

Nominalisation as Racialisation in the Italian Press¹

Chris Hanretty
University of East Anglia

Costanza Hermanin
Columbia University

Abstract: In this article we discuss the language used by the Italian media to refer to immigrant and other minority groups. In particular, we focus on one linguistic device commonly used when referring to minorities, namely, the use of nominalised forms of ethnic, nationality or religious-based adjectives, which leads to talk of 'the Romanian', 'the Muslim', and so on. We show that such nominalisation has recently become the subject of criticism both from courts and from journalists' associations. We consequently examine a corpus of articles drawn from the two main Italian dailies, La Repubblica and Il Corriere della Sera, from 1992 onwards. Whilst we find no global trends, we find that some references – to Romanians, Albanians, and 'islamici' – have become more nominalised over time, at least in La Repubblica. Trends in nominalisation for Il Corriere are stable or declining, but start from a higher rate. Based on these results, we argue that La Repubblica is catching up with a pattern of prejudicial coverage which is likely to date back to before 1992.

Keywords: nominalisation, racialisation, press, *La Repubblica*, *Il Corriere della Sera*

On 9 March 2009 the leader of the National Alliance (Alleanza Nazionale, AN) an Italian political party usually described as post-fascist, made a plea against the linking of ethnicity and crime in the news.² He was addressing the widespread use, by some Italian media, of the nationality, ethnic origin, or faith of the alleged perpetrators – rather than their proper names – when reporting a crime. The fact that even the leader of a right-wing party which has traditionally employed anti-immigrant tropes, governing in coalition with the overtly anti-immigrant Northern League, felt the need to warn the Italian media, is telling.

The case at hand referred to the rape of a young Italian woman in the Caffarella Park in Rome. Two Romanian citizens suspected of the crime were subsequently arrested. Even before formal allegations were made, the mere suspicion that the criminals could be Romanians made their national

origin the main focus of most news. Romanians, who currently make up the most numerous group of foreign residents in Italy (ISTAT, 2009), have become sensitive targets for crime news – particularly since the separate murder of an Italian woman by a Romanian citizen in October 2007. In the recent Caffarella case the two Romanians initially suspected were cleared of the rape allegation after a month in which their case had been on the first page of the most read Italian newspapers almost every day. A majority of the headlines, and a majority of the articles featured in *La Repubblica* explicitly mentioned the nationality of the suspects; less than half mentioned the suspects' names. Most of these articles appeared on the first pages.³ When the first group of Romanian suspects was cleared, attention merely switched to a new national group, Albanians ('*Stupro alla Caffarella. La pista degli albanesi*', or '*Caffarella Rape: The Albanian Track*').

When, some months later, an Italian citizen was arrested for a series of rapes and attempted rapes, the coverage was different. Although the levels of coverage were similar (aided by the fact that the individual in question was a local official of the Democratic Party (Partito Democratico, PD)), the individual's name was used repeatedly, and his national origin only used once. Moreover, most of the articles were confined to middle pages or local sections.⁴

The portrayal of immigration by the Italian media has drawn the attention of many scholars. Economic migration to Italy surfaced relatively late compared to most western European countries, with the imbalance between emigration and immigration turning positive only after 1973 (Pugliese, 2002). The media have been quicker than many other sections of Italian society in their appraisal of the immigration phenomenon. Whilst the press had already begun to treat migration issues systematically from the end of the seventies, the Italian politico-institutional system took time to address the phenomenon in a comprehensive manner (Sciortino and Colombo, 2004).⁵

The Caffarella case not only demonstrates the way that the Italian media 'front-loads' the national origin of migrants accused of crimes; the differences in the tone and the nature of the coverage given to these cases, and the statement made by Fini, suggest that the media's portrayal of migrant groups is no longer just a subject of academic debate, but also a matter of public debate.

Studies on the treatment of immigration by the media have been particularly frequent since the 1990s.⁶ Indeed, most of the literature identifies the end of the 1980s and, in particular, the so-called Albanian 'invasions' after 1991, as watersheds between a period of 'benign anti-racism' on the part of the press and a subsequent alarmism and poorly-veiled racism (Balbo and Manconi, 1990; Dal Lago, 1999). Several authors have also talked about 'moral panics' inflated by the public and media

discourse on criminal acts allegedly committed by immigrants, and in particular Albanians (Barbagli, 1998 and 2008; Mai, 2002; Maneri, 2001).

Sciortino and Colombo (2004) disagree concerning the time boundaries identified by other studies as marking the development of the negative portrayal of immigrants, but they concur on the fact that the Italian press has

unified the discursive field... promot[ing] a vision of immigration... [which is] much more preoccupied with the impact of immigration on the social and cultural life of Italy (2004: 102).

One of the main objectives of the studies quoted above was therefore to understand whether the press was simply testifying to the variation in societal attitudes towards immigrants or, rather, played an autonomous role in the construction of the immigrant as an 'other' and of immigration as an emergency.

Our study also focuses on this question since, in very recent times, an increasing number of voices have pointed to the prejudicial character of Italian news about events involving migrants or Roma.⁷ We concentrate especially on one linguistic strategy, nominalisation, which we consider as a highly stigmatising device when referring to specific foreigners' groups. As one way of turning a group into an 'other' is by referring to members of that group exclusively by ascriptive characteristics, the article attempts to assess whether the nominalised use of ascriptive characteristics – such as nationality, ethnicity, and religion – has expanded over time.⁸

The article is structured as follows: in the first section we present the framework supporting the hypothesis mentioned above. We then describe recent developments in jurisprudence and self-regulatory initiatives undertaken by journalists themselves, both of which testify to a widespread concern over the way the Italian media treat news involving migrants, and which underpin our concern with nominalisation as a stigmatising device. The third section presents our empirical analysis of nominalisation of immigrants in two major Italian newspapers, *La Repubblica* and *Il Corriere della Sera* between 1992 and 2008. The conclusion connects the insights of this analysis with the results of other scholars.

