Critical Discourse Analysis and the Editorial 2.0:News Reception and User-generated Comments in Discourses about (Im)migration

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1. INTRODUCTION

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) has traditionally viewed text and discourse as being produced by a dominant and powerful text producer for seemingly acquiescent readers. The relationship between text producer and receiver in such a view is one-directional, with power (and ideology) concentrated at the top of the paradigm. At the same time, however, CDA scholars proclaim an interest in both production and reception factors, as reflected in social practices (Fairclough 1995; Fetzer and Johansson 2008). In Faircloughian approaches, for example, discourse practice "involves attention to processes of production, distribution and consumption" (Fairclough 1992: 9). Yet, surprisingly, actual empirical data focusing on reception factors have been lacking and/or have been limited to the reader/researcher's personal impressions of a text. With the advent and spread of converged media platforms online (Herring 2013) and the new discourse and social practices this entails, the one-directionality of certain text types may indeed need to be reconsidered in

light of the more prominent role played by users in both reception and (co-)construction of texts (Boyd 2014).

The present study focuses on the genre of the editorial in online newspapers in an attempt to determine the role of this genre in forming public opinion in the digital age. Specifically, it attempts to bring reception factors into focus by analyzing user comments written in response to editorials. The analysis is informed by the notion that such commenting practices not only change media discourse and social practice but also, ultimately, transform the traditional flow of media discourse, creating more possibilities for users to interact with institutional discourse (the editorial) and with other text commenters. It is proposed that readers' participation in such interactive features as commenting can be used to gauge the text receivers' values and opinions of in the news process (Boyd 2016). Thus, the work examines the ways in which powerful public discourses are received by the general public through the interactive feature of commenting available on many media platforms. Text commenting, in turn, is seen as crucial to understanding how certain texts are received and transformed by different types of (social) media users in the online newspaper.

From a theoretical perspective the work aims to expand traditional CDA approaches to media discourse. In fact, in line with recent scholarship embracing more innovative approaches for new media phenomena (KhosraviNik and Zia 2014; KhosraviNik and Unger 2016; KhosraviNik 2018; Phelan 2018), the work attempts to demonstrate the actual role played by text consumers through the analysis of user-generated data and asks whether such practices alter the original discourses, texts and genres and, if so, to what extent. At the outset, it was hypothesized that by focusing on reader comments of a limited set of editorials about the European migrant crisis from one newspaper (*New York Times*), it would be possible to ascertain readers' varying opinions about the issue and how these reflect and/or diverge from the view(s) presented by the editorial. A quantitative and qualitative analysis of the empirical data (the editorials and reader comments) is aimed at drawing out the various opinions. The analysis focuses on the linguistic means adopted by text producers to align themselves with (proximization) or differentiate themselves from (distancing) from the views presented in the editorial. The study is part of an ongoing project about editorials and comments and the role that editorials play in shaping public opinion in an increasingly mediatized world.

In what follows I briefly review the traditional approaches to media discourse in CDA and provide some new insights for online environments. I then discuss the role of the genre of the editorial and focus on the current online newspaper ecology. The corpora and methodology are then introduced, the empirical data discussed, and, finally, preliminary conclusions for the study are provided.

2. CDA AND (NEW) MEDIA

With its interest in power, ideology and hegemony it should come as no surprise that so many CDA studies focus on media text and discourse (Fairclough 1995; Johansson

2014; Richardson 2007; Van Dijk 1991). In such descriptions, powerful news producers are seen as a dominant force in forming and shaping public opinion and consensus, as part of a generally one-way flow of information from text producer to consumer. In his opus on media discourse, Fairclough (1995: 14) sees media organizations as purveyors of ideologies that both produce and reproduce "unequal relations of power, relations of domination," a view that arguably mirrors the dichotomous nature of discourse as both a product of social interaction and a powerful force in reshaping social practices (Fairclough 2010; Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Richardson 2007; Wodak and Chilton 2005; Van Dijk 2001). In traditional accounts, news corporations occupy a powerful position, from which they shape important issues and public discourse as well as to 'reinforce beliefs' amongst readers (Richardson 2007).

