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Immigrants Representation in Parliamentary Debates:
the Cases of Italy and Spain

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1 – Introduction

Once major labour exporters, Italy and Spain have now become firmly established as 'immigration societies' targeted by growing numbers of migrants. The shift from 'emigration' to 'immigration' has occurred around the beginning of the 1980s when countries of Northern Europe were closing their borders to foreign workers and introducing policies of strict control over migratory flows. The rapid and quite sudden character of this inversion in migratory patterns has demanded efforts of adaptation from Italian and Spanish state and society. Apart from the establishment of completely new institutional and legal structures, the arrival of newcomers have equally engendered transformations at a more symbolic level, most notably concerning the way immigrants are perceived and represented in the public sphere of these two countries.

There is a growing literature in political science looking into party attitudes and preferences towards immigration. Research in this field has been concentrating on themes such as the relationship between party orientations and specific policy preferences. These works have however frequently ignored the symbolic dimension of political discourses, as well as the consequences these discourses might have 'in the real world'. Indeed, because they have been concentrated almost exclusively on party positions, scholars have often failed to explore the consequences of effective political discourses in the *representation* of immigrants in the public sphere, as well as the kind of *policies* certain ways of defining immigration may engender.

This paper shall contribute to filling this particular gap in the literature by exploring how certain ways of representing immigrants have been progressively constructed and institutionalized by the key political parties in Italy and Spain, and how such representation is linked to quite specific political projects and policy choices. We should explore here not only the way political leaders have tried to 'make sense' of immigration as an structuring element of society in these two 'recent immigration' countries, but also how certain discursive categories have shaped police preferences thereby narrowing down the set of policy options available.

Adopting a constructionist[1] approach to social enquiry, we hold that language has a powerful constitutive force in politics, and hence the ability to successfully manipulate it is an essential resource for political actors. For politics is essentially a "struggle over symbols" and their meanings, dominant discourses are constantly being challenged by competing ones, in a constant struggle to gain legitimacy and power (Fischer, 2003:76). Politics implies therefore not only conflict over the interpretations of substantive problems, but also over the kind of discourses they should involve. Indeed, as we will see in the analysis of the Italian and Spanish cases, discursive and policy responses to public 'problems' are by no means automatic nor uniform. The ways in which a given situation will be portrayed by the actors involved can vary deeply and each of these framings has different implications not only to the actors involved (for instance, who is responsible for the problem and hence deserves being punished, and conversely who are the victims), but also to the solutions assigned to it.[2]

These processes of categorization should be studied here by the analysis of a particular kind of political discourse, that is, parliamentary debates. Although parliamentary debates do not constitute a 'mass-consumed' type of public discourse (as is the case of media discourses, for instance), they do have an especial role in the *construction* and *dissemination* not only of ideologies (conceived as worldviews), but also (or consequently) of discursive categories most commonly connected to them. Among a large amount of possibilities, we have chosen to focus on the debates held at the Italian and Spanish parliaments during the elaboration of two immigration laws which have taken place in beginning of the 2000s: in the Italian case, the debates of law n° 182 of 2002, and in the Spanish case, the debates corresponding to the elaboration of law n°8/2000. Among other things, these laws share one major characteristic: they both have been elaborated by conservative forces during a centre-right government (the

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[1] Forming rather a philosophical orientation towards knowledge than a school of thought, social constructionism exposes the underlying assumptions determining empirical observations, but above all provides a sophisticated way of theoretically *reconsidering social problems*. For a thorough consideration of constructionist perspectives in the social and political sciences see Fischer, 2003.

[2] Drawing from a literature that brings together social categories and public policies, we are moreover close to the thesis that the way a particular 'target population' – in this case, immigrants - is represented in the public sphere will largely influence the kind of policy design, more precisely, on the choice of policy tools available and the policy rationale. Differences in the representation of a target group have direct effect on policy design, more precisely, on the choice of policy tools available and the policy rationale. In this way, when immigrants are negatively represented (connected with negative attributes such as 'dishonest', 'undeserving', 'criminals' and so forth) and thereby categorized as 'deviant' target groups, public policies tend to become oriented logically towards their punishment and coercion. On the other hand, when positively framed (normally the case of 'legal immigrants' that are perceived as 'deserving', 'honest' or 'hard workers'), policies tend to focus rather on the concession of benefits and public services (Ingram and Schneider, 1993).

Casa delle Libertà[3] coalition in Italy, headed by Silvio Berlusconi, and the Partido Popular administration in Spain, led by José Maria Aznar). These texts embody moreover, more or less explicitly, a sort of conservative 'reaction' to previous laws, elaborated by centre-left forces (law n°40/1998, the so-called Turco-Napolitano law issued during the first Prodi administration in Italy, and law n° 4/2000 in Spain), and for this reason, also believed to be have a 'too permissive' or 'liberal' approach to immigration.