Otherness and exclusion: nominalisation as racialisation

In this first section of the article, we shall explain why we chose to look at the specific linguistic device of nominalisation to assess whether and how the Italian press may construct a stigmatising view of immigrants. For this purpose, we define nominalisation as the process by which either a noun or a syntactic unit functioning as a noun phrase is derived from any other kind of unit, such as an adjective (Matthews, 2007). In the following, we

will explain why we hypothesise that a growing use of nominalised instances referring to the ethno-national (or religious) background of individual immigrants in the press may be considered, in itself, as a marker of stigma.

As mentioned in the introduction, a vast literature points to the development of anti-immigrant racism in Italian society from the mid-1980s onwards. The automatic association of immigration with criminality seems to have built the main basis for the anti-immigrant sentiment. However, as the first Italian minister of immigration, Margherita Boniver, noted,

often, racial intolerance is not manifested explicitly; racism is inhibited because it is morally wrong. Thus, it has to be justified on different grounds, this is what is called 'additional racism' (Boniver quoted in Triandafyllidou, 1999: 79).

The association between immigration and deviance might of course provide the additional element evoked by Boniver. Such a tendency is confirmed in most early work about perceptions of immigration, as well as by some specific quantitative studies analysing press corpuses and highlighting the correlation of terms referring to the national origin of immigrants and the vocabulary of securitisation (Barbagli, 1998; Stoppiello, 1999).

Closer to our approach, a number of authors have analysed not only the context in which news on immigrants was reported, but also the categories and the linguistic devices used to refer to them in those articles. Sciortino and Colombo's 2004 inquiry, in particular, shows that as early as the 1980s immigrants had become progressively 'depersonalised' in press articles. Incidentally, the phenomenon of depersonalisation is also at the core of another major sociological study on the public discourse on immigration in the 1990s, significantly titled *Non persone* - 'Nobodies' (Dal Lago, 1999).

The analysis of the press by Sciortino and Colombo shows, in a first period (1972-1992), the abandonment of proper names and occupational categories in favour of the all-encompassing categories, *immigrato* and *extracomunitario*. Later, the authors notice an evolution towards

a noticeable retrieval of strategies of connotation based not on the distinctions of Italian and immigrants but rather on those among the immigrants. Nationality is naturally the focus of these alternative nomenclatures [...] (Sciortino and Colombo, 2004: 107)

Nationality becomes indeed the most widespread type of characterisation used in the daily newspaper *La Stampa* between 1992 and 2001. The individual characterisation of foreigners is increasingly rare, while the terms occurring most frequently in articles on immigration are those

referring to the ethno-national origin of the groups which are most present on the Italian peninsula.⁹

These results receive further confirmation from Anna Triandafyllidou's (1999) analysis of two mainstream weekly magazines, *L'Espresso* and *Panorama*, conducted over the period 1990-1995. Attempting to assess whether the presence of immigrants engenders a redefinition of Italian identity in an exclusionary fashion, the author identifies the use of a number of categories which translate the notion of 'otherness' into the language of the press. Terms pertaining to the categories defined by the author as ethnicity and civic values are the most used. Concerning ethnicity, Triandafyllidou (1999: 79) notes

a tendency to create ethnic hierarchies among immigrants of different origins. Thus, an immigrant of Albanian origin is by definition a criminal while being a Nigerian woman is synonymous with being a prostitute [...]

Again, the author highlights the reference to the national origin of the immigrants portrayed in the press, a national origin which not only indicates the legal status of the subject, or his or her place of birth, but also, as the author herself recognises

patterns of behaviour stemming from different cultural backgrounds and lifestyles attributed to ethno-biological factors. Because the national character is supposedly inherent in the individual's genetic code, its features are not subject to change. This view provides fertile ground for not only xenophobia, but also overt racism to emerge (Triandafyllidou, 1999: 81).

Racialisation refers to the production of racial identities through specific discursive devices. It identifies the extension of racial meanings to previously racially unclassified terms or broader categories. Racialisation processes have been at the core of the literature on 'new racism', which underlines how contemporary racism tends to concentrate more on cultural differences rather than on biological ones. From this perspective, ethno-national and religious belonging become the main focus of discriminatory behaviour and racism (Barker, 1981; Gilroy, 1991; Miles, 1989).

Our argument is, therefore, that the use of nominalised instances of adjectives referring to the ethno-national or religious background of immigrants in the press is a way of strongly racialising discourse on immigration. By nominalising an adjectival instance, journalists depersonalise the subject of a piece of news and put all the emphasis on her belonging to a specific ethno-national or religious group. There are three principal reasons why the nominalised use of these ethno-national adjectives should be considered as stigmatising language.

First, such nominalised uses typically preclude reference to more general categories to which the reader may belong. For example, it is both

common and natural to see written, '*una donna rumena/romena*' (a Romanian woman) and by using this form the writer makes clear that the individual in question belongs to two categories: the set of women, and the set of Romanians. Since the set of women is a large set encompassing half of the population, it is not hard for the reader either to recognise him or herself in this categorisation, or to make an association to someone they know who belongs to this category. The same reasoning applies *pari passu* to other group categories – including, for example, reference to occupational categories.

Second, the use of these adjectives as nouns is stigmatising insofar as it depersonalises the individual in question. That is, these adjectives can be applied both to persons and to objects. In this way they differ from other common reference strategies – use of individuals' names, reference to an occupational category, reference to gender – which can only be predicated of people. Consequently, adjectives which can be predicated of both objects and individuals are more dehumanising. This property of nominalisation has been noted before: as Fowler (1991: 80) writes, 'reification [is one potential of nominalisation]. Processes and qualities assume the status of things: impersonal, inanimate, capable of being amassed and counted like capital, paraded like possessions'.