Recontextualization plays a pivotal role in the process of reshaping practices and reinforcing beliefs among readers, and is considered one of the main means for text propagation in CDA. Through recontextualization textual elements are transferred into new discourses "in ways which correspond to the concerns, priorities and goals of the current stage" (Fairclough 1995: 48). In the media, this can be found at a number of different levels: from the recontextualization of important events and actors, whose words are embedded (Bell 1991) or layered in different versions of stories (Fairclough, 1995) to the news stories, which are recontextualized among readers who may be influenced by the points of view and ideologies presented by newsmakers. In theory, such recontextualization can explain "how the symbolic elites of politics and the mass media are able to control public discourse and attitudes" (Van Dijk 2018). Yet, how do researchers decide how dominant discourses are received (or, in Van Dijk's view, are imposed from above) and then recontextualized by news readers? As noted by Phelan (2018: 291), although many CDA analysts recognize "audience interpretations", the analysis of such reception factors has been "relatively invisible." To be fair, Fairclough (1995: 15) admits to the limitations of a text- and researcher-centered approach to media discourse based on a "very detailed analysis about a very few texts," but he also stresses the need "to see language analysis as one of a range of types of analysis which needs to be applied together to the mass media which can generalize across large quantities of media output."

While few would disagree that news producers play a powerful role in society even today, we also cannot ignore the changes in the way that news texts are now consumed. In traditional print and broadcast media consumers had few opportunities to respond directly to a topic that they felt strongly about, if not in a letter to the editor, which was rarely published. Today, users can react immediately to a news story or to fellow commenters with their own comment(s), or they can share their reaction on social media. In the case of commenting, users can now recontextualize news stories and opinions, which, I would suggest, adds a further layer to the media discourse recontextualization discussed above (cf. Boyd 2016). It would appear, then, that new media discourse practices require a rethink about the ways media discourse has been traditionally analyzed in CDA. In addition to this, I would argue that new media provide CDA with a unique chance to observe and analyze the role played by

text receivers in text consumption, on the one hand, and the role of news producers, on the other.

One of the first scholars to recognize the importance of incorporating new media practices into CDA is KhosraviNik (2018; see also KhosraviNik and Zia 2014; KhosraviNik and Unger 2016), who highlights the inadequacies of traditional top-down, one-to-many communication model accounts in CDA to deal with interactive and participatory schemes of new media, as such models foster many-to-many participation schemes through the convergence of new types of content and new types of user-centered affordances (KhosraviNik and Zia 2014). Moreover, the nature of the text itself is being changed in almost unrecognizable ways: "the power of a text is now determined through pull communicative strategies to convince ordinary users to react (e.g. 'like' a post) rather than push strategies of mass media" (KhosraviNik and Unger 2016: 210). Commenting is one of the many ways ordinary users now have to react to text, selectively recontextualize both text and discourse (Boyd 2014) and "play with established conventions of form and representation" (McKay 2006: 600). Such means, also known as affordances, encourage dynamic interaction and co-creation of text, "with the result that the 'content' of what is developed and shared on the internet is as much a product of participation as it is of traditional creative and publishing/broadcast processes" (Sargeant and Tagg 2014: 4). KhosraviNik (2018: 586) proposes a further level of contextualization (in addition to social context) of the role of the medium and the "media-specific [...] context of participatory web." This implies a specific focus on "meaning bearing forms [...], which are indigenous to participatory web such as tagging, likes, annotation, sharing, hyperlinks [...]" (ibid.: 587), as well as, commenting, which is the focus of the current study.

With the spread of "digitally facilitated spaces" (KhosraviNik 2018: 586) the amount of data available to researchers has increased exponentially. The question then arises as to how best analyze so much textual data. While ethnographic and observational practice-based approaches to social media data have also been proposed in the CDA literature (cf. KhosraviNik 2018; KhosraviNik and Unger 2016; Phelan 2018), a corpus-based approach can provide the researcher (with limited resources) with a powerful tool, providing an overview of lexical data and, subsequently, general discourse practices among commenters. Such a combined approach has been employed in a number of CDA studies (Baker, et al. 2008; Boyd, 2014b; Boyd 2016). Such corpus-based tools are combined with traditional qualitative, fine-grained text analyses of the empirical data. In the next section we will look at the genre of editorial focusing on web 2.0 features.