As we will see, even if these laws have similar policy-goals (most notably, to enhance border control, establish a stricter management of flows and counter irregular immigration), and share a similar terminology ('legal' and 'illegal' immigrants), the *meanings* conveyed by these terms, as well as the way these policy-goals are legitimated are sensibly *different*. In other words, even if the terminology is apparently identical; they are *semantically* diverse, which entails a difference in immigrants' representation. While in the Italian political arena the representation of immigrants, particularly 'illegal' ones, has become closely associated to social disorder and particularly to crime and criminality (a representation that was eventually institutionalized by this conservative law); in Spain, the terms of public debates about immigration have been based on fairly positive frames, the 'illegal' category referring rather to a 'dependent' group than to a 'deviant' one. For they are based on categories that have different meanings, these two laws also send different 'messages' about who immigrants 'are', what kind of treatment they are suppose to expect from the government and what place they may eventually aspire to occupy within the host society. I should hold in the end that the absence of radical right-wing parties, the existence of different political cultures, as well as the voicing of immigrants' claims at the political arena by other actors than political parties (more precisely NGOs, syndicates) help explaining the differences in Spanish and Italian political discourses.

This paper is structured in three sections. In sections 3 and 4, I will detailed how the above mentioned representations of immigrants at the Italian and Spanish public sphere have been progressively constructed, being later eventually reinforced at the parliamentary arena. Indeed, a first step in the analysis of the relation between social categorization, public discourses and political action is to understand how the particular framing of a given issue

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[3] The Casa delle Libertà (CDL) coalition comprised the following parties: Forza Italia, Alleanza Nazionale, Lega Nord, Unione Democratica Cristiana (composed by the centre-right Centro Cristiano Democratico and the CDU, both parties of strong Catholic orientation).

(here immigration) can effectively turn it into a 'problem', while others remain unchallenged. These two empirical sections should hence be introduced by a short analysis in which public discourses about immigration in these countries are deconstructed so we can properly understand how they have become 'public problems' in the first place. Making such genealogy is essential if we are to understand, for instance, how 'public problem discourses' have appeared in Italy and Spain as the unintended consequences of a confluence of events and ideas. Following this analysis, I will also briefly detail the policy-making process and parliamentary debates of the two mentioned laws. The paper will close (section 5) with some comparative insights and concluding remarks.

2 – Immigrants' Representation in Italy: The Social Construction of a 'Threat'

The transformation of Italy into an 'immigration society' in the early 1980s was not only rapid, but, at least in some parts of the country, also easily observable – to the eyes of the media and the so-called 'public opinion'. If in the first years during the 1980s, the presence of immigrants in some of Italian larger cities[4] has caused no more than a certain surprise and curiosity, in the early 1990s it began to be perceived as 'suspicious' – even 'dangerous' to some. Partly as an effect of such visibility, partly due to the pressures of other European members, Italian political leaders have quickly understood that, in the years to come, immigration would be one of the key issues on the country's political agenda. As we will see, politicians have moreover promptly understood that monopolizing the issue (by presenting their own 'versions' of the 'problem' and prescribing the best 'solutions' to it) would turn out to be a crucial strategy not only to control the political agenda, but also to gain legitimacy. In a scenario of deep political legitimacy crisis[5], one can easily presume that immigration has become a very sensitive issue in Italian politics.

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[4] Particularly in economically dynamic cities like Milan, Rome, Florence or Turin.
[5] In 1992, Italy's mainstream political parties have literally crumbled. Even if the story of what happened cannot be detailed here, it is possible to point among its causes the collapse of Communism in Europe, and chiefly the beginning of a large judicial investigation (started in February 1992) which has eventually exposed the incredibly high level of corruption of Italian politics. One of the main effects of this crisis was to put the whole political system under attack. The corruption of politicians and public administrators; the opposition of 'citizens' to the dishonest system; the substitution of the political paradigm by a 'juridical' one in the definition of public events, and consequent ascendance of the 'legality' as a highly valued principle - these are some of the key elements of Italian political codes since 1992 (Dal Lago, 1999:76). As we will see later on, this obsession, more or less artificial, with legality has become then a central feature of public debates and political rhetoric since then. On this see among others Ginsborg, 2001, D'Alimonte and Bartolini, 2002.

The progressive politicization of immigration during the 1990's was indeed accompanied by an increasing criminalisation of immigrants' image in both the political and the media arena. Two events can be pointed out as markers of this change in immigrants' representation. The first event was the forced disembarking of Albanese asylum seekers in the city of Bari between 8 and 15 August 1991.[6] Public consternation, especially from the local population and authorities, has grown as days passed without any concrete measure being taken. After initial calls for 'Italian's solidarity', discourses on newspapers and the television have become increasingly harsh, and talks about a possible 'invasion' of the country by all sorts of 'disparate' people worldwide has gained the headlines.

