The Political Discourse on Immigration in Southern Europe: A Critical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

This study analyses the political discourse on immigration in Greece, Italy and Spain, with a view to highlighting how discourse is organised and, in particular, the use of ingroup and outgroup categories in it. It is hypothesised that talk on immigration involves a re-elaboration of national identity and re-definition of the ingroup:nation and outgroup:immigrant representation. Moreover, it is expected that immigrants are represented as Others, alien to the ingroup and, therefore, to be excluded from the host society. My aim here is to highlight the commonality of identity processes activated in different social-historical contexts and analyse the connection between ingroup-outgroup representations and the specific historical legacy and socio-economic reality of a given country. Greece, Italy and Spain have been selected as a suitable set of case studies because they have recently been transformed from senders to hosts of migrants. The section that follows describes briefly the size of the immigration phenomenon in each country and the public policies adopted. The second section discusses the ingroup-outgroup dynamics activated in immigration discourse from a sociological and a social psychological perspective. The third section concentrates on the analysis of political discourse, namely interviews with non-governmental organisations, trade union representatives and public administration employees in Athens, Rome and Madrid. The methodology used is that of qualitative discourse analysis. Findings are discussed under the light of sociological and social psychological research on the issue. Copyright © 2000 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Key words: immigration; political discourse; Greece; Italy; Spain

IMMIGRATION TOWARDS SOUTHERN EUROPE

The dramatic increase of immigration flows towards Europe during the last decades has swept into its influence the southern borders of the EU, namely Greece, Italy and Spain. Since the late 1980s, these three countries have become hosts of large numbers of immigrants from eastern and central Europe as well as Africa and Asia. As a matter of fact, they may be considered as exemplary cases of countries that have

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Table 1. Stocks of foreign population residing in Greece, Italy and Spain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Legal immigrants</th>
<th>Undocumented immigrants (estimates)</th>
<th>Total (incl. max. estimates)</th>
<th>Total resident population in 1995</th>
<th>Percentage on total population (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>78 000 (Sept. 1997)</td>
<td>500–600 000 (1998)</td>
<td>678 000</td>
<td>10 443 000</td>
<td>6.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>1 240 000 (end 1997)</td>
<td>176–295 000 (April 1998)</td>
<td>1 535 000</td>
<td>57 269 000</td>
<td>2.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>461 364 (end 1994)</td>
<td>200–300 000 (1994)</td>
<td>761 000</td>
<td>39 170 000</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: Fakiolas (1998: 1) observes that the undocumented immigrants in Greece amount up to 8%–11% of the registered labour force in the country.

The sudden transformation of Greece, Italy and Spain from emigration countries to immigration countries has raised socio-economic and political issues that their governments were not ready to tackle. Thus, the respective governments have dealt with the issue mainly through temporary administrative measures and special legal provisions aiming at ‘regularising’ vast numbers of illegal immigrants who had already settled in the three countries. Only recently, have comprehensive and up to date immigration laws been voted in Spain (1999) and Italy (1998) while in Greece such a law is still in preparation.

During the same period, namely from the late 1980s onwards, reactions among the domestic population towards immigrants from non-EU countries have grown increasingly hostile. Anxiety about the possible negative consequences of immigration on unemployment has been frequently expressed, while the immigrants were often viewed as a threat to ‘our’ way of life. The development of xenophobic and even racist attitudes has soon led to violent incidents against immigrants, in particular Albanians, in Greece, extracomunitari in Italy¹ and Moroccans in Spain. Unfortunately, neither the mediterranean tradition of hospitality, nor the previous experience of Greeks, Spaniards and Italians themselves as emigrants have prevented the rise of discriminatory attitudes and behaviour.

¹ The term extracomunitari means ‘people from outside the EU’ and is the most commonly used Italian word by which to refer to immigrants in general.
US AND OTHERS IN IMMIGRATION DISCOURSE

Immigration flows towards southern Europe make part of a global trend of increasing population movements across national borders and, hence, of the emergence of multicultural societies within the context of nation-states (see also Chrysochoou, introduction to this issue). Host countries are faced with the necessity of dealing with these ‘Others within’ whose presence challenges the political and cultural order of the nation. The co-existence of different nations or ethnic groups within the same territory requires the identity of each group to be constantly reproduced and re-affirmed for the sense of belonging to the group to survive. It requires the constant re-definition of the We that must be distinguished from a They that is geographically close. Not surprisingly, such processes are put into motion when the foreigners found within the national community are immigrants, socially visible and economically weak (Mikrakis and Triandafyllidou, 1994). The need to deal with the Other within thus leads to a re-definition of the national identity of the host society.

According to my hypothesis, a process of re-defining the national identity along exclusionary lines is activated by the presence of immigrants. This happens because they are perceived to threaten the ‘way of life’ of the ingroup and, thus, part of what is its members’ sense of self (Cohen, 1985). Since the national community is primarily ‘imagined’ (Anderson, 1991), its reality lies in its members’ perception of the vitality of their culture and their common belonging. Immigrants who do not share the cultural and identity codes of the nation pose a threat to it, although the nature and strength of this threat will vary according to the perceived cultural distance and behavioural characteristics attributed by the host society to different immigrant groups—issues which will be touched upon later.