3. NEWSPAPERS AND THE EDITORIAL

3.1. *Editorial as genre*

There are a number of reasons why the editorial genre can offer fertile terrain for CDA. First of all, by analyzing media discourse we can tease out the linguistic forms that may

serve to legitimize (or not) existing power structures in the editorial, as a reflection of underlying social, economic and ideological values. Second, as an example of argumentative and persuasive genre (Van Dijk 2018), the editorial is well known for its predominant role in evaluating issues, forming public opinion and eliciting reader support and agreement (Henry and Tator 2002; Moon 1994; Van Dijk 1991). A fine-grained analysis of the editorial can lead to an understanding of how opinions about important issues are transmitted through this genre. Crucially, by focusing on comments written in response to editorials, a more balanced analysis that considers both production *and* reception factors is possible. Such a focus can also draw out the ways in which editorial opinions are reflected in user-generated text. Ideally, studying social interaction in the form of comments can provide researchers with empirical data that can help to gauge the extent to which seemingly powerful media genres such as the editorial have in forming and swaying public opinion.

In a recent chapter from *The Handbook for Critical Discourse Studies*, Van Dijk (Socio-cognitive Discourse Studies, 2018) proposes a socio-cognitive (CDA) analysis to the editorial. While his analysis is based on the view that newspaper editors are representatives of powerful media organizations "able to influence the opinions of hundreds of thousands of readers" (ibid.: 27), his empirical data are limited to a single editorial from the *Daily Mail* about former UK Prime Minister David Cameron's positive steps in dealing with apparent abuses of the immigration system. As noted – correctly, I would add – by the author, "the journalist of the editorial presupposes specific political knowledge, and formulates a personal or institutional *opinion,* based on underlying conservative *attitudes* on immigration and general conservative *ideologies* against foreigners, on the one hand, and against Labour, on the other hand" (Van Dijk 2018: 35, italics in original). He goes on to argue that such attitudes, opinions and ideologies about immigration and terrorism are "derived from specific mental models of news reports in the media" (ibid.: 43). He is attempting to demonstrate that editorials have the power to both formulate and transform people's personal ideas about current policies of immigration: "by the explicit and persuasive expression of underlying attitudes and ideologies against immigration, it is more likely the readers will form or reinforce their own negative attitudes on immigration" (ibid.: 39). While I would agree for the most part with his interpretation of the presuppositions of this particular text and the discourses it deals with, I find Van Dijk's reasoning about forming and reinforcing negative attitudes among readers tenuous. Namely, how can we determine the ways in which readers are influenced by the opinions and ideologies expressed in an editorial without considering actual readers' opinions after reading such texts? In other words, if CDA's claims of interest in both the production *and* reception conditions are to be taken at face value (as they are presumably in Van Dijk's analysis above), how can the researcher determine the ways in which a media text is interpreted and recontextualized by recipients without considering reader-generated textual data (Fairclough 1995; Fetzer and Johansson 2008)? Moreover, and importantly for the present discussion, if we are to accept that a conservative editorial reinforces negative attitudes and ideologies against immigration, would the opposite be true for a liberal newspaper such as the *New York Times* advocating a pro-

immigration stance, as we shall see below? And, finally, can such attitudes be drawn from user-generated comment data? We will attempt to answer some of these questions below, but first we need to examine some of the most salient features of the editorial in traditional and digital media.

In his earlier studies about the editorial, Van Dijk (1991, 1993) emphasizes the role played by this genre of criticizing, supporting, or providing advice to authorities about important events. As noted above, in editorials the newspaper's ideology comes to the fore and it is "clarified and re-established, reasserted in relation to troublesome events" (Hodge and Kress 1993: 17). In terms of generic structure, researches have applied a number of functional categories. While a full discussion of such categories is beyond the scope of the current study (see, e.g., Bolívar 1994; Bonyadi 2010; Van Dijk 1991,1993), we can take Van Dijk's three-way categorization (i.e. definition, explanation and reccommendation), which he applied to reporting about ethnic affairs in the UK in the 1980s. In his view, which I would argue generally holds today as well, editorials first *define* the situation by providing "a summarizing description of what happened", then *explain* a situation or attempt to "account for causes of events and circumstances," and, finally, focus on the future to *recommend* what should or should not be done (Van Dijk 1991: 125-6). Bolívar (1994) also proposes a three-tier structural division of the editorial similar to that proposed by Van Dijk, but her analytical framework is inspired by conversational analysis as applied to written text.