For our purposes, the important outcome of the 'Viora' episode was the establishment of a disseminate feeling of alarm and fear of an imminent 'immigrant assault'. In terms of public (political) representation, the event has also established the beginning of what would become commonplace rhetoric in Italian public discourses, that is, the representation of irregular immigrants as 'clandestines' and (therefore) criminals - a *de facto* definition that would soon become part of legal documents and policy decisions. The link between immigrants' presence and social perceptions of growing disorder, criminality and therefore rising sentiments of insecurity have also been largely reinforced during this episode. As we shall see, these negative other-presentation strategies, largely present in members of the parliament's (MPs) discourses, are more often than not oriented towards reinforcing and/or reproducing such connection between immigration and criminality.

The second event that has marked the criminalization of immigrants' categorization was the introduction of the so-called *Decreto Dini* (Dini Decree) in November 1995. The decree was in fact a political compromise between the moderate right and the centre-left, a sort of alternative solution to the xenophobic propositions the regional party *Lega Nord* had presented to manage immigration issues since then. Symbolically, however, the decree represented the institutionalization (or its embodiment in a form of a public policy) of the idea that immigrants are criminals, and that managing immigration meant in fact combating

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[6] It should be remembered here that the so-called 'boat-people' phenomenon was, at that time, still fairly uncommon and the idea that people could actually risk their lives trying to escape their countries has greatly surprised Italian public opinion.

(immigrant's) criminality.[7] As Dal Lago (1999:8) observed, the decree marked a "twist in Italian juridical and political culture" as it transferred de facto the responsibility for the micro-criminality (of immigrants, chiefly), "real or imaginary", to the jurisdiction of the police forces. In sum, with the enactment of the Dini decree immigration has definitely become a metaphor for crime and criminality (Dal Lago, 1999:81-82).

Although the causal relation between 'growing immigration' and 'growing criminality' has been more assumed than empirically observed, the equation immigration=criminality is often taken for granted in Italian public discourses. As can be expected, right-wing parties of that period – like *Forza Italia, Alleanza Nazionale* and the *Lega Nord* – have quickly endorsed and even reinforced the 'criminal-migrant' equation. Nonetheless, the 'need' of security and 'protection' against immigrants was not exclusive to more conservative political forces, but (implicitly and often quite explicitly) shared by important fractions of cultural elites (like intellectuals, opinion-makers, academics[8]), as well centre-left parties (the only exceptions being the small communist party Rifondazione Communista and the Green party, Verdi).

Trying to take over its lost legitimacy on issues such as public security and social order, which had been strategically monopolized by the centre-right, Italian left parties have progressively changed their discourse, particularly after 1995. As the capacity of centre-left groups to represent and defend the interests of 'Italian people' was being strongly attacked by its opponents, such strategic change of rhetoric was, above all things, hoped to boost its legitimacy and hopefully its electoral results. In this way, Pietro Folena, a high member of the Prodi first government (1996-1998), has declared in a interview in 1997, security was not to be seen as 'a value of the right', but the Left could just as well be seen as the 'warrant of citizens', who were concerned with the 'growing insecurity' of some Italian cities.[9]

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[7] In this way, for instance, the regulation established that any foreigner suspected of disturbing the public order or condemned for committing a minor crime could be presented before a judged and expelled from the country without having the right to appeal from the decision.

[8] A telling example is a book chapter written by Italian sociologist Ugo Melloti (1993), in which he develops the thesis that immigrants are the main responsible for the growing urban criminality and conflict in Italy.

[9] ""*La sinistra democratica, che si trova per la prima volta al governo, è la forza che può costruire un vero diritto alla sicurezza per i cittadini. E, anzi, ne fa una questione costituente*". *La sicurezza "non è un valore di destra...*", La Repubblica, 23 March 1997, p.8.

2.1 – The Bossi-Fini Law: Reinforcing Immigrants' Criminalization

In this section, we will see show the negative representation of immigrants has been reproduced and vigorously strengthened during the elaboration of the law n° 182 of 2002 not only as a strategy of the centre-right to gain legitimacy, but also as a consequence of the centre-left's incapacity (or inability) to challenge the frames of the debate.[10] In the years that have followed the entry in force of the Prodi administration's immigration policy, also known as the 'Turco-Napolitano' law (law n°40/1998), immigration has become even more central in political debates. As the electoral campaigns for the national elections in 2001 approached, parties of the conservative centre and the right have intensified the 'immigrant-threat' rhetoric coupled with de-legitimating strategies, stressing thereby the inefficiency of the centre-left government in the managing not only immigration, but of the country as a whole.[11]

Public discourses to 'ban' foreign criminality, and establish 'real' solutions to fight the atmosphere of 'widespread insecurity' created by illegal migrants, have grown stronger. The media (which is in Italy highly connected with the centre-right forces), has continued to reproduced, almost on daily basis, news about immigrants' 'attacks' against Italian society. Public opinion pools, as expected, began to show that immigration was part of the most disturbing concerns for the 'ordinary Italian' – which in reality meant that the electoral campaign would become very much centred on the issue. As so they were. The Ulivo management of immigration was not the cause of the right-wing victory on the 2001 elections; still, it can reasonably be included among the factors that have greatly favoured the loss of credibility of the left administration. Italian Right has made a fairly impressive return to power.

