

# The Construction of Immigration in Italian Media

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GIULIA MATASSA, AUG 25 2014

### How is Immigration Constructed in Italian Media? What are the Normative Implications?

#### **Introduction**

This project will analyse how the issue of immigration is constructed in Italian media and what the resulting arising normative implications are. To investigate how immigration is constructed in Italian media, I will first consider the existing literature attached to the discourse on immigration: specifically at the work of Nicole Lindstrom (which set the framework for my project) the work of Anna Triandafyllidou and the studies conducted at La Sapienza University under Professor Mario Morcellini, which gave evidence of existing possibilities to research in the topic as well as proving that there are gaps within current literature. I will then analyse how immigration is constructed by three of the main Italian newspapers. The articles chosen from these newspapers, namely *Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica* and *Il Giornale*, relate to migration to the island of Lampedusa and the implementation of the *Mare Nostrum* operation in October 2013. I will conclude that in the six months since the commencement of the operation the discourse on immigration transitioned from a discourse attached to a humanitarian issue to one attached to an economic issue. Finally, I conclude by evaluating the inevitable limitations of this project, some of which are attached to the limitations of the methods chosen, discourse analysis and normative theory, and some to my personal understanding and approach to this project under an anti- foundationalist, interpretivist, qualitative approach.

#### **Immigration and the Existing Literature**

The existing literature tied to the issue of immigration & discourse and immigration & normative theory is rich but there are many gaps. Nicole Lindstrom's work on 'Transnational Responses to Human Trafficking' (Lindstrom; 2007, 61) provided my project with a framework to approach the question. Although Lindstrom's work is based on the politics of anti-trafficking in the Balkans, her argument that the 'policy area is based on a consensus on the nature of the trafficking problem. Yet in practice, we can observe significant differences among actors in their conceptualisation of the trafficking problem and how it should be tackled' (Lindstrom; 2007, 63), provided an important stepping stone for my project. She continues by stating that 'actors have framed the issue of human trafficking' (Lindstrom; 2007, 63) differently contributing to the construction of varied approaches. This work is in line with my assumption that framing immigration in specific ways has various normative implications, and thus contributes to the construction of specific responses or strategies to tackle the issue.

Lindstrom's work brought me to look more closely to the discourse attached to immigration to Italy. Anna Triandafyllidou places the importance of understanding immigration in Italy within a historical context as it is a country that has 'been transformed from sender[s] to host[s]' (Triandafyllidou; 2000, 373) of migrants. Beyond the historical significance of analysing migration to Italy, Triandafyllidou argues that there are two contrasting normative discourses: the first emphasizes a humanist and solidaristic approach, where migrants are 'seen as (potential) members of the ingroup' (Triandafyllidou; 2000, 387); the second is a nationalistic approach within which 'foreigners do not belong to Our society' (Triandafyllidou; 2000, 387).

Triandafyllidou's work provided an important stepping stone towards Professor Mario Morcellini's study on how immigrants and asylum seekers are portrayed in Italian media. Morcellini argues that media, television and

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newspapers portray immigration within a 'security dimension' (Morcellini; 2009, 2) as the existence of immigrants on Italian soil is 'naturally' a problem' (Morcellini; 2009, 2). The picture of the 'immigrant' constructed by Italian media is one of a criminal, in 80% of the cases a man, where the immigrant's motivations are defined by his/her nationality or ethnicity. The implication of portraying immigration under this light is that immigration is 'a problem that needs solving' (Morcellini; 2009, 5).

The existing literature that I have approached has shown that there is a scope for answering my question (within the framework provided by Lindstrom), as none of the literature specifically looks at the construction of immigration by newspapers. Moreover, the literature does not look to immigration and the *Mare Nostrum* operation as it was implemented in October 2013. There is, therefore, an opportunity to draw on a conclusion at an important benchmark (six months) from the start of the operation, while creating a dialogue with existing academic literature in the hopes of developing and advancing current knowledge on the topic. The importance of this lies in the fact that the issue of immigration has been used as a tool to gain party support. The Lega Nord[1] has had a newfound wave of support arguing that immigration not only damages Italy on the economic but also on the cultural level, as Italian culture is 'bastardized' by the mix of cultures.

## Approaching the Research

In trying to answer the question of how immigration is portrayed in Italian media, I firstly had to decide what newspapers to use within the time frame of the implementation of *Mare Nostrum*, 'a military and humanitarian operation'. The operation began on October 18<sup>th</sup> 2013 due to the exceptional influx of migrants and the number of casualties during the migration. The beginning of the operation gave me a starting date for my research, and April, roughly six months from the starting date, became a good benchmark to compare and contrast the portrayal of immigration within Italian media. This meant that my search for articles was within the 'October 1<sup>st</sup> 2013 to April 30<sup>th</sup> 2014' time frame, so I could have an article from the beginning of the operation and one from April.