What is particularly relevant to the present study, however, is Bolívar's (1994: 279) view of editorial textual organization in terms of both text producer ("that concerns autonomous text processes") and receiver ("that relates the text to the participants") by focusing on both "retrospective" (patterns of organization that may be discovered by the reader) and "prospective" (sequence of speech acts presumably undertaken by the writer) patterns of organization in the discourse. The author appears to be anticipating subsequent developments in Web 2.0 newspaper environments by stressing the producer/receiver dichotomy: "[t]he difference is important because in the first case we refer to interaction between real (or imagined) participants, while in the second we mean interaction between the reader and the text" (ibid.: 279). Crucially, the commenting function enabled by developments in online media provides us with the opportunity to actually survey reader participation and gauge to what extent such commenters perceive and reproduce "retrospective" patterns of organization.

3.2. *Newspapers and the editorial 2.0*

In the past, there were few possibilities for readers to respond directly to an editorial or to any other news story. One of the few such ways was the "letter to the editor", few of which were ever published and, if so, responses were decontextualized from the original editorial. Today, however, many online newspapers provide users with a wide range of interactive features allowing users to "talk back" (Landert and Jucker 2011: 1423) to an original text. Participation on online news sites, in fact, is regulated by the

convergence of new forms of interactive media combining user-generated content, social interactivity, co-creativity, multimodality, and converged media platforms (Herring 2013), which have radically changed the way users receive and consume news (Johansson 2014). In this paradigm users also become 'prosumers' because they are "not only viewers of creative content and advertisements but also the co-creators and co-distributors of the very content themselves" (KhosraviNik and Unger 2016: 208). With comments, in fact, interested and/or stimulated readers have the chance to respond to an editorial as soon as it is published. On the one hand, this process of text co-creation and participation has been portrayed as a form of "citizen engagement" (Weber 2014: 942) and "media-stimulated interpersonal communication" (Ziegele, et al. 2014: 1112). While it is true that such features allow readers to participate in the news process, not all users decide to do so and their actual participation may be limited by the media organizations.

First of all, many online news sites, including the *New York Times* employ some form of gate-keeping on comments, which stands in contrast with Social Media where comments are generally unmoderated. In the case of news organizations, moderation is viewed as "a necessary filter" so that "the relevant information" can be separated "from the irrelevant as the information load becomes immense" (Ihlebæk and Krumsvik, 2014: 473). And in the specific case of the *New York Times*, it is seen as necessary to "provide substantive commentary for a general readership […] where readers can exchange intelligent and informed commentary that enhances the quality of […] news and information" (New York Times 2017) or "a safe space where people of all political persuasions can make their case without fear of a barrage of childish insults or insubstantial or off-color remarks" (Sullivan 2012). Until recently (September 2017) when a semi-automated system was introduced, all decisions about publication of comments were made by the 14 moderators at the Community Desk who had to read over 11,000 comments every day (Etim 2017b). Their decisions were based on a set of guidelines published by the news site, excluding comments that demonstrated "personal attacks, obscenity, vulgarity, profanity (including expletives and letters followed by dashes), commercial promotion, impersonations, incoherence and SHOUTING" (New York Times 2017). Interestingly, comments expressing points of view contrary to the newspaper's liberal bent are not automatically discarded "to allow reasonable space for the expression of every point of view" (Etim 2017b). This is because "comments are meant to further conversation and debate on the foremost disagreements about our society" and, therefore, moderators are urged to "avoid making moral judgements on readers' arguments" (ibid.).

Users also play a role – albeit a less important one – in moderating comments through the flagging of any content considered inappropriate, which offers another possible level of interaction. Ultimately, however, moderators must still decide which comments to keep or eliminate. Such flagging demonstrates another important aspect of commenter behavior: namely, commenters respond not only to the original editorial but also to each other. Furthermore, commenters can use the news platform to speak about general issues only tenuously related to the article and sometimes arguments may be "used fallaciously with little justifiable connection between their

standpoint and arguments, often driven by 'unexpressed premises' not strongly supported by evidence" (Richardson and Stanyer 2011: 19). As we have seen, however, such comments on nytimes.com may be eliminated by moderators if considered off topic. Gate-keeping is also exercised when deciding which stories to open to commenting. In the case of nytimes.com, the decision is taken by the editors who open (a limited number) of articles for commenting each day, inspired by a specific article. According to Etim (2017a) the decision to not enable commenting is due to the lack of sufficient resources "to sort through them all."