The coalition Casa delle Libertà has achieved the majority in both houses of the parliament, therefore assuming the head of the government, personalised by Silvio Berlusconi. As promised during the campaigns, one of the first initiatives of the CDL government was the

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[10] In fact, as I have tried to demonstrate in my dissertation, this was already the case even during the discussions of the Turco-Napolitano. Even if some Left-wing representatives have tried, in their pronouncements, to underline the 'unacceptability' of the 'unrealistic' criminalization of immigrants, the truth is that the law the own Left had elaborated was fairly based on this type of reasoning. Aware of its own contradiction, the Ulivo administration has had a difficult time trying to justify its political choices.

[11] The establishment of an 'immigration crime', i.e. the criminalization of the recurring attempt of illegally immigrating to the country, figured as one of the most important proposals of the period. See particularly the congress about immigration organized by the Alleanza Nazionale in 2000 entitled 'From invasion to regularization'.

elaboration of a new immigration law derogating the 'too benevolent' Turco-Napolitano law. Given the radicalisation of anti-immigrant discourses, somehow deepened by the events of 11 September 2001 in the United States, it is not difficult to guess the orientation of the future bill. The law was drafted by a restricted committee composed by leaders of the Alleanza Nazionale and Lega Nord (Gianfranco Fini, Umberto Bossi being the prominent figures), without the participation of pro-migrant associations or NGO's. The outcome was a document that has basically summed up the main securitizing claims of the Right, reinforcing even more the criminalization of immigrants and the legal/illegal dichotomy (the former category implying 'criminals').

The choice for this policy design was indeed not occasional. For immigrants' representation was chiefly negative in dominant discourses, punishment and coercion were logically the kind of policy answer expected from the public. For it is part of the representation of these individuals the belief that they respond rather to punishment than to benefits, the establishment of beneficial policies would be indeed very difficult to sustain at the eyes of the public. Even if policies based on punishment and coercion are not necessarily 'effective' in terms of successfully reaching its declared objectives (say, counter illegal immigration or micro-criminality), they are strategically positive for they give at least the impression of answering public expectations (Ingram and Schneider, 1993).

During the debates, immigrant's representations have more often than not been negative, categorized as a 'deviant' group. Especially when talks have focused on illegal immigrants, it was not difficult to find direct associations with 'delinquents', 'deviants' and/or 'criminals', which eventually strengthened the association between immigrants' illegality and rising criminality. It is true that during the debates the most frequent and widely used expression used by MPs when referring to immigrants was the (apparently) neutral '*extracomunitari*' (literally non-communitarians, in reference to the nationality of the immigrants considered). Yet, as Dal Lago (1999) shown, as a consequence of its frequent use in public discourses (in particular, in the media) in a direct association to different types of misconduct, the term 'extracomunitario' also gained a considerably negative connotation in Italy.[12]

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[12] A nuance needs however to be made here. In right-wing speeches, like those of Lega Nord, Alleanza Nazionale (and, to a lesser extent, Forza Italia) MPs, immigrants designations have been much more straightforwardly negative, normally associated to denigrating or blatant offensive words such as 'prostitution'/'prostitute', 'robber', 'mugger', 'scum', and so on. On the other hand, left-wing MPs have

Parliamentary debates have been largely monopolized by the government and its supporters, a monopole that rested largely upon CDL representatives' capacity to set both the agenda and the symbolic frames of the discussion. The opposition has tried to be incisive in its reactions, accusing the government of handling immigration as if it was a simply matter of public security instead of a complex social phenomenon. In some moments, debates became very passionate, with strong charges coming form both sides (the opposition openly accusing the right-wing MPs of racism, xenophobia, intolerance, and so forth; and CDL members charging the Left of incompetence and disregarding Italians' interests). Still, despite its strong reactions, it was already too late for the left to change the terms of discussions. Criminalization of immigrants and the illegality/legality dichotomy were in fact common to MPs' discourses of both sides, which have varied mostly on the type of legitimating and de-legitimating strategy used.

3 – The Social Construction of Immigrants in Spain: Between 'Victims' and 'Citizens'

As Italy, from a 'sending' country, Spain has become in about three decades a net receiver of immigrants. This emigration-immigrants shift has taken place around the mid-1980's, a moment that coincided with a series of important reforms in Spanish economy linked to its opening to international markets. At this initial phase, the increasing arrival of immigrant workers has led to slight transformations in the general environment[13], but no real debate about the phenomenon has been set at this point (Cachon, 2003:226). The process of public (re)formulation of immigration in political debates has loosely started in the country by the early 1990s.[14]

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constantly tried to 'victimize' immigrants, associating foreigners to images of 'poor' or 'desperate' people who 'need' assistance.

[13] In July 1985, the government passed the fist Law aimed at regulating immigration in Spain, the 'Ley de Extranjeria'. Presented as an urgent bill, the proceedings were considerably shortened, facilitating in this manner its promulgation before the formal incorporation of Spain to the European Communities, the first of January of 1986 (Moreno Fuentes, 2000).