This study analyses the political discourse on immigration developed in Greece, Italy and Spain with a view to highlighting the ways in which talk about immigration is organised and, more specifically, the ingroup-outgroup representations and the discursive strategies used by the interviewees in speaking about immigration. It is hypothesised that immigrants are defined as alien and attention is paid to the discursive strategies used to make sense of the relationship between nationals, the ingroup, and immigrants, the outgroup. Ingroup-outgroup representations and the social or psychological features attributed to each group are examined. Moreover, the paper investigates the appeal to moral or political principles as a means to justify opinions, arguments or policy measures and the use of ”subtle racism” (Dovidio and Gaertner, 1986) strategies.

This study seeks to combine social psychological theories that concentrate on universal cognitive-motivational processes, like Social Identity Theory (SIT), and on the social-symbolic nature of knowledge, like Social Representation Theory (SRT), with a sociological viewpoint that examines group relations and collective identity formation within a specific historical context. SIT (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) assumes that all individuals in Western modern societies strive for positive self-identity and, consequently, for positive group identifications to the extent that their group memberships contribute to their individual identity. The more or less positive character of these memberships is determined through social comparisons with other groups along dimensions and/or features that are value-laden. In other words, the identification/categorisation of the individual as member of a specific group involves her/his perception of that group as positively differentiated and/or distinct from the relevant
outgroup(s). In order to achieve this positive group identity, individuals (as group members) and/or groups will engage in favourable comparisons between themselves and relevant outgroups. Tajfel and Turner’s view of inter-group relations and social identity may be applied to nations and their relations with other nations or ethnic minorities within or outside a given state. However, in order to achieve a better understanding of the identity mechanisms underlying ethnic relations, one has to take into account the specific historical, social and political context in which these take place. For this purpose, in the beginning of this paper, the situation in the three countries under examination has been outlined. Moreover, the findings presented below are discussed in relation to earlier sociological studies of the phenomenon.

Similarly, SRT points to social representations as a form of social knowledge that people use to make sense of social reality and to ascertain their position in relation to situations, events and objects of communication that concern them (Jodelet, 1991; Moscovici, 1976). SRT thus links cognitive elements with symbolic relations in society. This perspective is also useful in analysing discourse on immigration in the context of the nation-state because it highlights the fact that social representations are not merely cognitive schemes but involve the symbolic structuring of society and, hence, the representation of different groups (and individuals as members of these groups) and their relational positioning within society. This theory is pertinent to the analysis of immigration discourse because it points to the socially shared nature of knowledge and its symbolic functions in society. Nonetheless, this theory too needs to be integrated with the specific social, historical elements that organise social and political reality in a given society.

In other words, this paper analyses the ingroup-outgroup, nationals-immigrants bias and the symbolic functioning of the related representations of the two that underlie political discourse on immigration. Attention is paid to the rhetoric strategies and discursive devices used by the interviewees in making sense of social reality and positioning themselves within it as members of the ingroup that is related, and usually contrasted, to one or more outgroups (immigrants in general, or specific national groups among them). Using a qualitative discourse analysis methodology, this paper puts the study of social psychological identity processes into its social-political context from a comparative perspective. The commonality between identity processes developed in different country contexts but also the difference generated from the specific national, historical and socio-economic conditions of each country are discussed.

**DATA AND METHODOLOGY**

The texts analysed in this study are the transcripts of 26 interviews conducted with public officials, NGO representatives and trade unionists in Athens, Madrid and Rome during the spring and summer of 1996. The analysis of these interviews aims at highlighting the political discourse on immigration in the three countries. It examines the opinions and views of people who have to deal with the issue on a daily basis. Their views, of course, are not representative of the nation as a whole. However, they have been selected as a suitable target population because they are often involved in public discourse on immigration and may influence not only the policy agenda but also the media discourse.
Political discourse on immigration

The data set analysed includes nine interviews from Greece, nine from Italy and eight from Spain, namely three interviews (two in the case of Spain) with administration employees, three with trade unions and three with non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in each country. Interviewees were selected on the basis of their expertise and hands-on experience on immigration issues. NGO representatives were professionals of the sector (not volunteers) employed on a full-time basis. Trade unionists and public employees were both from higher and lower ranks in the hierarchy. The former were also both from the general trade union headquarters and from special immigration branches. Interviews were loosely structured: a set of issues/questions related to both immigration control (policy, authorities, clandestine migration, criminality) and immigrant integration (policy, living and working conditions, language, education, employment, everyday contacts, racism and anti-racist movements) were discussed with each informant, albeit the wording of the questions and their sequence followed the flow of the interview itself and not some predefined (by the interviewer) order. Interviews were always conducted in the subjects’ workplace and no other people were present.

The methodology used for the analysis of interview texts may be described as qualitative discourse analysis assisted by a standard DBMS package (Foxpro2), which allowed for simple code-and-retrieve operations. The relatively small volume of data to be processed and the qualitative orientation of the analysis have been the main reasons for opting for these tools. The coding scheme included two identifying categories (i.e. record number, name of interviewee and organisation that s/he represents), ten issue categories² (criminality, employment, contact with immigrants, living and working conditions of immigrants, control policy, integration policy, education of immigrants, racist organisations, anti-racist associations, and immigration in general), and one text variable entitled ‘us and them’. The interview transcripts were coded and passages referring to Us-nationals, Them-immigrants, or the two were identified and inserted into the memo variable. These segments of text, which ranged from a single sentence to a whole paragraph, were printed out and analysed qualitatively.