Third, and following Grice (1975), the implication of front-loading the national characteristic (by nominalising it) is to assign it particular relevance. The fact that many references to immigrant groups occur in the context of criminality may lead the reader to make the (fallacious) inference that the national characteristic is relevant to criminality, instead of multiple other candidate factors – most often the excess of young impoverished men amongst immigrant communities, a group which has higher rates of criminality (Ministero dell'Intero, 2007: 354).

This additional information is, for Teun van Dijk (1993: 258-9), a form of 'overcompleteness'. Such overcomplete passages may be used to convey a negative picture of a news actor. If a Rastafarian is described as 'unemployed', this is usually not a neutral description, but a characterisation of young blacks that fits into a stereotype, namely, that many of them don't work. The most pervasive form of overcompleteness, however, is the very mention of origin, colour, race, or ethnicity of news actors in situations where this information is clearly irrelevant, but which may be used as an implicit explanation of usually negative actions of minority group members.

Our main hypothesis is that the use of nominalised instances of ethno-national and religious connotations in the Italian press has expanded over time, so much so that it has become the most usual way of reporting news involving immigrants. The hypothesis seems to be confirmed by the recent comparison of self-regulation initiatives aiming to control the use of such connotations, and by the jurisprudential sanction of the fact that a

national connotation can be considered as discriminatory when used in particular contexts. We will now turn to the consideration of these initiatives, before passing to the analysis of the press corpus.

Recent developments: juridification versus self-regulation

Our argument that the use of nominalised instances of ethno-national/religious referents has discriminatory potential is not only substantiated by theory, but is also found in jurisprudence. The Italian Supreme Court has recently (2005) supported such a perception in a judgement where it had to evaluate whether calling somebody *marocchino* (Moroccan) could, in specific circumstances, be considered an offence. In its judgement, the Court concluded that

nominalising the adjective which refers to the ethnic background of a person and reprimanding her in this way, with an overtly mocking attitude, constitutes an insult which is furthermore associated with a clear racially discriminatory intent...¹⁰

Abstracting from any peculiar connotations that the nominalised instance may have in the Italian language, we note that even the European Court of Justice, deciding upon a Belgian case, did not hesitate to apply European Union racial anti-discrimination law to the case of an employer who had publicly declared that he would not recruit Moroccans. For the court, the fact that an employer states publicly that it will not recruit employee of a certain *ethnic or racial origin* constitutes direct discrimination,¹¹ and in such cases, the court highlighted that the nominalised instance of an adjective referring to nationality may well be used for racial connotation, and possibly discrimination.

The examples quoted above point, however, to situations where a discriminatory intent is manifest. The stigmatising effect of a press discourse based on ethnic categories cannot, by contrast, be considered as overtly discriminatory and thus capable of being sanctioned in court. Applying non-discrimination criteria to the work of the media is much more complicated, as every restriction in the use of language may be considered as a circumvention of the right of expression, and of the freedom of the press; a tension well exemplified by the case of the Danish anti-Islamic cartoons, for example.¹²

Ethno-racial characteristics are normally considered as 'sensitive data', and therefore protected by privacy legislation. Nonetheless, the statutes on the protection of personal data provide for exceptions precisely when the handling of sensitive information is carried out by the media. In Italian and European legislation, while all public and private subjects need to have the written consent of the persons concerned and the authorisation

of the privacy watchdog in order to collect and process information on individuals' ethno-racial background, journalists are specifically exempted from this requirement.¹³

Consequently, only soft-law instruments, such as codes of conduct, can regulate the media's use of this kind of information. In the Italian case, soft-law norms adopted by the privacy watchdog in agreement with the National Council of the Press Association leave a wide margin of appreciation for the use of sensitive information such as ethno-racial origin or religious belief, as the sole limit placed on journalists' use of such material is that it should be used only where the information is essential to the news item.¹⁴

It can, however, be argued that Italian journalists have moved far beyond the strictly essential use of such information, especially in light of recent initiatives promoting further self-regulation of those journalists who write on immigration-related issues. The first of these initiatives, promoted by the Italian section of the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) in 2008 and ratified by the National Press Federation and by the Ordine dei giornalisti (Journalists' Association), is the 'Charter of Rome'. Whilst providing a glossary for the correct use of terms such as asylum seeker, refugee and illegal immigrant, the Charter also reiterates journalists' duty of non-discrimination and calls for specific training on the representation of migrants among journalists. Furthermore, it provides for the establishment of an independent observatory entrusted with the task of monitoring, periodically, 'the evolution of the way in which information is provided on asylum seekers, refugees, victims of smuggling, migrants and minorities'.¹⁵ At the time of writing, however, only anti-racist NGOs have attempted such a monitoring,¹⁶ while the observatory promoted by the Charter has remained on paper.

In some other cases, journalists have launched self-regulatory initiatives on the issue, e.g. *Giornalisti contro il razzismo* (Journalists Against Racism).¹⁷ This initiative, which aims to ban some words – such as *clandestino* (illegal [immigrant]) – from the media's language entirely, and to mainstream greater consciousness about the treatment of migration issues, is also of very recent pedigree.

The multiplication of such initiatives therefore substantiates our assumption that the language used by the Italian press over the past few years has become increasingly stigmatising, and therefore that we should expect an increase in the nominalised use of the ethno-racial adjectives, insofar as such use is also stigmatising.

Empirics

In order to test our hypothesis, we identified five terms with an ethno-national or religious connotation as potentially subject to the phenomenon of nominalisation: *albanese*, *islamico*, *marocchino*, *musulmano*, *r*meno* (Albanian, Islamic, Muslim, Romanian).¹⁸ We also selected the term *extracomunitario* ('non-EU') in order to test our hypothesis that nominalised instances of words with a specific ethno-national connotation are more stigmatising and would therefore be more commonly used than words which connote citizenship. Finally, we selected one control term – *abruzzese* ('from the Abruzzi') – which can be used both as a noun and as an adjective, but which is not typically used to refer to outsider groups.