[14] Not surprisingly, the moment has also coincided with the beginning of a 'new phase' of immigration in Spain, that is, immigrants were not only determined to settle in the country, but also they were increasingly coming form different countries (Cachon, 2003:223). Because immigrants 'looked' and acted differently, their presence and concentration in some areas, particularly in the larger cities of the country, had become increasingly more 'noticeable' by Spaniards.

Politicians' interest in the issue was to a large extent also fostered by some concrete events that had been at the centre of Spanish public debates of the period. The first one took place during the summer of 1992, which was afterwards named the summer of the 'pateras'.[15] As happened in Italy on year before, Spanish coasts had been constantly the object of these small boats, crowded with migrants, most of them North African men, during the whole summer. As Celaya observed (1997:30), the arrival of several 'pateras' has called the attention of EU members to Spanish critical position in controlling the continents' borders with Africa. At the domestic level, these events have contributed to a greater consciousness of Spanish public opinion concerning the real dimension of immigration flows (especially from Northern African countries like Morocco) to the country.[16]

Particularly after 1992, members of the key political parties have chosen to adopt a more cautious discourse when with regard to immigration. During the campaign for the 1993 elections, conservatives and socialists have chosen a the more 'secure' type of discourse, that is, one that would echoes - at least superficially - their constituencies' worries and expectations. Border control policies have been the preferential issue in discourses and electoral programmes. In terms of policy rationale, it is worth noticing that despite this policy option has been established to answer public apprehension of a possible overflowing of pateras to the country, immigrants were rather referred to as victims ('poor', 'desperate' people) than criminals, or dishonest, 'bad' people. Yet, even if these immigrants 'deserve' to be helped, some control was needed not only given Spain's commitment with European standards, but also given the country's 'limited capacity' of welcoming immigrants.

It was however only during the campaigns of 1996 that the PP and PSOE have begun to assume more thorough positions about the social and political consequences of immigration to

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[15] In Spanish language, the patera is a type of boat, normally quite small and fragile, used by immigrants coming from all parts of Africa in their attempt to reach Spanish coasts (normally the Canary Islands) by crossing the Atlantic and after passing through the Strait of Gibraltar, the Mediterranean.

[16] Likewise, the overtly publicized murder of a Dominican woman, Lucrecia Pérez, by a racist group in the end of this same year has made explicit the 'malaise' of parts of Spanish society, pointing out moreover that, contrary to some beliefs, racist and xenophobic reactions were not 'exclusive' to Northern European societies. In fact, as we will see, during the debates of the Spanish immigration laws, MPs of different political orientation have shown their concern with racist and xenophobic reactions within Spanish society. Given the strong anti-racist norm existing in Spanish parliament, the most common reaction has been the categorical rejection of these behaviours, based on positive representations of immigrants (immigrants as 'good' people who need 'help', but also as an 'enriching' element to Spanish economy and society).

Spanish society.[17] Even if 'control' and 'regulation' were still recurrent in politico-electoral pronouncements, reflections about immigrant's integration had gained a considerable place in Spanish public sphere. In addition to the electoral campaigns, 1996 was marked by another event which has profoundly marked the representation of immigrants at the public sphere. More than simply exposing discursive categories or adding actors to the public discussions, the expulsion of a hundred of north-African immigrants from the Spanish exclave of Melilla served to illustrate how political forces managed immigration *in practice*.[18]

In point of fact, the Popular party has been caught in a considerably difficult position in 1996 when, assuming the government for the first time after the democratization[19], it was immediately confronted with the need to manage the conflicts in Melilla. Feeling 'observed' (domestically, by its constituency; and internationally, by other European members), the Aznar administration has tried to demonstrate that both territorial sovereignty and public order would be by all means protected from immigrants' attacks. From this perspective, the Aznar response to the Melilla conflicts in 1996 embodied hence a double (symbolic) message: by the party's constituency, the expulsions were to be understood as a demonstration of the government's commitment to its campaigns promises (of fighting irregular immigration); by Spain's European partners, the prompt reaction of Spanish administration should be seen as a reaffirmation of the country's commitment to the 'Schengen[20] spirit'.

3.1 – The making of law n°8/2000: Enforcing the 'Schengen Sprit'

The key norm regulating immigration issues in Spain up until 1999 was the Organic Law for Foreigners 7/1985, passed during the Socialist Government, on the occasion of the country's entry into what was then the European Economic Community. Different political parties presented proposals for reforming Spanish immigration law in 1998, which was passed in

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[17] On this point, it is important to emphasise the important of parts of Spanish productive sector, NGO, pro-migrant associations' members, scholars, as well as some politicians who have tried to emphasise immigrants' positive contributions to the country, such as their active role in Spain's demographic renewal or on the sustainability of the welfare system (Cachon, 2003: 227).

[18] The debates set forth by the Melilla episodes could be described as an exchange of mutual accusations between the newly empowered government and the opposition about the legality and hence the legitimacy of the expulsions.

[19] The PSOE occupied the head of Spanish government from 1982 until 1996.