In this study, discourse analysis is seen as ‘a general analytic approach whose precise implementation depends upon the particular theoretical issues at hand’ (Reicher and Hopkins, 1996: 359) rather than as a set of rules for processing data. Hence, the analysis undertaken concentrates on the specific issues of concern in the study. Thus, definitions of Us and Them and evaluation of the respective groups have been pointed out. Particular attention has been paid to the use of rhetoric strategies for positive self-representation and negative other-representation. Moreover, different types of argumentation, which interfere with the relationship between the ingroup and the outsiders, have been identified. Finally, attention has been paid to contested issues such as the relationship between criminality and immigration and the impact of immigrant labour on unemployment.

**FINDINGS**

The analysis of interview texts has been organised around four broad themes. Three of these correspond to the initial concerns of the study, namely, the definition of the

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² The issue categories were mainly aimed to monitor the issues mentioned by the interviewees but eventually were not used as indicators of the importance of each issue. Given the small number of the interviews analysed, I chose to concentrate on a qualitative type of analysis.
Other, the direct or implicit attempts to put forward a specific representation of the ingroup and the Other and also to affirm the ingroup’s superiority, and the analysis of the normative discourses inherent in interview talk. A fourth topic emerged from the data as a separate theme, namely the discussion on contested issues, such as the relationship between immigration and criminality and/or unemployment.

Relational aspects of discourse: who is the Other

Even though it may seem obvious, defining the Other is not such a straightforward issue in any of the three countries under examination. Constructing the immigrant Other involves first of all demarcating the ingroup. However, the nation may not always be the compact and homogeneous unit defined by theorists.

Internal diversity poses indeed a problem for Italy. The issue of immigration brings to the forth cultural and administrative differences between northern and southern regions: local administrations in the north are more efficient (IT2-ADM) but southern Italian culture is more open towards outsiders and tends to integrate them (IT4-TU). In other words, the debate is more complex than a simple confrontation between Us and Them. It involves the recognition of diversity within the ingroup and its interference with the issue of immigration.

This problem has not been identified in Greek interviews. The We, i dopii (the people from around here) are a homogeneous category ethnically and culturally. This finding shows that socialisation into a national culture and identity has been successful in Greece while in Italy regional differences remain salient. The distinction between southern and northern regions has not been encountered in Spanish interviews either, despite the importance of regional nationalisms within the country and the salience of regional identities. However, this may be related to the fact that interviews were conducted in Madrid.

In Italy, internal diversity is also expressed in the form of a triangle: We (Italian people) are contrasted to Them (immigrants-foreigners) and the Italian state, a second Other, who fails to meet the needs of Our society and deal with the matter (IT6&7-NGO, IT8-NGO). This type of discourse is in conformity with the findings of the seminal work by Almond and Verba (1965) on civic culture in Italy. However, although such a relationship is typical of the Greek society too (Mouzelis, 1995; Tsoukalas, 1995), Greek citizens and their state appear united in front of the immigrant Other. The same unitary reaction is typical of the Spanish discourse. However, in one case, the interviewee defines her NGO and the immigrants as the ingroup and intolerant, fellow Spanish neighbours as the outgroup (ESP1-NGO). In other words, humanism and solidarity becomes the main identity dimension that distinguishes the insiders from the outsiders, while nationality is downplayed.

Furthermore, the definition of the immigrant Other is intertwined with historical links and cultural or linguistic ties that may exist between the ingroup and specific immigrant communities. This issue is addressed in Italy and Spain in relation to their

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3 Names of the interviewees are withheld for confidentiality reasons. For the same reason I do not specify which organisation, ministry etc. the interviewee represents. I acknowledge that this poses some interpretation difficulty: For instance a right-wing official from the Ministry of Public Order will not have the same views as a ‘leftist’ from the Ministry of Education. The following abbreviations are used: GR for Greece, IT for Italy, ESP for Spain, ADM for employees of the national administration, NGO for non-governmental organisations and TU for trade unions.
colonial traditions. With regard to Italy, the communities concerned are immigrants from Ethiopia or Eritrea, which used to be Italian colonies, and also immigrants from Albania, a country that was under fascist occupation during the inter-war period (IT4-TU, IT8-NGO). However, there is no preferential treatment for any community, nor are these links seen as claims to Italian citizenship.

In the case of Spain, the historical ties with specific countries which share the Spanish linguistic and cultural tradition is emphasised. The cultural affinity between Spaniards and Latin Americans makes the integration of the latter into the host society easier and also gives them, according to the Spanish law, priority in residence and employment over other non-Spanish citizens (ESP3-NGO, ESP4-TU, ESP-ADM, ESP6-NGO). Moreover, some interviewees point out that the Spanish people living in southern and central America still largely outnumber the Latin American immigrants residing in Spain (ESP1-NGO).

Another country that has historical and cultural ties with Spain is Morocco. However, contrary to Latin Americans, Moroccans are perceived as the other par excellence for Spanish people. Prejudice against them is related to collective memories of past military conflict between the two countries (ESP6-NGO, ESP7-TU). However, it is suggested that the reluctance of Spanish people to accept immigrants from Morocco depends more on social and cultural difference (poor, ill-educated) than nationality or history.

The reflection on who is the Other in Spain brings about an interesting issue concerning the notion of otherness. As many interviewees observe, Others are often found among the Spanish population: gitanos (the Roma community) and poor Spaniards (Españoles de realojos) are discriminated against and isolated more than immigrants are (ESP3-NGO, ESP4-TU). In other words, in the Spanish society, otherness seems to be related to class and culture rather than nationality or citizenship.