I researched the most read newspapers in Italy, both in digital and print format, and came across a study from November 2013 that placed *Corriere della Sera* followed by *La Repubblica* at the top of the list. These newspapers are traditionally attached to a more centre and centre-left agenda and, to diversify my research, I decided to include *Il Giornale* within the sample. *Il Giornale* is the eleventh most read newspaper in Italy and has a centre-right agenda, as it is owned by Silvio Berlusconi but does not function as a party journal. In bringing in newspapers with varied political backgrounds but focused on a common topic, I hoped to find a common ground that could enrich my project and further current knowledge.

## Immigration and Italian Media

To approach the text within the newspaper articles and derive conclusions on how the chosen newspapers portray immigration, I will be using discourse analysis. Discourse analysis is a qualitative form of analysis that examines the meaning in texts and so is concerned with the ways in which language and meaning give legitimacy and meaning to social practices and institutions. Discourse is a form of action, as words do not just describe, they do. This understanding of discourse analysis ties in well with normative theory as the project aims to discover the normative implications of the language used and constructed by Italian media.

## Corriere della Sera

The first article, 'Immigration, the Cabinet approves the «*Mare Nostrum*» operation' (2013a)[2], was published on October 14<sup>th</sup> and appeared on the *Corriere Del Mezzogiorno*, a section that focuses on current affairs in Southern Italy. The first part of the article focuses on the need for Italy to recognize its position within this complex situation, as 'Italy must strengthen its border protection and calculate the costs of not moving forward with the operation'. In this sense, Italy is the protagonist of the operation and the migrants, whose lives are in danger, are forgotten. The second part focuses on the hope that this operation will also serve as a 'deterrent against human trafficking', and so maps the operation within a wider humanitarian dimension. The third part focuses on describing the operation in depth, as it is a 'military and humanitarian operation that will see a strengthening in surveillance and ability to rescue in the Mediterranean, to increase the level of security'. Within this article there is an understanding of the operation within

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security terms, where the humanitarian aspect comes in second (literally) to the military.

The second article, 'New arrivals, Italy has no more resources' (2014a)[3], was published on April 22<sup>nd</sup>. The article focuses on the details of the migrants' arrival to Italy, 'there are hundreds every day... as of yesterday there were 21.728'. Within this first section of the article, there is use of the third person plural, 'they', almost in an attempt to 'other' the migrants, possibly in part because they will remain 'they' if the operation fails to come through. The article not only 'others' them but also divides them into the migrants 'and then there is the women, the children'. The second part of the article focuses on party opinions, bringing in the LN and Forza Italia[4], which provide the most entertaining opinions: migrants 'are invading', in opposition to the responsibility to protect view that *Mare Nostrum* has saved the lives of thousands, in a geopolitical backdrop that was overwhelmed by the Arab spring'.

## **La Repubblica**

The first article was titled 'May the Mediterranean no longer be a sea of death' (2013b) [5] and was published on October 15<sup>th</sup>. The title of the article itself gives a sense of hope, hope that the tragedies and number of casualties in the migration to Italy will and can end. The article can be divided into four sections. The first introduces the operation, by listing the resources that will be used, 'more men, more possibilities [to succeed]', where this implied possibility of success is the result of efficient use of resources and where the humanitarian dimension of the operation is almost completely lost. The article, in fact, defines the operation as 'military and humanitarian', which is in line with the description given by the Italian navy but again frames, literally, the issue of migration as a military and security issue first, and a humanitarian issue second. The second section builds on the first by giving a detailed analysis of how each resource will be used. For instance, the article mentions the Lpd, a landing platform dock, which also serves as a moving hospital, and the 'increase in the number of eyes in the sky' as the air force will provide an aircraft that can sense sources of heat from the human body. Again, there is this continued approach to a humanitarian issue through a security dimension. The third section tackles the implementation of the operation within Italian politics. It addresses the cost of the operation, '1.5 million per month', and the way the issue of immigration will be tackled, 'through: international cooperation, control of European borders, equal treatment and Italian availability to help'. Once again, the economic dimension addressing the economic cost of the operation forgets the 'human cost' dimension. Finally, the article ends by returning to the humanitarian issue that was introduced by the title, so giving a sense of urgency as 'the number of victims has multiplied', and therefore there is a need for action.

The second article was published on April 29<sup>th</sup> and is entitled 'Ministry of Interior: 'Over 800 thousand migrants towards Europe, the system is collapsing' (2014b)[6]. The first of the three sections that can be identified in the article echoes the title as Giovanni Pinto, head of the border police, launched the warning, claiming that the forces are unable to provide the migrants with accommodation, and there is also the 'frustration from the locals who see more and more foreigners arrive'. In this case, the migrants are 'othered' as they are not only the cause of the operation coming into practice, but also the cause of it 'collapsing'. The second section of the article takes a retrospective view at the operation, which sets the operation between two extremities where, on the one hand, it has 'given excellent results' but, on the other, 'funds are required' and the 'number of migrations from Libya have increased'. Therefore, while there is a sense of success in saving human lives from death but also from the political, economic, and social insecurities of the Northern African countries, there is also a sense of failure as the 'system is collapsing'. Pinto again sets the operation within two somewhat contradicting extremities, as 'there are no more deaths' but 'we need an exit strategy'. The final part of the article focuses on the party views on the operation, bringing in opposing views from FI and LN, and the Democratic Party[7]. While FI and LN talk of an 'invasion' not only of foreigners but also of 'diseases', the PD talks of a 'responsibility to protect', which is more in line with the original humanitarian dimension under which the operation was initiated and which is lost in the concern for the economic losses.