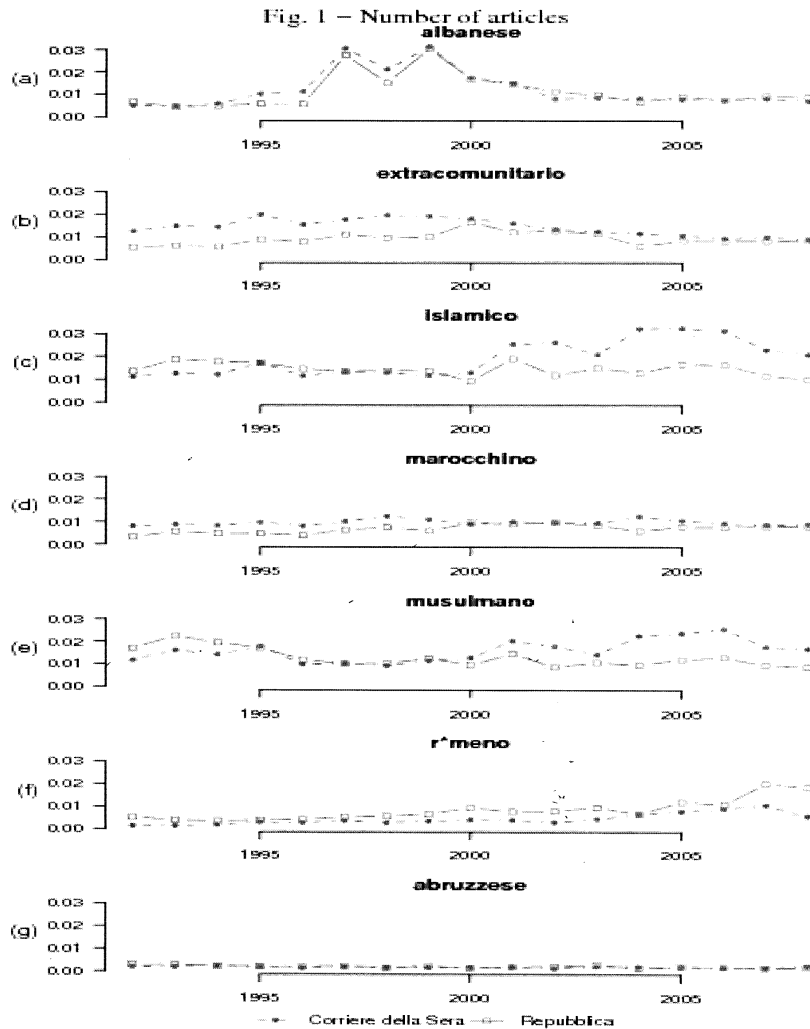
The basis for the choice of the first five terms is relatively simple. Three terms – *albanese*, *marocchino*, and *rumeno/romeno* – have been chosen because Albania, Morocco and Romania have been the three most common countries of origin for migrants to Italy for most of the period we analyse (1992-2008). The two terms *islamico* and *musulmano* were chosen because of the increased salience of perceived conflict between Islam and 'the West', not only in international relations but also in local politics (see, for example, the Northern League's numerous campaigns against the construction of mosques), after September 11. We took two different terms as both are commonly used in their nominalised form in the press, even though, until recently, *islamico* used to be mainly employed to denote objects, and not individuals. One reason for its increasing use may well be its assonance with 'islamist', which therefore gives it a more negative connotation as compared to *musulmano*.

Having identified these terms, we then wrote a short script to download all articles featuring any of these terms from the online archives of *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica*. These two newspapers were chosen because they are the best-selling Italian newspapers, and thus are the most important actors in the print media, and because of availability: both newspapers have freely accessible online archives that date back to 1985 (in the case of *La Repubblica*) and 1992 (in the case of *Il Corriere*).¹⁹

Both archives are extensive, indexing on average 76,000 and 104,000 articles per year for *Il Corriere* and *La Repubblica* respectively. In the case of *La Repubblica* archives, however, fewer articles were indexed before 2000 (an average of 43,000 articles per year); we were unable to ascertain whether the post-2000 growth resulted from an increase in the number of print articles (from new local editions of *La Repubblica*) or from an increase in the percentage of print articles which were indexed.

Our script downloaded all articles from 1992 until the end of 2008. The search engines used by the two websites do not inflect search terms, but do permit wildcard searches. Consequently, searches were performed on *r*men**, *extracomunitari**, and so on. Following downloading, articles were transformed to plain text.

Figure 1: Frequency of articles containing the search terms as a proportion of the total number of articles indexed by each newspaper each year



Figures 1(a)-(h) show the number of articles featuring each search term as a proportion of the total number of articles indexed by each newspaper each year. This allows us to show the frequency of use of each term whilst accounting for differences in the overall quantity of articles over time and between the two newspapers. To give an example: whilst at the beginning of the period around one in every hundred articles in both newspapers featured the term *islamic**, by 2005 more than three out of every hundred articles in *Il Corriere della Sera* featured this term, compared to slightly less than one in a hundred for *La Repubblica*. Expressed in absolute terms, *Il Corriere della Sera* therefore published over 2,500 articles featuring '*islamic**', compared to slightly over 1,000 for *La Repubblica*.

Whilst these figures are presented as descriptive statistics and do not noticeably affect our analysis, the number of articles featuring each search term does seem to vary in line with our expectations. Thus, the number of articles featuring the search term *albanes** increases with the 1997 fall of the Berisha regime and with the 1999 inflows, but sinks after 2000, with the resettlement of the majority of Albanian refugees who fled during the conflict. The search terms *islamic** shows similar patterns, consisting of a strong peak in 2001, presumably associated with the twin towers attack, followed by a high number of articles in the years that follow, although there is a tail-off for last year. This is not the case for *musulman**, which displays no clear trend. There are no significant trends in either direction for *marocchin** or *extracomunitari**, but the number of articles featuring *rumen** increases significantly after 1999.