In Greece too, the issue of historical and ethnic ties with certain immigrant populations is salient. The question includes, on the one hand, the Rossopontii or else called Pontic Greeks who form a separate category and are treated as Greeks ‘returning to their homeland’ and, thus, are given citizenship rights. On the other hand, there is the issue of Vorioiopirotes, whose Greekness, however, is contested (cf. Triandafyllidou, 1996).

The Greekness of either group is based on (presumed) common descent and their historical ties with Greek culture and language. However, for matters of foreign policy of the Greek state, or as it is eloquently stated by the interviewees for matters of ‘national interest’ (GR1-NGO, GR2-NGO, GR7-ADM, GR8-ADM, GR9-ADM), Pontic Greeks are given full rights and Greek passports while Vorioiopirotes are treated

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4 Rossopontii come mainly from the ex-Soviet Republics of Georgia, Armenia and Kazakhstan. They are ethnic Greeks who either emigrated from areas of the Ottoman empire to the ex-Soviet Union in the beginning of this century or left Greece in the 1930s and 1940s for political reasons (cf. Glytsos, 1995). Pontic Greeks are defined by the Greek state as members of the diaspora community who return to their homeland and are, therefore, given full citizen status and benefits aiming to facilitate their integration into Greek society. Vorioiopirotes are Albanian citizens, mainly from southern Albania, of Greek ethnic origin and Christian Orthodox religion. Only recently (presidential decree, January 1998) have Vorioiopirotes been recognised officially as a separate category of immigrants that should be treated preferentially. Nonetheless, there have been, in the past, a number of administrative circulars distinguishing Vorioiopirotes from other illegal immigrants, on some occasions exempting them from the need to obtain a stay permit and advising the police not to arrest them for illegal stay (cf. Triandafyllidou, 1996, 1998).

5 Even though the majority of Pontic Greeks and Vorioiopirotes do not speak Greek.
as guestworkers (GR9-ADM). In other words, Vorioipirotes are ‘also a bit like Greeks’ (GR4-TU) but their Greekness is not recognised because it is in ‘Greece’s interests’ (i.e. the interests of the state, which represents Greek citizens) that they remain in Albania to keep alive the Greek minority there. No one of our interviewees challenges the legitimacy of this view.

Even though the Greek state defines Rossopontii as Greek citizens, their Greekness is contested by some of the interviewees. While in some cases, it is acknowledged that Pontic Greeks ‘are not Pontians, they are Greeks’ (GR4-TU) and they are overall distinguished by aliens, in other instances, they are differentiated from ‘normal Greeks’ (GR8-ADM) or dopii and the cultural difference between Us and Them is emphasised (GR7-ADM).

In other words, a hierarchy of Greekness is constructed in the political discourse, whereby priority is given to ‘real Greeks’, i.e. citizens of the Greek state, of Greek ethnicity and Orthodox religion. Pontic Greeks are, so to speak, second-class, third are classified the Vorioipirotes whose Greekness is contested and, of course, at the bottom of the scale lie the Others, the aliens, i.e. the immigrants who cannot claim Greek origins. Thus, constructing the Other involves shifting the boundaries of the ingroup and, most importantly, creating multiple levels of inclusion-exclusion.

It is worth noting that Spanish interviewees identify immigrants as non-Europeans and conceive of Spain as the southern border of Europe. ‘Africa now starts at Gibraltar and not at the Pyrenees’ comments one interviewee (ESP6-NGO). This element is salient in the case of Italy too. As a matter of fact, immigrants are called extracomunitari (non-EU nationals). In Greece, on the contrary, more attention is paid to the Greek or non-Greek origin of immigrants rather than to their being Europeans (GR4-TU, GR5-TU, GR6-TU).

Overall, members of the nation and immigrants are demarcated as two separate and often contrasted communities. In both countries, interviewees usually refer to fellow nationals as ‘we’ and immigrants as ‘they’. Different communities of immigrants are referred to as ‘their group’ or ‘among themselves’ (IT2-ADM, GR5-TU). Besides, it is a common opinion that ‘Our society’ can only take a limited number of Them (immigrants) (IT9-NGO, ESP4-TU, ESP5-ADM). Nonetheless, interviewees from all three countries reflect on the changes their society has gone through in the course of the past 20 years as a result of migratory flows. Such accounts, although accentuating the distinction between Us and Them—‘Our society’, ‘They came’, ‘We have changed’—concentrate more on the necessity of the home society to adapt to the new situation rather than arguing that immigrants should leave (IT4-TU, IT8-NGO, GR6-TU). Spanish people, in particular, seem to have come to terms with the new experience of being an immigration country (ESP7-TU) and point to the need to provide more information on the matter to the citizens (ESP2-TU).

**Evaluation aspects: We are better than They are**

Relational aspects of the political discourse on immigration are complemented by the evaluation of the two groups. As it will be shown in this section, there is an implicit ethical hierarchy in the discourse.

Us and Them as identity categories are constructed firstly through disclaimers: people deny that they or their co-nationals have xenophobic attitudes or act in discriminatory ways. Racist violence and discriminatory behaviour is attributed to
particular individuals, marginal within the host society, with specific psychobiological features: ‘they are weird people’, ‘mad’, ‘old’, ‘intransigent’ (ESP2-TU, ESP3-NGO).

