario Of Negotiations*

The close relationship between Italy and Europe is underlined in class 4 with terms such as "EU". Italy as the European frontier for the EU seems to be persistently seeking shared solutions in Europe, which are difficult to implement. The focus is placed on "quotas". The debate is ongoing "summit", "meet" (Extract 21).

The complexity of the migratory phenomenon makes it difficult at times for Italian politicians, and (among other) Matteo Renzi Premier, to look for dialogue in Europe. Some countries are against ("veto") the plan for the redistribution of "asylum" "seekers" (Extracts 22 and 23). The keyword is "rejection"(Extracts 24 and 25).

Within this complexity, the urgency of "bilateral" "agreement" with the countries of the Libyan area that take on a strategic role in the chessboard is underlined. Italy must not be left "alone!" (Extract 26).

### *Class 1 – Pro And Against Immigration: Xenophobic Populism On The Right Wing And Multi-Cultural Left Wing*

Class 1 shows the words "Populist" and "Populism" interrelated with "migratory" "phenomenon" in the European "Political" scenario. The migratory phenomenon is tinged with dark shadows with terms such as: "fear", "problem" and

“terrorism”... with deep reflections on the “values” in the “crisis” of “democracy” (Extract 27).

Italy, in the European context, is described as being squeezed between the voices of opposing political parties who use their “rhetoric”, animating antagonistic discourses. The contrasts emerge with preponderance in this class hosting a considerable presence of “opposites” (“right” vs. “wrong”, “peace” vs. “war”, “pro” vs. “against”, ...) (Extracts 28, 29 and 30). The theme of security is a classic of “nationalism” often coupled with right-wing populism characterized by the raising of material and immaterial walls (Extract 31).

To summarize, Figure 4, resulting from the intersection of the first factor placed horizontally and the second vertically, identifies the words relating to the six classes that emerged from the *Descending Hierarchical Classification*. On the left half-plane, the words relating to classes 2 and 3 are projected—from texts of Canadian online newspaper articles—while, on the right half plane are the words concerning the classes 6,5,4 and 1—from texts of articles from Italian online news media. Class 6: “the long journeys with an uncertain destiny”