Due to widespread abuse and obscenity and other such "participatory complications" online (Lange 2007: 37), which may actually hamper participation, many news sites have disabled commenting altogether, relegating comments sections to Social Media such as Facebook. Such a decision can be due to lack of sufficient resources within a media organization to moderate user-generated comments (Goujard 2016). The difficulties involved in maintaining a comment section is summarized in the following quote from the *New York Times*:

> The advent of community made things more complicated. News outlets wanted to *engage* their readers on a large scale. Readers wanted to be *heard*. Comment sections evolved and readers began to discuss issues with one another directly. While at best, comment sections became places for dynamic conversation and exchange, they could also become irrelevant or loaded with spam and vitriol. (Etim 2017a)

Of course, commenting on a news site is not the only "follow-up action" (Mitchell, et al. 2017) that readers can engage in: they can also talk about a news item directly with others, share it or comment about it in an email, text message, or via Social Media. According to the Pew Research Center in approximately half of the cases (47%) news experiences elicit a follow-up action (ibid.), but it may be difficult to determine how often such action consists of commenting.

Despite the difficulties in maintaining commenting sections and the growing number of news outlets that are eliminating the practice altogether, the *New York Times* appears to be following a more positive approach to the practice. As early as 2014 the organization began to question its approach to digital media, at which time they complained (in an internal report later leaked to the press) that there was a "risk of becoming known as a place that does not fully understand, reward, and celebrate digital skills" (Tanzer 2014). The report stressed the need to "integrate and create a force multiplier for these new, digitally focused functions and to incorporate them into the existing structure of the newsroom" (Pompeo 2014). The decision to expand commenting in 2017 would appear to be a direct response to this concern, in addition to the integration of "machine learning technology to prioritize comments for moderation" (Etim 2017a). This does not mean that all articles (and editorials) are automatically opened for commenting, because most comments still have to be reviewed manually. Crucial for the present discussion, however, is that the news organization considers comments as an important part of the digital news

environment "by treating reader submissions like content" and valuing "quality of comments over quantity" (Etim 2017a). It would appear then that readers may indeed become co-creators of the news cycle.

Nevertheless, we still need to consider the actual number of editorials opened to comments. A cursory examination of 63 editorials published on the nytimes.com in a one-month period (1-30 September 2017) revealed that 22 (ca. 35%) had commenting enabled, with an average of 447 individual comments per editorial. The (limited) number of comments is due to the short period in which users have to write a comment (approximately 24 hours). In the next section we will look at specific examples of editorials (and comments) dealing with the European migrant crisis of 2015.

4. CORPUS AND METHODOLOGY

The original inspiration for the study stems from the reading of a *New York Times* editorial from 18 September 2015, published in the wake of the greatest movement of migrants and refugees in Europe since the Second World War. The article, entitled "Europe should see refugees as a boon, not as a burden" (Editorial Board 2015), and the comments written in response to it, were chosen as a test case, first of all, to determine the opinions expressed in the editorial about the complex issue of European migration and refugees and, secondly, to try to understand the extent to which the views expressed in the editorial influenced commenters' opinions (cf. Boyd, In press). The article, as implicit from the headline, argues that Europeans should embrace migrants (and refugees) because of the economic advantages they provide rather than consider them as a burden for society. The text also criticizes the views – expressed especially in the UK – that immigrants arrive only to take advantage of the social welfare system. The focus on Great Britain in the editorial serves not only to provide a contrast with the (positively portrayed) German approach to migrants, but also to bring the topic closer to its mainly US readers[1], who would presumably find more common ground with the former than continental Europe. The editorial ends with the argument that the US Congress, and its Republican majority, should do more to pass comprehensive immigration legislation. The editorial concludes with the following statement summarizing its liberal, anti-Republican ideology:

> Advocating a pro-immigration position has become politically difficult in the West, in large part because opponents have successfully cast newcomers as

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[1] A cursory glance of the user information of the commenters found in the empirical data indicate that most commenters are from the United States. This does not mean, however, that online readers are limited to the United States, as there are clearly many readers and registered users that are not from the US. Online platforms have helped to open up national and local newspapers to a more worldwide audience.

economic and social burdens. Their false arguments damage economies and the lives of millions of people trying to escape war and poverty. (Editorial Board 2015)

At this point, in order to understand the scope of the New York Times' opinions about migration in Europe, a search of editorials on the nytimes.com site was carried out for any text that contained the terms *Europe* and *migran*t or *refugee* and a corpus created. The texts were limited to a time frame beginning on 5 June 2015 (when an editorial focusing on the EU proposed quota system for migrants was published) and ending on 27 October 2017 with an editorial focused on the problem of migrants stranded in Calais. A total of 51 texts were deemed relevant for the study. Of these texts only 16 were opened to commenting. A smaller corpus from a more limited period (June to September 2015) – when the crisis was arguably at its peak – was then created with only those editorials that had commenting enabled (7 editorials). The comments were saved in a separate file and another corpus was compiled. The list of the corpora used, including the vast EnTenTen reference corpus, are provided in Table 1.