[20] The Schengen agreements were signed, after long preparatory work, in 14 June 1985 by Germany, Belgium, Luxemburg, the Netherlands and France.

December 1999 with the disagreement of the government party (the PP), after more than a year's negotiations.[21] After Law 4/2000 was passed, the PP government has made public its intention to modify some of its points during the new legislative session, insisting in the so-called 'summoning' effect generated by the new norm. Finally, in June 2000, José María Aznar's government presented a new draft of the Law for Foreigners, backed by the majority obtained in the general elections in March of that year. The new Law 8/2000 was passed in December of the same year.

Conceived to be a 'reaction' to the previous law (being hence constantly referred to as the 'counter-reformation' law by the opposition MPs), the law n°8/2000 has suspended the mechanism of automatic regulation, eliminated the need to state reasons for refusing visas, and more importantly, cut back the rights and benefits previously conceded to immigrants in irregular situation – including the rights to meet, to demonstrate, to participate in associations, to participate in unions, and to strike- and modifies the disciplinary regime, in order to be able to confine and expel foreigners without residence permits. The Popular Party has legitimated these policy options on the basis of two basic rationales: first, the need to fully adapt Spain's immigration policies to the *European* directives and treaties on the matter (in particular the recently approved Schengen Agreements); and second, the need to fight illegal immigration (and the correlate problem of human trafficking).

As mentioned, the Schengen Agreements, in particular, and 'Europe' more generally, has turned out to be the main validation for the government discourses and policies on immigration – used quite often to exonerate its members from the responsibility of adopting restrictive border policies, and particularly for cutting down (irregular) immigrants' rights. From this perspective, government MPs have frequently held that the country, as a member of the European Union, was not really 'free to chose' a more inclusive or 'open border' type of immigration policy – as centre-left groups, and the PSOE in particular, had advocated. The 'character' of domestic immigration policies was hence not simply a question of political choice, national interest and/or ideological colour; it actually mirrored the decisions taken at the European level by all members of the community.[22] In time, this difference between government and opposition does not imply however that the centre-left have completely

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[21] The Organic Law 4/2000 about Foreigners' Rights and Freedoms in Spain and Their Social Integration entered into effect in February 2000.
[22] Spain's duty to abide by European norms was considered particularly important at that period given its status of 'new member'.

erased from their discourses Spain's commitment to the Schengen Agreements, while the PP has become its most fierce guardian. The distinction is actually more subtle, and lies on the fact that while the centre-left has succeed to overcome a strict 'border control' perspective on immigration; the PP has made of it the major goal of any meaningful policy (Celaya, 1997:41).[23]

During the debates, there was a major divide between members of the government's party and the opposition (which included not only the PSOE and other centre-left national parties such as Izquierda Unida, but also small regional, nationalist parties) particularly concerning irregular immigrants' rights. In terms of immigrants' representation it has varied along two major categories. In the first one, immigrants have been designed positively, normally referred to as 'citizens' (ciudadanos) and persons (personas) or human beings (seres humanos). Implicit to these categories is the idea that immigrants are individuals empowered with (human, basic) rights and who should be incorporated to Spanish society. By defining immigrants as 'citizens', MPS has more than simply recognized their 'right to integrate', but has turned integration into a responsibility/task of Spanish government. In fact, the promotion of immigrants' integration and equality has often been presented as an anti-discrimination measure. In this way, facilitating immigrants' access to these basic services and facilitating their socialization would help fighting racist and xenophobic reactions.

In fact, several racist incidents in different cities and villages (El Ejido, Terrassa, and Figueres) during by the end of the 1990s and yearly 2000s have highlighted the need for a higher degree of involvement by public authorities to facilitate the incorporation of immigrant populations into Spanish society, and hence to prevent the development of xenophobic and racist attitudes among the Spanish population. Indeed, among politicians of different political ideologies, integration policies are believed the better policy mechanisms to prevent or counter racism. The promotion of immigrants' full insertion into Spanish society and the fight against racism - which were among the key declared goals of the law n°4/2000 - have also inspired discourses and policies during the conservative PP government, despite the restrictive

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[23] To be sure, in Italian public debates, the 'European standard' has also appeared as a goal to be reached through political and institutional reform, particularly in the field of immigration. Yet, as my empirical research indicates, at the Italian political arena, the use of 'European compromises' as a rationale to legitimate (irregular) immigrants' rights was lees relevant than the use of arguments such as the 'need' to 'punish' and/or coerce immigrants' criminality.

character of law n° 8/2000, such as the creation of the Higher Council for Immigration Policy.[24]

In parallel to this positive, empowering category, immigrants have also been represented as a 'dependent' category, that is, as people who 'need' (or 'deserve') help finding better life conditions. From this perspective, immigrants are also positively perceived, but also portrayed as *passive beneficiaries of public solidarity,* and not actors expected to play an active role inside the political community. The emphasis on the victimization of immigrants is much more common to be found on discourses of PP's representatives, but again, not exclusively. The point worth underlying was the representation of illegal immigrants also as victims. From this perspective, illegal immigrants have been considered victims of either the so-called 'mafias' (the whole structure of people and institutions which were behind organizing and facilitating the voyage and the irregular entry of immigrants in the country), or of unclear policies which 'forced' them into 'illegality' – this former argument being almost exclusively used by MPs of the opposition.[25]