Since our reasons for looking at nominalisation have to do with Italian politics and society, we are principally interested in newspaper articles set in Italy. If trends in nominalisation were driven by articles about foreign affairs or sport, or if such articles formed a large part of the total number of articles about each group, our results would be less convincing. In order to test this possibility, we investigated the number of *cronaca* ('local news') articles featuring each search term. We considered an article to be an item of *cronaca* if its section keyword named a city or region (Venezia, Roma, Puglia, Palermo, Napoli, Milano, Genova, Firenze, Bologna, Bari), or if it mentioned *cronaca* or *cronache*. Since section keywords were only available for *La Repubblica* articles, we carried out this analysis for that newspaper only.

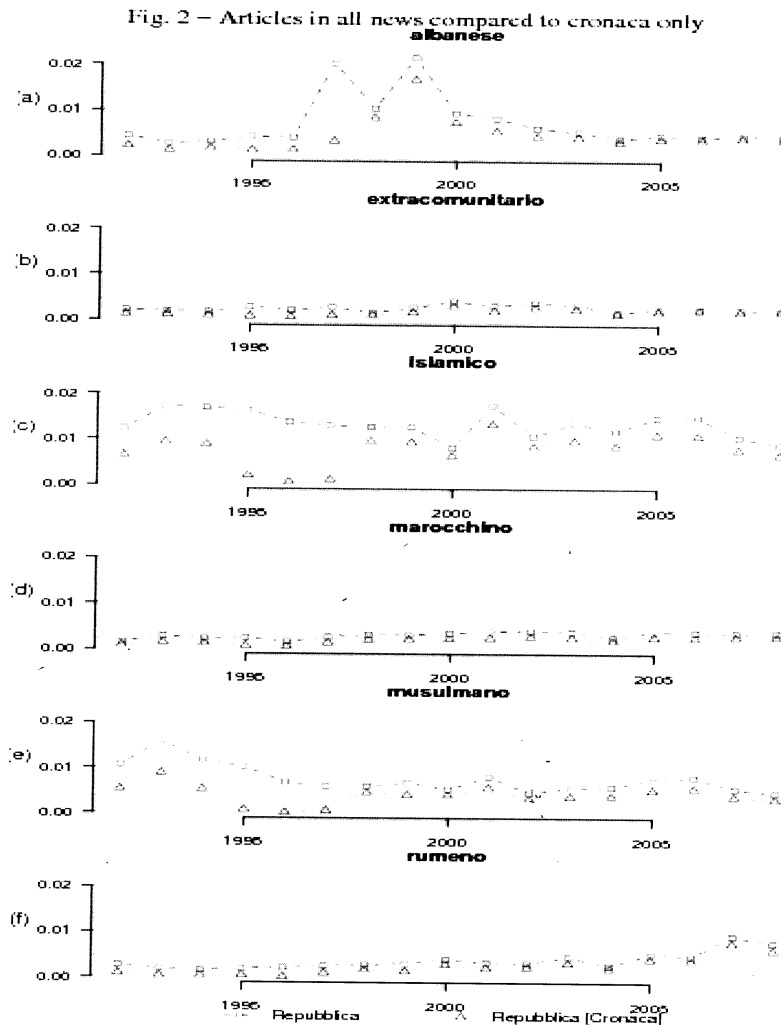
The results are given in Figure 2, which shows the relative number of articles in *La Repubblica* featuring each search term for all articles and *cronaca* articles respectively. Once again, the figures refer to the proportion of articles featuring each search term relative to the total number of articles each year.

With the exception of *islamic** and *musulman** for the years 1994-1998 and *albanes** for 1997, the majority of articles featuring each search term are *cronaca* articles. We can therefore be confident that the trends we identify are not importantly driven by articles about foreign affairs. We show this for *La Repubblica*; we assume that similar trends would be seen for *Il Corriere della Sera* were section information available.

Our figures provide information on the frequency with which our search terms are used as nominalised adjectives, or as adjectives modifying other terms. Whilst we can be sure that nominalised adjectives refer to individuals, we cannot be sure that uses of our search terms *as adjectives* always refer to individuals, instead of referring to animals, objects, or abstract concepts. Thus, although the figures on the frequency of articles using these key terms are interesting, they do not help us to answer our key question, namely whether the Italian media has, to an increasing degree,

nominalised certain minority groups. In order to answer this question, we parsed the corpus using TreeTagger (Schmid, 1994).²⁰ TreeTagger uses probabilistic decision trees to identify which part of speech – verb, noun, pronoun, adjective, adverb, and so on – each word in the sentence is.

Figure 2: Proportion of cronaca articles featuring each search term relative to the total number of articles each year



Unfortunately, TreeTagger cannot be used directly to identify whether instances of our search terms are being used as adjectives or nouns. TreeTagger tends to classify most instances of the search terms as adjectival uses; if these terms are typically classed as adjectives, this gives limited support for the argument that the primary use of many of these words is

adjectival, and thus that nominalised uses marginalise these particular groups. Consequently, we attempted to identify nominalised uses by the parts of speech surrounding them. In Italian, adjectives referring to the ethno-national, religious or citizenship background of individuals are almost exclusively put after the noun they refer to. That is, we considered as nominalised instances all instances of our search terms which were *not* preceded by a