As a matter of fact, interviewees from all three countries explicitly and emphatically deny being racists:

- We are not as racists as they are in other European countries (GR5-TU, ESP1-NGO, ESP6-NGO, ESP7-TU, ESP2-TU)
- We do not have a LePen (ESP1-NGO)
- There are virtually no racist organisations, but there are many pro-immigrant associations in the area of Madrid (ESP6-NGO)
- Racist incidents are isolated (GR6-TU)
- They are marginal cases . . . Small and marginal organisations (ESP4-TU, ESP5-ADM, ESP6-NGO)

The effort to provide for a positive self-conception is also manifested through the re-definition of the We and They categories. Thus, people who adopt discriminatory behaviour are excluded from the ingroup (IT4-TU, ESP2-TU, ESP3-NGO). Similarly, employers who exploit illegal immigrants are distinguished from Us-Italians:

- Businessmen are not encouraged to employ illegal immigrants, also because in Italy the trade unions are present (…) just as they were for Italian workers (…) this is the exploiter who makes business by ‘selling women’, life is like that, we are not all honest. However, this is not the Italian people, the Italian people tends to regularise the immigrant citizen, the proof is the large number of people who have been legalised. (IT5-TU, my emphasis)

Thus, the ingroup is credited for its impartiality and is defined as ‘good’. Xenophobic behaviour is justified by the lack of information or the misinformation provided by the media (ESP2-TU).

Moreover, in Greece and Spain (ESP1-NGO, ESP2-TU), interviewees express their pride for not having had a fascist or racist political past:

- . . . the fact is that some people have tried to take advantage of nationalism, that nationalism of LePen style, some groups, (…) some fascistoids who would like to come out with the slogan ‘Foreign workers go home’. Yes we had some phenomena of this kind (…) The good thing is that we historically (…) the evolution of the Greek trade union movement comes from a different history, a different culture than that of many European states. That is why we do not have such outbursts, such serious problems like in Germany or Sweden and other countries.’ (GR5-TU, my emphasis)

In Italy, on the other hand, where fascism has been a dominant political force in the past and continues to exert some influence (Veneziani, 1994: 259–60), a complex rhetoric of denying racism and asserting a positive ingroup representation is adopted. The following passage is eloquent:

- Italy is a country that has shown a great availability, a great culture of acceptance (…) the tragedy of Italy is that it has always lived in this view that Italians are good people, so, even if we have been colonisers, we have left a good impression in Greece, in Albania, in Abyssinia. (…) In all these years, the Italian lay person has lived with the idea that we are good, while, on the contrary, nowadays it is accepted that Italy has had its colonial experiences too, the racist contradictions, populism and, even if there have not been outbreaks of violence such as with Germans (…) The word ‘racism’ seemed a term that did not suit us. Even the racist laws of 1938 in Italy were seen as something imposed by the Germans but never applied. The difficulty has been to make Italians accept that Italy runs the risk of becoming racist. (…) However, when you move from a big town to smaller cities, you discover a work for integration that cannot be compared with any other country in Europe . . . (IT6&7-NGO, my emphasis)
The positioning of the ingroup as non-discriminatory, non-racist, is complemented by prejudiced views against specific nationalities. In Italy and Greece, in particular, immigrants of different nationalities are ‘classified’ as better or worse. Thus, in Italy, the Senegalese community is praised for its honesty (IT4-TU) while immigrants of Balkan origins are seen as troublemakers. Such classifications are made also in terms of the immigrants’ culture and the convergence of their values with the Italian culture\(^6\) (IT1-ADM). Similarly, in Greece Polish are ‘different’, ‘they are Europeans’ (GR6-TU), Albanians are ‘dangerous’ (GR1-NGO, GR9-ADM), Pontic Greeks are linked to the kosmo tis nyhtas (underground world) and Russians to prostitution networks. Moreover, it is argued that the links between certain immigrant communities and specific illegal or criminal activities derive from the former’s culture and lifestyle (GR5-TU). Thus, the immoral character of the Others further accentuates the ethical superiority of Greeks.

Immigrants are also implicitly accused for refusing to integrate because their main objective is to save some money and return to their home countries (ESP5-NGO, ESP6-TU). It is thus implied that often immigrants themselves are responsible for their poor living and working conditions and the discrimination they suffer. Moreover, those immigrants que no tienen culpa (who are not guilty) for falling into illegality are mentioned separately (ESP5-ADM), presuming that there are others who are guilty for being illegal.

Overall, in all three countries the evaluation of Us vs Them is mainly based at the demonstration of the ethical superiority and intrinsic goodness of the ingroup. The positive ingroup representation and its acting on the grounds of humanism and tolerance are, in fact, typical features of political discourse on minorities (van Dijk, 1993; 1997). Moreover, ter Wal (1996) and Peñamarín (1998) highlight how the representation of the ingroup’s high moral standards and tolerant, humanist attitudes is intertwined with a negative image of the Other, who is accused for being corrupt and dishonest. These findings confirm that ingroup-favouring bias and outgroup discrimination indeed characterise the immigration discourse. However, the analysis highlights how this as a general tendency builds upon the specific features of national identity in a given country, its historical legacy as well as current situation.

\(\text{Contested issues: criminality and unemployment}\)

Despite the impression that one might get from reading the newspapers, immigrants are not charged for increasing criminality and unemployment rates. Interviewees from all countries were critical of over-generalisations concerning the criminal offences committed by immigrants (both legal and illegal) (IT5-TU, GR4-TU, ESP2-TU, ESP6-NGO). The press was accused for presenting a distorted image of reality (ESP3-NGO). Not surprisingly, however, certain immigrant communities were seen as troublemakers and were linked to organised crime (GR1-NGO, GR4-TU, GR9-ADM, ESP5-ADM). Discriminatory behaviour against them was thus justified (IT2-ADM). Moreover, a tendency to criminalise illegal immigration was also found (ESP5-ADM). However this was not a prevalent view among the interviewees.