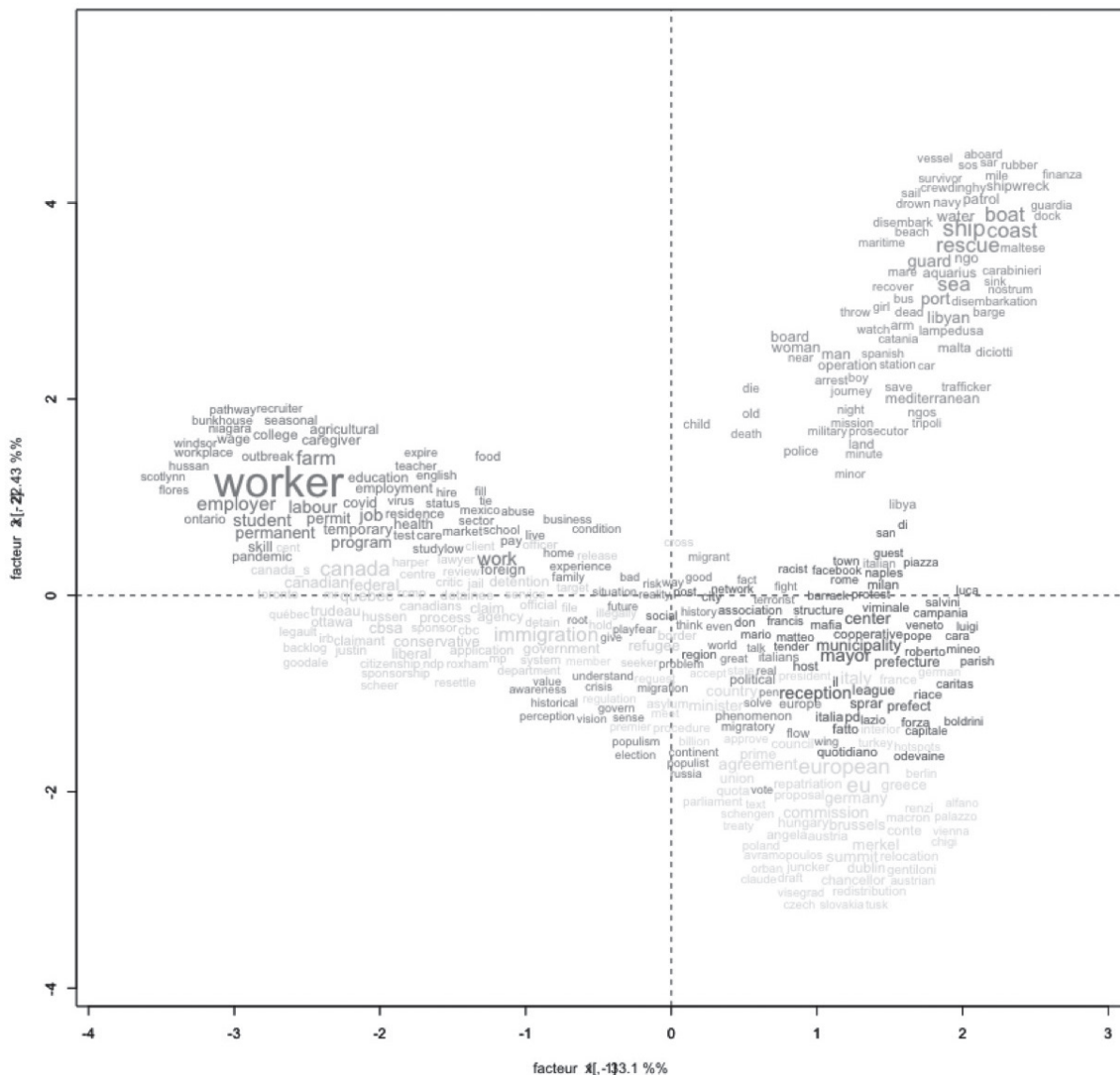
(focused on the immigrant target) is graphically detached from the other classes containing texts in Italian, while classes 5, 4 and 1—referring to the institutional political aspects of the migratory phenomenon—are close to each other and close to class number 3, which focuses on Canadian politics.

To summarize, the first factor (horizontal), distinguishing, with the two semi-axes,- Canadian versus Italian articles can be defined as the “geo-cultural factor”. The second factor (vertical), distinguished –through the two semi-axes,- focuses on the (im)migrants versus institutional political aspects and can be defined as the “private and public - human beings versus institutions/politics” factor.

In this paper we have empirically investigated the structure and contents of Social Representations and Policies about (im)migration through the analysis of 2404 articles published online in Canadian and Italian news media.

In line with our hypothesis, we have found social representations about inclusive Policies, driven by a supra-ordered view that embraces ‘me–we–others’ in the name of ‘humanity’, whereas, on other hand, we found social

Fig. 4. Graph resulting from the intersection of the first factor placed horizontally and the second vertically.





representations that lead to anti-immigrant Policies, driven by national sovereign ideology and reinforced by mass manipulation of fear towards others and the identification process of ordinary citizens with political leaders who promise security, protecting the national borders against foreign others (Mannarini, Veltri & Salvatore, 2020).

In two classes, the influence of exclusionary populism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012) rooted in the concept of the old continent is particularly clear.

In class 4, the disengagement of various European countries from the problem of immigration is explicit, despite the various attempts by Italian Governments to involve other countries so as not to be left to deal with the challenges alone.

In class 1, the opposition inclusion/exclusion is highlighted. Following the literature, here we have found xenophobic populism in the right-wing exclusionary perspective (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012) -after having gained the support of the electorate.

The exclusion of the out-group (non natives related to the nationalist sentiments (Lahav 2004; Koopmans 2005) emerges in class 1 through the theme of “security”. The sovereign control over external borders and the regulation of access to citizenship are problems that limit the collaboration of European Country members with Italy (class 4). Despite the requests for collaboration expressed by the various Italian governments, wishes such *Porta di Lampedusa* or *Porta d'Europa* are often unfulfilled.