- proper name or noun
- proper name + intra-sentence punctuation
- proper name or noun + adjective
- proper name or noun + intra-sentence punctuation + adjective
- proper name or noun + intra-sentence punctuation + adjective +

intra-sentence punctuation

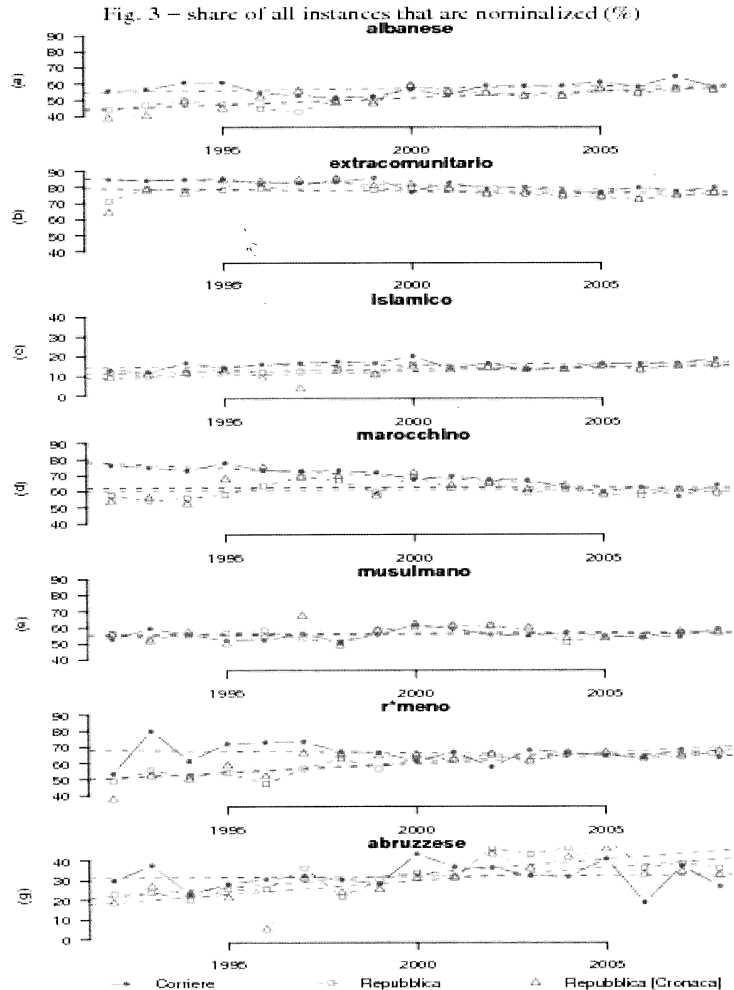
We then calculated the ratio of nominalised to non-nominalised uses for each term. Figure 3 shows these ratios. Three lines are plotted for *Il Corriere della Sera*, *La Repubblica* (all articles) and *La Repubblica cronaca*. Some axes are spaced differently in order better to show trends across time.

It is clear from the figures that our initial hypothesis – that nominalised uses of these terms would increase over time – is not borne out by the overall trends. However, there are trends for specific groups and specific newspapers which merit further discussion.

Four search terms showed a significant²¹ increase over time for *la Repubblica*: *albanes**, *islamic**, *r*men**, and *abruzzes**. Both *albanes** and *rumen** are terms denoting ethno-national background; we therefore expected that they would increase over time. *Islamic**, although it does not denote ethno-national background but rather ethno-religious background, has increasingly been used as a noun; earlier we suggested that the use of *islamic** had increased because of its assonance with *islamist*, giving it a negative connotation. If increased nominalised use of this term is an indicator of latent prejudice, and thus of negative connotations, this increase too might have been expected. Finally, the increase in nominalisation for our control term, *abruzzes** was unexpected; we know of no reason why nominalised uses of this term should have increased.²²

These increases are not the result of a global increase in nominalisation, since for three terms – *extracomunitari**, *marocchin**, and *musulman**, there was no significant increase in the ratio of nominalised to non-nominalised uses. For *musulman**: if the choice of *islamic**, because of its assonance with *islamist*, is expressive of greater latent prejudice than *musulman**, then the flat trends for *musulman** may reflect a substitution effect between these two terms, rather than the absence of a trend in latent prejudice towards Muslims in Italy. For *extracomunitari**, the fact that many minority groups often exposed to prejudice (such as Romanians) are no longer *extracomunitari* makes interpretation difficult.

Figure 3: Ratio of nominalised to all other instances



By contrast, when we examined the trends for *Il Corriere della Sera*, we found only two significant trends, both of which were negative – *extracomunitari** and *marocchin**. As noted before, it is difficult to interpret trends for *extracomunitari** when the composition of that group has changed. Nevertheless, the fact that *Il Corriere della Sera* and *La Repubblica* should demonstrate such differing trends is surely of interest. One possible interpretation is that *La Repubblica* – which, according to Assessment of Newspaper Circulation (Accertamento Diffusione Stampa, ADS) data has maintained its sales compared to a slight decline in sales for *Il Corriere* – has been forced to move its coverage ‘downmarket’ in order to gain new readers or replace former readers, and has chosen to expand territorially with the creation of new regional editions. Such a move downmarket might

bring with it different patterns of reference to minority groups. If these trends are concentrated in one particular newspaper, then this may explain why numerous actors have drawn attention to the stigmatisation of minority groups, despite the absence of clear overall trends in stigmatising language, apart from the frequent use of ethno-national / religious referents.

Comparison of the rates of nominalisation for each term should be made with caution. Since greater use of our search terms as adjectives means a lower ratio of nominalised to non-nominalised uses, the ratios shown in the figures also depend on whether a given word is more often used to refer to animals, objects, or abstract concepts, instead of persons. This is why we cannot claim that a ratio of 10 nominalised uses to 90 non-nominalised uses for *islamic** is more or less stigmatising than a ratio of 80:20 for *extracomunitari**, because words differ in the frequency with which they are applied to individuals. *Islamic**, to continue the example, can be used as an adjective to modify a number of other words (*musica, cultura, fede, tempio* – music, culture, faith, temple); the adjective *extracomunitari**, by contrast, is much less applicable to objects.