Corpus	Texts	Words	Tokens
(1) NYT Europe Migrant Editorial 1	1 (editorial)	541	618
(2) NYT Europe Migrant Comments 1	455 (comments)	46,857	56,363
(3) NYT Europe Migrant Editorials	51 (editorials)	25,945	30,038
(4) NYT Europe Migrant Editorial sample	7 (editorials)	3,939	4,588
(5) NYT Europe Migrant Comments sample	7520 (comments)	203,276	243,533
(6) Reference: EnTenTen 2013	ca. 37 million	19.7 billion	22.7 billion

Table 1. NYT Europe migrant editorial, comments and reference corpora

5. DATA DISCUSSION

During the first stage of the analysis, which also served as the basis for a parallel study (Boyd, In press), a quantitative corpus-based analysis was conducted in order to determine lexical similarities and differences between the original editorial (1 in Table 1) and the 455 comments (2). Word frequencies were first generated using the Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff, et al. 2014) and, subsequently, keywords were determined to flesh out the most salient linguistic patterns and lexical items as compared to the EnTenTen 2013 reference corpus (6). The analyses were mainly aimed at finding linguistic elements that might indicate comparison or contrast (*as*, *than*, *but*), modals, pronouns as well as deictics, referential terms, tense changes, and contrastive lexical choices, all of which were deemed as possible linguistic signals for (dis)agreement. A secondary qualitative stage of analysis was then carried out on a sample of the first 50 comments from (2) in an effort to determine agreement or disagreement with the main opinions put forth in the editorial. In order to maintain a clear focus on certain linguistic phenomena other aspects of the comment data were necessarily ignored, such as the

use of hyperlinking, emoticons, memes, user identification, etc. While such factors would clearly offer more insight into the discourse practices of comment(er)s, due to space and time limitations they were excluded from the current study.

While a full comparison of corpora (1) and (2) is not possible, it should be noted that while they share a number of terms, there are some lexical items with a high frequency in the comments that are absent from editorial including *I*, *or*, *you*, *we*, *if*, and *migrant*. Of these, the conditional marker *if* and the personal pronouns were considered significant. First, the high frequency of *if* most likely indicates a wide use of conditional forms, which can be used by speakers to provide options for possible future scenarios, create a contrast with what has been said, give examples and make inferences based on certain assumptions made by others (Ford and Thompson 1986). A closer look at concordance data of this form provides evidence of these uses, in which commenters propose various options or challenge what is stated in the editorial.

The second interesting difference to emerge from a comparison of corpora (1) and (2) is the high relative frequency of the first- and second-person pronouns (*I*, *you*, *we*) in the latter, indicating a certain level of personal participation (Boyd 2014b), interpersonal communication (KhosraviNik and Sarkhoh 2017) and commitment by commenters. A closer look at concordance data (Table 1) shed light on pronominal use, especially in the case of *we*, the meaning of which depends on the speaker's alignment with hearers (in this case either the editorial board, other commenters or other readers who do not comment). Such data demonstrate a number of shifting meanings from 'we Americans' (*We have an enormous amount of problems here*) to 'we liberal Americans' (*we need to fight back against right-wing extremism*).