On the contrary, in classes 2 and 3 related to Canadian results we have found specific references to the role of the immigration as constitutive element of the national identity in Canada and also to Canadian Policies to select immigrants through strategies guided by a fundamentally economics-based view of the (im)migrants.

In particular, in class 2, the polarization of the discourse on (im)migration as a “problem” or as a “resource” takes on low polemical tones shaped by the image of the (im)migrants as a source of the potential economic development of Canada (Negura et al., 2021; 2022). However, in the same class, polemical social representations have been amplified due to the spread of COVID-19, with sentences such as the following: “*If the virus doesn't kill us, hunger will*” (Toronto Star, 4/17/2020). Also, in class 3 we have found references to the point of view of the US President Donald Trump.

We can answer the question “how do social representations shape the construction of (im)migration in the two societies and geo-cultural contexts?” through the Cartesian plane, summarizing the main results. In particular, Factor 1 differentiates Canadian internal political scenarios, where immigration is seen as an integral part of national identity and economic growth from Italian and European political scenarios where an inclination has been noted towards exclusionary Policies, fuelled by nationalist ideologies and populism.

## Discussion

*Definition of Social Representations.* As we have found in other publications of the wider research programme (cf inter alia: de Rosa, Bocci and Proietti, 2023), in this study

we have detected interesting rethorical figures as key elements of the SRT (Moscovici, 1961/1976). We first highlighted the presence of the keyword “door” diffused in the different news media, both Italians and Canadians. Moreover, we have focused the presence of different metaphors through the Descending Hierarchical Classification. “Hell” and “lottery” (class 6) underly the complicate path of the (im)migrants in Italy. Moving from the (im)migrants to the religious and political authorities, we have found the rethorical figure of *personification* (class 5) with the presence of public figures such as Pope Francis and Matteo Salvini. From the perspective of the Canadian communities we have found the “sanctuary cities”(class 3).

The rethorical figures mentioned have been used in the articles to anchor and objectify the issue of (im)migration, translating the concepts of inclusion/exclusion into images and focusing on the Policies of different political leaders and countries from both sides of the Atlantic. Moreover, the anchoring process, reducing the fear for immigrants, is strictly related to the politics of inclusion, while when familiarization with the unknown does not occur, the immigrants remain foreign elements and social exclusion practices correspondingly exist.

“*Hot*” *societal issues and polemical social representations* As already found in reference to other “hot” societal issues (cf inter alia Bocci and Pascarella, 2023), and in the wider research programme on (im)migration (de Rosa, Bocci, Bonito and Salvati, 2021c; de Rosa, Bocci and Latini, 2021c; de Rosa, Bocci, Salvati and Nubola, 2020b), the results obtained have shown polarized social representations as opposite systems of values, practices and metaphors.

Here the oppositions emerge due to the presence in the same class—or different classes—of some differences in terms of:

- Political leaders and related politics: “Trudeau”(Liberal Party of Canada) versus “Legault” (CAQ) and “Harper” (Conservative Party) (class 3); “Pope Francis” versus “Salvini”(Lega for Salvini Premier) (Class 5);
- Political scenarios: “multi-cultural left wing” versus “xenophobic populism on the right wing” (class 1);
- Ways to describe and to connote “who knocks on the door”: “*victims*” (class 6) versus perceived *invaders* (class 5).
- Metaphors: “*sanctuary cities*” (class 3) versus “*hell*” (class 1).

The oppositions are various and interrelated. A sentence taken from Il Fatto Quotidiano (August 10, 2017) effectively summarizes the consequences in Italy: “*It is therefore certainly complicated to enter constructively into such a polarized debate, in which every argument ends up being positioned in the field of pro or anti-immigrants*”.

*Social Representations and Policies.* The strong relationship between SRs and Practices—“leading to” and “driven by” Policies—is highlighted. We consider the relationship between SRs, practices and Policies as dialogic-circular, taking into account the close relationship that binds social discourse to political discourse (and related Policies) and vice-versa (Abric, 1994; de Rosa, Taieb & Latini, 2021a; Jodelet, 1989; Wagner, 2015).