4 – Comparative Remarks and Conclusion

In the precedent sections we have seen that since the beginning of the 1990's, the public representation of immigrants in Italy has been consistently connected to events that implied rising feelings of social disorder, insecurity and general mistrust vis-à-vis foreigners. It was also during the 1990's that the label *extracommunitario*, normally used to define the immigrants from non EU countries, has been overtly adopted by Italian political actors and media. Research on the construction of *extracommunitari* in the Italian media has revealed crucial passage on discourses about immigration: from a "danger of racism *in* Italian society", predominant around the 1980's, to immigration as "criminality and threat *to* Italian society", an account that has become particularly powerful since 1992, as we saw above (Cachafeiro, 2002: 126, Maneri, 1998).

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[24] The Higher Council for Immigration Policy was created within the framework of the new Law for Foreigners law n°8/2000, "For the purpose of coordinating the actions of the Public Administrations with competence in these matters or that may impinge on the policy of integration of immigrants."

[25] Another particularity of centre-left MPs' pronouncements were the recurrent emphasis on equality as a policy rationale for legitimating the protection of immigrants' rights (despite their legal status). From an 'equalitarian perspective', immigrants should be placed at the same level as Spaniards, to which they are fundamentally 'equal'. Immigrants' integration has consequently also been seen as an equality matter, for it can only be achieved if immigrants are bestowed with the same rights and obligations as Spaniards.

Immigrants' representation has thereby come to entail either their criminalization (which is particularly true in the case of undocumented foreigners) or, at best, their victimization (normally applied to 'regular' immigrants). As they normally lack voice at the public sphere and representativeness at the political arena[26], immigrants are most commonly represented as *objects*. From this perspective, the category of 'immigrant' in Italian public sphere entails the image of powerless individuals, which can expect to be either 'punished' for their misbehaviour, and sometimes 'assisted' or 'helped' given their lack of capacity or ability for autonomously leading their own lives. In neither of these representations immigrants are, indeed, expected to take an *active* part as real citizens within Italian society. The negative meanings attached to the representation of immigrants at the public sphere, though predominantly used by centre-right politicians, have been however also present in most centre-left MPs. To be sure, in Italy, right-wing parties have been able to monopolize public discourses, and legitimate not only their 'frames' about the representation of immigrants, but also about the policy 'solutions' to be sought to the 'problem'.

In Spain, on the other hand, political leaders have been quite careful in their public speeches, consciously avoiding the use of words and concepts that could eventually lead to the connection of immigration and criminality. In the debates here studied, politicians of different political colours have supported, with virtually no exceptions, a positive representation of the phenomenon, emphasising as much as possible its 'enriching', 'beneficial' and 'valuable' character. All in all, the terms used to refer to immigrants in these debates connect them to positive qualities, being categorized as a 'deserving' group. Even if 'legal' and 'illegal' categories have been used, the 'irregular'/'illegal' category have in no way been criminalized or categorized as a 'deviant' group, as happened in the Italian case. On the contrary, 'illegal' immigrants have normally been presented as the real 'victims' (either of unclear policies or mafia organisation) to be protected by governmental action.

Immigrants have been moreover considerably empowered in Spanish parliamentary discourses by the use of categories such as 'citizens', 'human beings' and 'persons'. Even if the 'new citizens' category can be originally traced back to the programs and discourses of the

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[26] As Caponio has argued, in Italy, immigrants' associations have always played a marginal role in national policy-making. More recent legislative engagement seems to have completely abandoned the purpose of empowering immigrants' associations (Caponio, 2005).

centre-left, centre-right representatives have appropriated the term and used it with the same empowering connotation. One element that has undoubtedly favoured the entrenching of the representation of immigrants as empowered actors ('citizens' or 'persons') at Spanish public sphere has been the action of NGOs, syndicates and other organizations. Either channelling of immigrants' claims or opening the floor to immigrants themselves to assert their demands, these actors have been quite important for the elaboration and spread of more positive categories in public speeches on immigration.

Apart from the already mentioned role played by NGOs in the voicing of immigrants claims, these differences in the Spanish and Italian political discourses can be linked to other two major factors: the absence of radical right-wing parties in Spain and the differences in the political cultures[27] of these two countries. Indeed, from a comparative perspective, the absence of meaningful radical/extreme-right places Spain and Italian political-parliamentary elites in two fairly different positions. As noticed earlier, Italian political scene has been characterized, especially after the 1992-1994 crisis, by a rising in importance of far-right and populist parties (and their) exclusivist/discriminatory rhetoric – a discursive strategy adopted not only by the Lega Nord and the Alleanza Nazionale (centre-right), but also to some extent by Berlusconi's Forza Italia. We have also seen how these actors were able to monopolize the political scene and impose their own interpretative framework, impinging on discourses a rather disruptive, anti-immigrant (and sometimes nationalist) tone.