racist, nor does it make us Trump voters.	*We*	have an enormous amount of problems here
food stamps ever. And yet despite this,	*we*	still spend 4 billion of taxpayer money
maintain the strong political coalition	*we*	need to fight back against right-wing extremism
against right-wing extremism and oligarchy.	*We*	should try harder to overcome them.
displaced persons in Europe/mid east, if	*we*	add them to the 11 million migrants we
if we add them to the 11 million migrants	*we*	have from Latin America things here will
only 10,000) in the next fiscal year) that	*we*	created, by our fraud war on Iraq, untenable
no where mentioned in our Constitution,	*we*	preach it but practice it not our selves
rights only of their 24% minority kind.	*We*	in this country and UK have double standards
customs etc. It is a sorry sight when	*we*	allow these right wing, hypocrite Sunday
of expression, barbarism. Welcoming those	*we*	fear. All because it's good for business
Assuming they aren't that stupid as	*we*	like to think, they probably know that
The reason I'm bringing this up is because	*we*	have international policies that welcomes
policies that welcomes war refugees and	*we*	are allowed to send back the economic migrants
terrorists to bomb other Muslim people,	*we*	should at least think about it. If we would

Table 2. Concordance lines for *we* in (2).

The examples in Table 2 demonstrate various we-groups in the comment data: the American we-group (*we have … problems here*), which may imply membership to different points of view such as the liberal one expressed in *we need to fight back*

against right-wing extremism; 'we-Europeans', 'we-migrants', 'we-general' and even 'we-the New York Times'. The latter can be found in a comment in which the writer is excluding him/herself and attributes responsibility of the views expressed in the editorial: *we put too much reliance on economic studies*.

In order to further evaluate similarities/differences in the editorial and the comments, the latter were compared to the much larger web-based reference corpus (6) to establish the keywords, i.e. those terms that were statistically relevant compared to the reference corpus. The keyword function can be a useful tool to flesh out specific context(s) and linguistic choices of the commenters (Baker, et al. 2006). Certain words were excluded from the results including those which appeared fewer than 10 times in the comment corpus, words referring to the web platform (such as *hyperlink*) and user names (e.g. *Renant*).[2] The top 25 keywords for (2) are provided in Table 3.

N	lemma	Score	Freq	Reference Frequency
1	migrant	373.9	152	141273
2	Editorial	316.4	40	28319
3	refugee	299.2	230	287294
4	boon	283.7	52	51276
5	immigrant	242.3	267	421793
6	unskilled	213.9	24	22627
7	assimilate	202.9	44	64811
8	editorial	195.8	142	269769
9	immigration	125.6	141	430254
10	assimilation	106.4	15	34324
11	Europeans	91.3	21	70322
12	uneducated	76.5	10	30248
13	influx	72.1	18	78243
14	Syrian	60.0	34	206067
15	Europe	59.4	266	1784052
16	Sweden	56.2	35	228943
17	Denmark	44.5	18	140886
18	flee	43.2	38	332513
19	Germany	42.3	99	920514
20	asylum	42.1	13	102197
21	Muslim	41.4	78	737275
22	migration	37.0	25	250682
23	Arabia	35.0	16	162339
24	culturally	34.9	10	93418
25	economically	33.9	15	156393

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[2] As noted above, such information, although certainly significant, was not taken into account in the current study in order to provide a clear-cut focus on certain linguistic forms and due to space and time limitation.

Table 3. Keywords in (2) vs. EnTenTen13 (6)

The most important assumption we might draw from the data in Table 3 is a relatively concentrated focus on (im)migration in both positive (*assimilate*, *assimilation*, *asylum*, *migration*) and, perhaps, negative (*influx*, *flee*) ways, as well as the purported qualities of (im)migrants (*unskilled*, *uneducated*, *culturally*, *economically*). Another important aspect to emerge from the keyword data is a concentration of nation and nationality lexical items, not all of which appear in the editorial. Thus, we find *Germany* but not *Britain*. In these keywords commenters focused more on countries such as *Germany*, *Denmark* and *Sweden*, the latter receiving no mention in the editorial. Furthermore, we might hypothesize from the high relative frequency of such place names that the commenters were more concerned with the actual situation at the moment of publication, i.e. the influx of hundreds of thousands of migrants into continental Europe, than the points of view expressed by the editorial. Some of the other keywords in Table 3 would appear to indicate an interest in the migrants' origin and/or those responsible for migration: for example, *Arabia*, which collocates exclusively with *Saudi*, is used negatively by commenters to highlight Saudi Arabia's unwillingness to aid directly the migrants. Finally, while the original editorial mentions *Syria* only one time, *Syrian* together with *Syria* feature in the keywords. Finally, the presence of the word *Muslim* would appear to indicate (anti-)religious sentiment among the commenters.