Having said this, the rates of nominalisation for each word do display some consistency. Words which refer to specific ethno-national groups – *marocchin**, *r*men** and *albanes** – are nominalised, on average, to a similar extent, i.e. in between 50 and 80 per cent of cases for *marocchin**, 40 to 70 per cent for *albanes** and 45 to 75 per cent for *r*men**. Similar rates are found for *musulman** (50 to 60 per cent), while the rate for *abruzzes** is much lower (between 20 and 45 per cent).²³

The press therefore talks about these four groups in a particular way – and it does so a lot. The 1.2 million *abruzzesi* merit a fraction of the articles featuring Moroccans (resident population in 2008 estimated at 366,000), Albanians (402,000) or Romanians (635,000).²⁴

Why then are these groups so frequently referred to and nominalised to different extents as compared, for instance, to the control term? Why should references to these groups be nominalised to such an extent? We have already argued that nominalisation is an expression of latent prejudice: references to these groups are nominalised at a high rate because of the latent prejudice towards these groups. This, however, need not be the sole explanation of nominalisation. A complementary explanation starts from the kind of story featuring references to these groups. Because of the repeated linkage between minority groups and criminality, the same linkage criticised by Fini, the national origin of criminals has acquired ever greater relevance. And, as we have already noted at the beginning, nominalisation of ethno-national characteristics is a rhetorically effective way of front-loading these characteristics and implying to the reader that they are important. Ethnic minorities which feature in other types of stories – Chinese residents of Prato, for example – would not therefore be

nominalised in the same way, not because they face different levels of prejudice, but because the frame is different. Those minority groups which do have higher rates of criminality, such as Romanians, Albanians and Moroccans (Ministero dell'Interno, 2007; Barbagli, 2008), do feature in crime news, and will thus be more likely to be nominalised for that reason, over and above any nominalisation due to the prejudice these groups would face anyway.

Conclusion

We have claimed that nominalisation is a stigmatising language, but that it has not generally become more common over recent years in the newspapers we selected. Why then have NGOs, journalists' associations, and even international organisations acted as if stigmatising language in general – of which nominalisation is an example – has increased markedly?

One possibility is that global increases in nominalisation are occurring, but that they are not visible at the level we have selected. Nominalisation might appear more often in other newspapers, newspapers which typically have fewer journalistic staff and which are consequently less specialised and less likely to participate in the kind of self-regulatory initiatives discussed earlier in the article. This would tally with previous research: Cotesta and de Angelis (1999) find that conflictual frames for migration stories are more common in the sub-national papers (*Il Resto del Carlino*, *La Nazione*) than in national newspapers (*Il Corriere della Sera*, and, to a lesser extent, *Il Messaggero*). As we have already suggested, *La Repubblica's* recent expansion into regional and local news may therefore explain its increasing rates of nominalisation.

If global trends in nominalisation do not appear, nominalisation might appear in the two newspapers we have selected, but only under certain conditions. For example, nominalisation might occur only in certain sections of the newspaper, certain types of article (for example, crime), or in the work of certain writers. We have already tried to account for one such confounding factor by including only those articles which dealt with *cronaca*: as we have seen, however, this did not change our findings. Or, to provide a further example, nominalisation might occur less in certain types of article – for example, those articles which are directly sourced from news agencies and are reprinted largely unaltered.

A second possibility is that increases in stigmatising language on the part of the media are real, but are not translating into increasingly nominalised use of the ethno-racial referents we list. It is possible that the stigmatising language employed by the media is too mutable for the analysis we carried out to identify global trends over time. If this were the case, future research should continue in the line of Stoppiello (1999), who carried out concordance analysis on texts involving references to migrants,

identifying which terms frequently co-occurred. Concordance analysis lends itself more easily to the identification of stigmatising tropes over time, since it allows the researcher to identify certain co-occurring words on a year-by-year basis. However, the disadvantage of concordance analysis is that it places a far greater burden on the researcher to prove that the commonly co-occurring phrases are in fact stigmatising.

A third possibility, the one which we favour most, is that whilst nominalisation is an appropriate indicator of the stigmatising properties of the language, journalists have been using nominalised forms of ascriptive categories from the beginning of the media's coverage of immigrant and other minority groups. Consequently, the attention paid to such language recently reflects a change in the amount of such language, more than a change in its nature; this would confirm the analysis of Sciortino and Colombo (2004) insofar as they assert substantial continuity in the use of categorising expressions. Thus, the increases that we have found in stigmatising language, for instance, for some of the search terms featuring in *La Repubblica*, represent both a catch-up to a previously existing high level of nominalisation, and the fact that the level of nominalisation may shift depending on the groups which are most likely to be identified as being the threat of the moment.

Of course, one may draw different conclusions from our finding that there has been substantial continuity between 1992 and 2008. One may argue that the Italian media's language is, was, and likely, will be, stigmatising, and that therefore the issue remains an issue of concern. Or, one may argue that since there has been no global increase in nominalisation over the years, those who assert current high levels of stigmatisation are simply crying wolf, and that the Italian print media should not bear special responsibility for the stigmatisation of these minority groups.

Notes

¹ In compliance with Italian academic folkways, the authors acknowledge that Costanza Hermanin wrote the odd-numbered pages and Chris Hanretty the even-numbered pages.

² *'La violenza sulle donne è una piaga sociale per l'ampiezza del fenomeno e una vera e propria emergenza civile che colpisce la dignità della persona umana. Ma bisogna stare attenti a non dare una "connotazione etnica" allo stupro.'* Gianfranco Fini quoted in *la Repubblica*, 9 March 2009, p.13. See also G. Lerner, 'Il catalogo dei reati etnici', *la Repubblica*, 9 March 2009, p.1.