## **Il Giornale**

The first article, '*Mare Nostrum* begins, 35.000 arrived since the beginning of the year' (2013c)[8], was published on October 16<sup>th</sup>. The article can be divided into two sections. The first section focuses on the character of the operation, 'military-humanitarian', but the aim is 'to save lives, as well as to provide security'. There is again this sense of a

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military and 'unhumanitarian' approach to a very humanitarian issue. The second part of the article brings in the left-wing party SEL's opinion to the foreground, bringing back the issue to party politics.

'Arrivals, Salvini: 'Suspend the operation'' (2014c)[9], was published on April 21<sup>st</sup>. The first part of the article focuses on the cost of operation, '300 thousand euros a day to Italian citizens', and the cost it has had on Sicily, where a LN delegation 'will protest against Renzi and the EU'. The second part of the article focuses on 'the wave after wave' of arrivals. This gives a sense of inevitability as the wave after wave will continue unless there is a change in leadership. In this case, the operation becomes part of a blame game against the government, unable to protect Italy from this wave of migrants.

## ***Under the Normative Lens***

The interpretation method within normative theory seeks to analyse discourse and its implications under a normative lens. The discourse in the articles transitioned from a discourse grounded in the humanitarian concern of the migrants, set within a security and militaristic dimension, to a discourse that focused on the immigration question in economic terms. This result is in line with Triandafallydou's conclusions, though this transition took place within six months from the beginning of the operation.

The question that arises is: what are the normative implications of framing the question of immigration in economic terms, whereby I would argue that the 'human'-itarian element of the operation is lost. Human lives, in fact, are given a value based on the cost or burden to the Italian state and citizens. This element of 'othering', though, is to an extent inevitable as the operation is called *Mare Nostrum*, from the Latin 'our sea', where there is again this sense of yours and ours, and where the 'collectivity' of 'us' grounded in the human element is almost non-existent. This raises the issue of immigration and equality, which I would argue is also non-existent as the Italian citizen is not, at least in this discourse, given an economic value. Finally, echoing Lindstrom, framing immigration and the operation as an economic problem fosters the creation of new strategies to tackle the issue.

## ***Limitations***

There are some inevitable limitations that come with any attempt at theory-building. In terms of discourse analysis, the main issue is selectivity. I could only pick a number of articles to analyse in depth. I also had to be selective in choosing the articles and six articles from three newspapers do not necessarily reflect Italian media. Besides, there is the issue of translation, as the articles are originally in Italian and I am not a professional translator. Finally, language is an issue, as it is organic and multi-dimensional, and ideas, norms and concepts held in one language may not be translatable.

The interpretation method is at the heart of the normative theory project but is not unique to normative theory. The underlying question within normative theory of how the world is versus how it ought to be is also value-laden, meaning that there is an a priori knowledge on immigration on my part but also within the discourse analysed. This is problematic because there is no sense of neutrality, but this is also what makes the topic rich.

Along the limitations of discourse analysis and normative theory stand my personal limitations grounded in the anti-foundationalist, interpretivist, qualitative approach adopted. As an author, I have a political perspective and agenda that may have affected my choice of articles and discourse, and within this political agenda there is an a priori knowledge on the issue of immigration in Italy.

## ***Conclusion***

This project has sought to analyse the portrayal of immigration in Italian media and the normative implications in the six months from the commencement of the *Mare Nostrum* operation. The research shows that the discourse has shifted from a discourse attached to a humanitarian issue, but framed by a military element, to an economic issue. I would argue the normative implication of framing the Italian immigration question in economic terms brings about a loss of the 'human'-itarian aspect of the operation, which fosters a blame game among parties and towards the

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migrants, who are not viewed as equals but as 'others'. In this sense, the project has successfully contributed in creating new knowledge that is set within the existing academic debate but also goes beyond it. Although the project is limited due to the methods used, there is a possibility of continuing research. The latest news story published by *La Repubblica* sees the Italian PM arguing that 'The EU Cannot Ignore This Situation' (2014d), where this Italian issue is taken to the European level. If I had the opportunity to further explore the topic, I would analyse how the situation in the South of Italy and the EU are portrayed in Italian media, both in newspapers and newscasts, so as to see how discourse changes within different platforms, and party responses, specifically that of the LN which has thrived in the past years making of its battle against immigration one of its driving factors.

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[1] Henceforth abbreviated to LN

[2] N.B. Henceforth this paragraph refers to (2013a)

[3] N.B. Henceforth this paragraph refers to (2014a)

[4] Henceforth abbreviated to FI

[5] N.B. Henceforth this paragraph refers to (2013b)

[6] N.B. Henceforth this paragraph refers to (2014b)

[7] Henceforth abbreviated to PD

[8] N.B. Henceforth this paragraph refers to (2013c)

[9] N.B. Henceforth this paragraph refers to (2014c)

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