*Impact of the work.* Moving from research to its application value, specific promotional online campaigns could be supported by experts in *Psychology of Communication*, to favour inclusive Policies free of stereotypes and prejudices, expressing

“white” (positive) social representations on (im)migration, as we have already defined (de Rosa, Bocci and Proietti 2023). In this way, the attention to the internal problems of our countries would not continue to be shifted to external scapegoats, as still happens today with exclusivist populist leaders.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, we wish to emphasize several key points. First, the field of psycho-social studies has the potential to create a “borderless world” (Esposito and Kellezi, 2020; Esposito, Ornelas, & Arcidiacono, 2015) where “research think thank for the integration and coexistence between natives and immigrants” (Arcidiacono, Natale, & Carbone, 2012). Second, some visionary intuitions of the founder of the SRT Serge Moscovici, about the “cyber-representations” are actualised in our results in time that SRT - disseminated worldwide, well beyond Europe as its “homeland” - is recognised as a suitable theoretical lens to capture the nature of the phenomenon of online communication (1995;1997). Lastly, we hope that the results of our research, in particular, may contribute to improving awareness about the dynamics between controversial social representations, communication and the discourse of influential leaders that inform Policies toward migration. Understanding these dynamics can improve public awareness and inform Policies on migration, rendering them more effective and inclusive.

## THE STUDY’S LIMITS AND POSSIBLE FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS.

Our research is not without limitations. The limitations of the research open up new opportunities for expanding data collection in a spatio-temporal perspective.

The number of items collected in Italy is much higher than the number of items collected in Canada. Data collection in French and English-language news media should be expanded. The wider research plan has sought—since its inception—to complement these results with results based on online news media from USA. For this reason, future developments will envisage comparative analysis of sources from online news media not only from Italy and Canada but also from the USA.

The time span considered (2014-2020) refers to the pre-pandemic period, covering some months within the pandemic. The invisible coronavirus pandemic contagion has radically refocused the media agenda in the first months of 2020, redirecting world wide citizens’ attention from immigration issue to health risks: from a racislized immigrant to an invisible virus, which started to travel without a passport from China to all over the world (de Rosa & Mannarini, 2020). Now that the pandemic has left the top of the media agenda, data collection should be extended from 2020 to nowadays in order to trace the transformations of social representations during the timeline.

## Note

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/mar/06/how-we-combed-leaders-speeches-to-gauge-populist-rise>

<sup>2</sup> The USA is also included not only due to the CA-USA borders, but also for the relevance of the echo effect of the political discourse and anti/pro-immigration policies at the transcontinental level.

<sup>3</sup> Words contributing to the interpretation of the results -according to the frequencies and chi-square metric- are highlighted in quotation marks.

## Supplementary Materials

Supplementary Materials are available at the following link: [https://uottawa-my.sharepoint.com/personal/ymass076\\_uottawa\\_ca/\\_layouts/15/guestaccess.aspx?share=EU1an9mKwX-RPkFh3HOmd69YBCBb3KpfEaxwhn0s\\_Rdqohw](https://uottawa-my.sharepoint.com/personal/ymass076_uottawa_ca/_layouts/15/guestaccess.aspx?share=EU1an9mKwX-RPkFh3HOmd69YBCBb3KpfEaxwhn0s_Rdqohw)

## Invisible Author Contributions

Elena Bocci: Methodology, Data Analysis, Writing.  
Annamaria Silvana de Rosa, Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing, Editing.

Lilian Negura: Conceptualization.

Martina Latini: Data Analysis

Sara Proietti: Methodology

Sarah Taieb: Review and Editing

Yannick Masse: Data collection, Review and Editing

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The Authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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The study was carried out according to the Ethical Guidelines 3.0 provided by the Association of Internet Researchers, and only publicly available articles were included in the study

## Data Availability Statement

Data will be made available upon request to the Italian-Canadian working group.

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