³ Search of *la Repubblica* archives (<http://ricerca.repubblica.it/>) carried out on 16 March 2009 for 'Caffarella' and 'romen*', and subsequently with 'Karol Racz' and 'Alexandru Loyos'. To quote only the articles adopting this linguistic device in their titles: 'Roma, fidanzatini aggrediti nel parco, caccia a due stranieri dell'est', 15 February 2009, p.3; 'Stupro, identificati i due romeni sono in fuga, caccia anche all'estero', 17 February

2009, p.8; 'Roma, i romeni restano in carcere. Piemonte, violenza su una russa', 23 February 2009, p.2; 'Scritte naziste contro i romeni vicino al parco dell'aggressione', 25 February 2009, p.2; 'Scarcerato uno stupratore romeno. Maroni protesta e lo espelle subito', 1 March 2009, p.13; 'Stupro, Racz attacca Loyos. Sta coprendo altri due rom', 5 March 2009, p.10; 'Stupro, un nuovo DNA scagiona i romeni', 6 March 2009, p.15; 'Il romeno Racz: "Sono povero, ma onesto"', 9 March 2009, p.7; 'Noi rumeni usati come capro espiatorio', 11 March 2009, p.2; 'Stupro, scagionati i due romeni', 11 March 2009, p.1; 'Roma, raid contro gli immigrati, via i romeni di qui. E giù botte', 12 March 2009, p.14; 'Se i due romeni fossero romani', 13 March 2009, p.1.

⁴ Two searches for 'stupratore'/'violentatore' ('rapist') and 'Roma', and for 'Luca Bianchini', were performed on 23 July 2009.

⁵ A Ministry with responsibility for immigration was first established in 1991, and the comprehensive Act reforming the Italian immigration system was adopted in 1998 (the Turco Napolitano Law, Leg. Decree 286/1998).

⁶ See for example the special issue of *Studi Emigrazione*: 'Mass media, conflitti etnici e immigrazione', no 135, 1999.

⁷ Not least, the European Commissioner for Human Rights in par. 32 of the *Memorandum following his visit to Italy on 19-20 June 2008*, CommDH (2008)18, Strasbourg, 28 July 2008.

⁸ Religion is an ascriptive characteristic insofar as it is commonly ascribed to individuals. It is not an ascriptive characteristic in the sense that it involves fixed placement (often at birth) in a particular social group. However, it is often used as if it were ascriptive in this second sense, particularly as far as Islam is concerned. Worse, religion is often inferred from other ascriptive characteristics, as happens when those born in majority Muslim countries are assumed to practice Islam.

⁹ On this, see also Stoppiello (1999).

¹⁰ 'Sostantivare l'aggettivo che riflette la provenienza etnica di una persona ed apostrofare quest'ultima in tal modo, con evidente atteggiamento di scherno e di dileggio costituisce ingiuria, che si connota, per giunta, di chiaro intento di discriminazione razziale, rendendo così più riprovevole sotto il profilo soggettivo la condotta offensiva.' Cass. Crim. 19378 of 5 April 2005. Rv. 231560.

¹¹ ECJ C 54/07, *Feryn*, emphasis added.

¹² The controversy concerned the September 2005 publication by the *Jyllands-Posten* of cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammed in a variety of guises, some of which were inflammatory

¹³ See sect. 20, 23, 26 and 136 of the Code on the Protection of Sensitive Data (Leg. Decree 196/2003) as well as cons. 17 and 37 and Article 9 of Directive 95/46/EC.

¹⁴ 'Nel raccogliere dati personali atti a rivelare origine razziale ed etnica, convinzioni religiose...il giornalista garantisce il diritto all'informazione su fatti di interesse pubblico, nel rispetto "dell'essenzialità" dell'informazione.' Emphasis added. Sect. 5 of the Code of Practice Concerning the Processing of Personal Data in the Exercise of Journalistic Activities, *G.U.* (Official Journal) n. 179 of 3 October 1998.

¹⁵ '...l'evoluzione del modo di fare informazione su richiedenti asilo, rifugiati, vittime di tratta, migranti e minoranze.' The Charter of Rome is available at www.unhcr.it and www.odg.it.

¹⁶ See for instance www.cospe.it/doc/monitoraggio_cospe_razzismo08.pdf

¹⁷ See www.giornalismi.info/mediarom/

¹⁸ We searched for both *rumeno* and *romeno*, since both are correct and commonly used in Italian. The term *romeno*, once considered archaic, has started being used more frequently recently. This is possibly due to its similarity to the term Rom. Confusion between the terms Rom and *romeno* is extremely frequent in the Italian media. We originally wished to search also for articles with the term 'Rom', but we were unable to do

so for technical reasons (the search engine for *la Repubblica* archive automatically and incorrectly inflects the term so that articles are returned which do not refer to Rom but to events in Rome).

¹⁹ The online archive of *La Stampa* has now been made publicly available, thus our analysis could in principle be extended to that newspaper. In general though there is a trade-off between the extensiveness of the archive and the relevance of the newspaper – *La Stampa* having extensive archives but tiny sales.

²⁰ We used Italian language parameters supplied by Marco Baroni (University of Trento).

²¹ By significant, we mean that, when we regressed the ratio of nominalised to non-nominalised instances against time, the coefficient for the time term was statistically significant at the 0.05 level.

²² To check whether there was a global increase in nominalisation for *la Repubblica*, we checked the rates of nominalisation for an additional control term, *frances**: this showed a decrease over time, suggesting that the increases in nominalisation for our other terms are not artefacts. The nominalisation rate for *frances** varies between 55 and 45 per cent in the period of observation.

²³ cf. previous note.

²⁴ Data from ISTAT (2009). The data do not include irregular presences, e.g. over-stayers or irregular migrants.

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