Regarding employment and the extent to which ‘They take Our jobs’, emphasis was put to the fact that unemployment is related to the economic crisis that ‘Our

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\(^6\) . . . or with the interviewee’s view of what the Italian culture ought to be.
country’ is going through (IT4-TU, IT6&7-NGO, GR5-TU, GR5-TU, ESP7-TU) rather than immigration. In Spain, in particular, the idea that immigrants are responsible for domestic unemployment was dismissed (ESP1-NGO, ESP2-TU, ESP4-TU).

Nonetheless, in Greece, immigrants were blamed for receiving lower pay and working longer hours (GR9-ADM, GR4-TU, GR5-TU):

they almost ask for it (...) they are ready to accept the unequal treatment in order to gain some money. It is in other words a vicious circle, you do not know: is it the hen that lay the egg or the other way round. (GR9-ADM)

In other words, immigrants are held responsible because employers (members of the ingroup) discriminate against them. It is also emphasised by Greek interviewees that employers ‘do not prefer foreigners’, they hire Them because ‘they cost less (GR4-TU, GR5-TU, GR9-ADM). Somewhat paradoxically, this argument is used in favour of regularisation: it is in the interest of the Greek population if immigrants are legalised, because then they would no longer ‘steal’ Greeks’ jobs (ibid.). Thus, it is emphasised that it is Our interests that should be protected through regularisation rather than Their rights. Clearly, this argument de-legitimises the immigrants’ position in Greek society: after all, Greeks come first, immigrants do not count.

Even though this blaming strategy is peculiar to Greece, in Italy too economic explanations are provided to account for racist incidents. Xenophobia and racism are linked to people’s fear of losing their jobs as well as to the poor living and working conditions of immigrants and their low socio-economic status (GR2-NGO, IT4-TU). This actually functions as an implicit justification: We are not racists, it is job insecurity that leads to racism. As a matter of fact, this is what is called ‘additional’ (Balbo and Manconi, 1992: 64) or ‘subtle’ racism (Dovidio and Gaertner, 1986), namely the rational organisation of socio-economic motivations that make people intolerant.

This type of argumentation is not present however in the Spanish data. Conflict between immigrants and the domestic population is attributed to the circumstances under which contact takes place. More specifically, the massive arrival of immigrants to a small town or village, their concentration into decaying inner city neighbourhoods, their poverty, the fact that they tend to live in overcrowded apartments are identified as the main factors that lead to xenophobia and racism (ESP1-NGO, ESP3-NGO, ESP6-NGO, ESP7-TU).

Thus, contact with the domestic population emerges as a crucial issue in Spain, which accounts for much of the prejudice towards immigrants. The interviewees, however, suggest that the problem is not different nationality or culture per se but rather the social visibility of immigrants because they are poor and tend to concentrate in specific areas. Mikrakis and Triandafyllidou (1994) have also pointed out the element of social visibility as a factor that contributes to the rise of xenophobic attitudes and behaviour. In Spain, rational planning of immigration and distribution of foreigners across the national territory is suggested as a possible solution (ESP4-TU).

**Normative discourses: integration vs racism**

The socio-economic explanation of xenophobia shifts attention from the immigrant as victim of discriminatory behaviour to external factors that are seen as causes of social tension and facilitators of xenophobia. This type of economic argumentation
bypasses the underlying conflict between two types of discourse concerning the relationship between the nation-(state) and immigrants: on the one hand, a normative discourse linked to notions of human rights, solidarity and integration which tends to acknowledge immigrants as legitimate social and political agents and, on the other hand, a discourse that justifies discrimination and de-legitimises immigrants’ position in the host society through ethnic, cultural and psychological arguments, namely the fact that they do not belong to this country.

The rights and integration discourse is more pronounced in Italy and Spain than in Greece. In the latter country, claims to human rights, the principle of equality and working class solidarity are overall weak (GR4-TU, GR5-TU, GR6-TU) and tend to be subsumed to the prevalent nationalist discourse of ‘Greeks first’ (GR1-NGO, GR2-NGO, GR4-TU, GR5-TU, GR9-ADM). Employment is seen as an important means of integration into the host society but equal treatment for immigrant workers is demanded as a means to protect Greeks’, rather than foreign workers’ rights. In only one occasion is the contribution of the immigrants to the national economy recognised and a moral duty of the Greek state to reciprocate is mentioned (GR5-TU).

In Italy, the political discourse on immigration is closely intertwined with notions of human rights, solidarity and multiculturalism. Ethical principles of justice and respect for cultural difference (IT1-ADM), social values, in particular solidarity towards the poor (IT8-NGO, IT9-NGO), and political notions, such as equality and fairness (IT9-NGO), are used to defend the social rights of immigrants and the need to regularise those who are already established in Italian territory (IT5-TU). Moreover, multiculturalism is promoted as a socio-political paradigm (IT1-ADM, IT4-TU, IT9-NGO) and concrete examples of integration between Italians and immigrants are provided to support this view (IT4-TU). Nonetheless, it is recognised that a lot of work needs to be done (IT6&7-NGO) so that We (Italians) become more sensitive with regard to these matters, albeit it is Our moral duty (IT9-NGO) to do so.