The task of attempting to make immigration a polarizing subject in the national agenda in Spain has fallen on relatively new groups, the most prominent of which being the Democracia Nacional (National Democracy, or DN), known for its vigorous embrace of the policies of Le Pen's Front National. While professing to uphold the principles and institutions of democracy, the DN is a strong supporter of law and order, including a very tough stance on immigration.[28] Yet, its failure to win representation in parliament in March 2004, despite growing concern within the electorate about immigration, is a clear sign of the continuing obstacles the far-right continues to face in Spain in the post-transition era. Indeed, Spanish extreme Right has

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[27] Instead of thinking about political culture solely as predominant political attitudes of relevant actors, I believe one must think about the context of meanings in which the community's political life takes place (Welch, 1993). These meanings are expressed in discourses, myths, languages, systems of beliefs and values, and so on. To study political cultures is, in this sense, to understand how actors re-appropriate meanings, using them as frames and as resources for political action (Cefaï, 2001).

[28] Its "Spaniards comes first" campaign (adopted for the 2004 general elections) called for the deportation of all illegal immigrants and the closing of Spanish borders.

met considerable problems in reconstituting itself in the aftermath of the demise of Franco's nationalist dictatorship. Having ruled the country for nearly four decades (1939-77) and denied the nation basic civil and political rights, the extreme Right has become, once the transition was achieved, a fully discredited political force in Spain.[29]

In addition to its institutional configuration, the development of a political culture built around the idea of democracy as a major value on the post-Franco political scene has largely prevented the development of extreme-right parties and discourses in the country. Since the end of the Franco dictatorship, a consensus about the 'necessity' and, to some extent, 'inevitability' of democratic transition has largely influenced political elites' perceptions of reality and behaviour. The legitimacy achieved by the 'democratic solution' consensus was so great that it has remained active – albeit with variations – shaping profoundly the country's political life. This 'democratic symbolic framework' operates therefore as the general grammar on which different social and political groups build a particular configuration of meanings, ideologies and beliefs, and define possible strategies of action and, above all, the justifications that actors apply to them. There is virtually no space within this framework for those formulations that clearly reject the underlying discursive structure based on the democratic value. Consequently, versions identified with radical positions on both sides of the ideological spectrum are naturally 'excluded' as they clearly lack any kind of legitimacy. Political discourses therefore tend to be anchored on 'moderation', 'pragmatism' and 'prudence' – terms frequently used by the centre-right to legitimate the restrictive orientation of law n°8/2000, by the way.[30]

Italian political culture, on the other hand, has been marked, among others, by a near obsession with (a particular view of) 'legalism'. One expression of such 'legalism' has been the focus on the fight against micro-, street-level criminality, or against the more institutionalized form of criminality, that is, the 'organized crime' which was found to permeate different areas of Italian public sphere, especially during the Tangentopoli years (Dal Lago, 1999:117). The predominance of 'criminality' and 'illegality' (or conversely on 'legality') on Italian immigration debates has a clear connection with this legalistic culture, which emphasises the overall rejection of any type of 'illicit' behaviour (understood not only

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[29] Broadly speaking, the present state of the extreme Right in Spain can be described as disorganized, highly fragmented, and isolated from mainstream politics. Its voice is also virtually absent from the mainstream media.
[30] See particularly the presentation of the project of law reform by the Minister of Interior, Mayor Oreja at the chamber of deputies (Plenary Session n° 3, 5 October 2000, p.1424-1425)

as a behaviour that challenges the rule of law, but also the norms of morality) and the stigmatization of those individuals who are believed to be in 'illegal' situation.

In time, these remarks should be taken in their *comparative* context. I am by no means making the claim that in Spain there is no discrimination or negative representations of immigrants. Racist and xenophobic discourses and episodes have happened before in the country and there is no reason to believe that they could not happen again in the future. [31] The point I wish to underline here is that, within the Italian socio-political context, immigrants' representation has been so consistently negative that not even more progressive parts of the left were able to legitimately counter such accounts by credibly presenting alternative categories. The escalation, during the 1990s, of the 'spiral of fear' (Dal Lago, 1999) concerning immigrants' presence in the country has not found at the public sphere dissonant or critical voices legitimate and powerful enough to challenge it. Even if political leaders, particularly those closer to the right, cannot be directly charged for the creation of such negative representation, they have been largely responsible for its maintenance and further institutionalization. In Spain, on the other hand, even the conservative PP, without necessarily being 'immigrant-friendly', has constantly tried to keep the terms of the debates outside the 'criminality/insecurity' interpretative framework.

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[31] In 1996 a poll elaborated by the Centro de Investigaciones Sociologicas revealed that 39.9% of Spaniards viewed immigrants with 'suspicion', see CIS, 'Actitudes ante la inmigracion', Madrid, June, 1996.

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