In Spain, the discourse is geared towards integration and normalisation of immigration rather than multiculturalism. The need to integrate immigrants into the reality of the host society (ESP2-TU) empowering them to act themselves as cultural mediators (ESP6-NGO) and also the necessity for a public response to immigrants’ needs for health services, schooling and accommodation (ESP1-NGO, ESP2-TU, ESP3-NGO, ESP7-TU) are the prevalent arguments in the Spanish discourse. Immigrant rights with regard to employment and training are also supported (ESP4-TU, ESP7-TU). Moreover, an appeal is made to the Spaniards’ experience as emigrants so as to become more sensitive to immigrants’ needs (ESP4-TU).

The normalisation and integration discourse in Spain is however moderated by the principle that

a country should not accept more immigrants than those it can accept, so that there are no people living in the streets. (ESP5-ADM)

This notion of ‘limited absorbing capacity’ refers, in particular, to the massive concentration of immigrants in small towns or in specific neighbourhoods which changes radically the composition of the population in the area.

The humanitarian viewpoint is complemented by a law and order approach, which calls for more effective state intervention in immigration policy. Legality in fact becomes a dimension for distinguishing between Us and Them. Immigrants are
stigmatised for the mere fact of their illegal presence in the national territory (IT2-ADM, ESP5-ADM). In Greece, the employment of immigrants in informal economic activities, often under blatantly illegal conditions (long work hours and extremely low wages), is an element that further de-legitimises their presence because a) They thus steal Our jobs (GR9-ADM), and b) They undermine Our [domestic workers] rights (GR4-TU, GR5-TU). The controversial character of the relationship between immigrant employment and regularisation divides also the Spanish social actors. Trade unions sustain that employment legitimises the immigrant’s presence in the country and her/his right to regularise (ESP4-TU, ESP7-TU), while public officials argue that regularisation may have negative effects on domestic unemployment (ESP5-ADM, ESP8-ADM).

Law and order concerns are salient in Italy and Spain, where attention is drawn to the lack of an effective immigration policy (IT5-TU, IT6&7-NGO, IT9-NGO, ESP5-ADM, ESP6-NGO, ESP7-TU, ESP8-ADM). Interviewees in all three countries (ESP4-TU, ESP5-ADM, IT5-TU, GR1-NGO, GR5-TU) point out the need for more efficient control measures and rational planning of immigrant integration. It is worth noting, however, that the emphasis put on legality as a pre-requisite for being integrated to the Italian, Greek or Spanish society is incongruent with their respective civic and political cultures. Indeed, citizen-state relations in these countries are characterised by mistrust and discontent while clientelistic relations have long dominated the national administration system (Almond and Verba, 1963; La Palombara, 1965; Morán and Benedicto, 1995; Mouzelis, 1995; Romero, 1973; Tsoukalas, 1995).

Contrary to Spain, where a discourse of prejudice and closure towards immigrants is virtually non-existent—with the exception of the concerns for the effect of immigrant labour on domestic unemployment—in Italy and Greece xenophobic and racist attitudes are expressed overtly. Thus, psychological or ideological explanations of people’s racist attitudes are put forward. Xenophobia is characterised as a ‘natural’ tendency of all peoples and is mainly attributed to the demise of ideology rather than to discriminatory attitudes (IT6&7-NGO). Moreover, cultural difference and the immigrants’ difficulty to assimilate to the host society is explained through psychologising arguments: ‘they are really very weird in their psychology’ (GR7-ADM). The racist reactions of the domestic population and the problems of communication between Us and Them are thus linked to collective psychological phenomena. The implication is, however, that neither psychological reactions can be judged because they are by definition irrational, nor can these difficulties be overcome because they do not depend from societal mechanisms. Thus, immigrants cannot be accepted as members of the host society, not because the latter discriminates against them, but because of circumstances outside Our control.

In conclusion, the recognition of immigrants’ human and social rights implies their legitimisation as members-to-be of the host society. This type of discourse transcends the nationalistic division between the ingroup and the Others introducing alternative dimensions that cut across national or cultural identities. However, this discourse is opposed by a nationalistic approach, which views Us-nationals and Them-foreigners as different ‘by nature’ and opposed to one another. Co-existence and integration is thus deemed possible only to the extent that it subscribes to a control-and-command approach, whereby the host society controls immigrants so as to fit its own interests. The conflict between these two points of view is more pronounced in Italy while Greek interviewees tend to follow the nationalistic viewpoint. It is worth noting that
most interviewees shift from a humanistic to a discriminatory discourse and alternate universalistic vision of solidarity with nationalistic notions of Italians/Greeks vs Others rather than adopting straightforwardly one or the other approach.

In Spain, however, the situation is different. The integration and legitimisation discourse is prevalent though integrated in a law and order perspective. Nonetheless, prejudice or discrimination based on nationality is very rarely taken up as an argument. This finding suggests that the experience of a multinational society organised into a single state and the awareness of the plural and internally divided nature of the Spanish nation (sic) (cf. Fox, 1998) supports a more tolerant attitude towards foreigners.

Overall, the analysis of the normative discourses underlying talk on immigration shows how old social representations ‘resurface’ and are adjusted to the new context by (re-)elaborating the meaning of national identity and the related categorisation between nationals and outsiders. The law and order framework, the limited absorbing capacity view, the revision of the solidarity principle and the re-elaboration of cultural-psychological difference arguments are some examples of the ways in which social representations change, reflecting thus the change also in identity dynamics within a given society.

CONCLUSIONS

This paper has analysed critically the political discourse on immigration in Greece, Italy and Spain, three southern European countries that have recently been transformed from senders to hosts. More specifically, I have explored the organisation of ingroup-outgroup dynamics in discourse so as to highlight how identity processes and group relations need to be seen in their specific historical context. For instance, although inter-group bias is expressed in all three countries, differentiation and discrimination take different meanings and are expressed more or less moderately in different countries, in relation to the pre-existing ethnic/national group relations and identity structures characterising each case. Moreover, the study has shown how notions such as solidarity, national preference, social order, cultural difference of psychological pre-dispositions are re-elaborated and adapted to the changing context. Indeed, the analysis of discourse shows that sometimes individuals are aware that there is a process of change going on and their discourse reflects both past and newly emerging social representations.

My first concern here has been to highlight the multiple definitions of the ingroup and the Other elaborated in political discourse. Indeed, the distinction between the two is not always straightforward. The answer is complicated by the fact that some immigrant communities have ethnic or cultural links with the host society. In Greece, for instance, there is a tendency to create multiple layers of Greekness. Similarly, in Spain the cultural affinity between Latin Americans and Spaniards is pointed out. In Italy, in contrast, regional differences are intertwined with issues of immigrant integration.

Along with the definition of the ingroup and the Other comes the evaluation of the two groups. Positive self-presentation, which includes denial of racism, and negative Other-presentation (van Dijk, 1993; 1997: 36–7; ter Wal, 1996) are typical features of discourse on minorities or immigrants. The findings of this study are in line with
earlier research. Charges of racism are denied and the ingroup is represented as impartial and non-discriminatory. Immigrants, on the other hand, are attributed negative features, they are accused of being corrupt and dishonest and their will to integrate is put into question.

Not only is the ingroup represented as ethically superior to immigrants but also these last become a contrasting Other (Penuel and Wertsch, 1995: 349): their negative representation serves to emphasise the desired qualities of the ingroup. This type of discourse is a strategic form of identity formation. Of course, contrasting others may also be found within the ingroup, as in the case of Spain where most interviewees point out that internal others, like the Roma community or poor people, tend to be the victims of discrimination more than foreigners.

There is more to it however. In Italy and Greece cultural difference and/or the (presumed) inability to assimilate with the host society is psychologised. Immigrants are described as ‘weird’ people and emphasis is put to their supposed intrinsic personality traits. Thus, the argument cannot be falsified and the blame for the lack of integration (as well as the justification of exclusion) is put on Them. In Spain too, immigrants are said to be reluctant to integrate, at least during the beginning of their stay but overall their image is less negative than in Italy or Greece. Psychologisation serves also as a strategy for maintaining a positive ingroup identity. In all three countries, racist people are defined as ‘not-Us’ and in some cases they are seen as psychotic or unbalanced personalities. Thus, overt racism is de-legitimated and treated as a pathology, while subtle racism prevails.

Despite this overall pejorative image of the immigrant as cultural and ethnic Other, views on contested issues such as the relationship between immigration and domestic unemployment or criminality vary. Overall, others are not blamed for domestic unemployment and most interviewees are critical towards the criminalisation of immigration.

Two opposed normative discourses have been identified in the study. On the one hand, a humanism and solidarity approach prevails. Emphasis is given to the contribution of immigrants in the host society and their position is legitimised. Moreover, this discourse supports equal treatment for immigrants and multiculturalism is proposed as a model for social integration. Immigrants tend, thus, to be seen as (potential) members of the ingroup. The nationalistic, discriminatory discourse, on the contrary, legitimises discrimination and unequal treatment on the basis of nationality/citizenship: foreigners do not belong to Our society. Furthermore, immigrant cultures are linked to social pathologies such as criminality or prostitution and their difference is psychologised. This type of denigrating Other discourse has been encountered in other countries too (Mehan, 1997), even though the use of psychologisation has not been registered.

A moderate line of argumentation, that seems to link the two discourses, is expressed by the law and order approach. As a matter of fact, there is agreement among interviewees from all three countries that a more effective immigration policy is needed both for control and integration.

In conclusion, the issues underlying the different discourses demarcate the ingroup and the Others. However, contrary to what was expected, nationality is in some cases replaced by more inclusive principles such as fairness, solidarity or, eventually, legality. Thus, despite the negative representation attributed to the immigrants, their position in the host society is negotiable.
One important feature common to the Greek and Italian political discourse is the fact that interviewees tend to shift from one normative discourse to the other. One may start a sentence with a critical comment towards fellow nationals, then continue by reviewing the country’s history and, eventually, shift the argument by claiming that ‘immigrants take our jobs’ or that ‘this country has shown a great availability towards foreigners’. This shows the extent to which a racist viewpoint is not yet rooted in Greece and Italy, perhaps simply because massive immigration is still a recent phenomenon. Of course, it also testifies to the weakness of universalistic appeals to human rights and the general good. This ambivalence, however, may be a point of departure for an anti-racist and anti-xenophobic education whereby the Other is normalised, emphasis is put to the daily aspects of immigrants’ lives and notions of cultural or ethnic purity are replaced by notions of difference and pluralism.

In Spain, however, the integration and normalisation discourse is clearly prevalent. It seems that Spaniards have been able to take advantage of their ‘national’ experience of being a multinational state, characterised by linguistic and cultural difference. Thus, the cultural diversity of immigrants is not seen as an insurmountable obstacle for integration. Moreover, the legacy of the Franco regime makes Spaniards particularly sensitive to issues of rights and democracy. Not surprisingly, representatives of the public administration express the odd nationalist voice among Spanish interviewees, as if they still subscribed to the conservative tradition in Spanish politics!

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