A further stage of the analysis of the larger comment corpora (3), (4) and (5) had a twofold objective: first, to check the preliminary results obtained in the analysis of corpora (1) and (2); and, secondly, to shed light on the linguistic practices about European migration in both the editorial and the comments. In an attempt to map out the main discourses, or *topoi*, presented in *New York Times* editorials about European migration a keyword analysis was carried out on corpus (3), consisting of 51 editorials and spanning over a two-year period, from June 2015 until October 2017. The edited keyword list is provided in Table 4.

N	lemma	Score	Freq	Reference Frequency
1	Calais	729.29	35	13616
2	refugee	654.17	268	287294
3	migrant	613.77	133	141273
4	Orban	555.04	18	1851
5	asylum	412.05	68	102197
6	Hungary	389.48	57	88068
7	Juncker	315.77	10	1306
8	Merkel	287.11	21	32694
9	resettle	264.36	13	14567
10	Tusk	260.75	9	3475
11	smuggler	245.64	16	26650
12	refugees	232.81	11	13121
13	macron	232.00	7	200

14	xenophobic	219.70	9	8371
15	Eurotunnel	215.69	7	1934
16	Libya	211.55	48	149067
17	squalid	180.72	7	6705
18	ISIS	176.33	6	3147
19	Greece	172.50	71	288845
20	brexit	166.94	5	70
21	Syrian	165.46	50	206067
22	seeker	161.62	41	169369
23	refugee	147.38	9	23632
24	unaccompanied	130.89	7	17911
25	Trump	125.97	12	49531

Table 4. Keywords in (3) vs. EnTenTen13 (6)

If we take a closer look at the simplified keyword data in Table 4, we can tentatively map out a number of different semantic groups, which, I would argue, are representative of the different discourses presented in the editorials about European migration. Firstly, there are a number of lexical items clearly referring to the migrants themselves (*refugee(s) migrant, seeker*), their status (*asylum, resettle, unaccompanied*) as well as their treatment and living conditions (*smuggler, xenophobic, squalid*). Secondly, there are a number of keywords referring to important places in which the crisis was unfolding: *Calais, Hungary, Eurotunnel, Libya, Greece.* Thirdly, some of the most important protagonists in the crisis (and its resolution) are used, such as *Orban* (*Hungary*), *Juncker* and *Tusk* (European Council Presidents), *Merkel*, *Macron* and *Trump.* A few lexical items clearly point to a semantic group referring to the UK and, probably, its anti-immigrant stance as we discussed above: *Eurotunnel, Calais* (referring to the migrants attempting to enter the UK from France), and *Brexit.* The one item that seems not to fit neatly into the semantic groups is *squalid*, which, however, is used only 7 times and always as a collocate of *camp*. This term then can be grouped with the first group of lexical items depicting migrant living conditions.

At this point it was decided to concentrate on linguistic use in the comments (Corpus 5) as compared to the original editorials (4) and the larger Europe Migrant Editorials corpus (3). It should be noted that only words appearing five times or more were considered statistically relevant. The comment keyword data and comparisons are provided in Table 5.

N	lemma	Score	Freq	Reference Frequency	Frequency (3) min. 5	Frequency (4 min. 5)
1	refugees	524.97	1218	193851	213	43
2	migrants	445.79	478	77395	124	-
3	Syrians	196.47	97	23464	16	-
4	refugee	172.40	279	128439	65	9
5	ISIS	171.36	107	35679	12	-
6	fleeing	161.33	150	64187	19	-

7	Hungary	142.55	163	84149	*57*	*10*
8	immigrants	131.17	432	284819	*23*	*10*
9	Europeans	120.10	165	105679	*10*	-
10	Assad	102.03	89	58908	-	-
11	assimilate	99.30	56	30132	-	-
12	Merkel	91.37	49	27570	*21*	-
13	xenophobia	88.66	31	10161	-	-
14	Hungarians	83.55	27	7704	-	-
15	syria	79.92	284	309185	*21*	-
16	syrian	79.34	174	182225	*36*	*8*
17	juncker	78.83	20	1237	*10*	-
18	migrant	74.96	75	70949	*10*	-
19	asylum	67.52	103	119982	*67*	*5*
20	destabilizing	66.32	23	9980	-	-
21	unskilled	64.13	31	22742	-	-
22	refugees	63.11	23	11645	*213*	*49*
23	boon	62.33	54	58486	-	-
24	arabia	61.13	119	159318	-	-
25	destabilized	59.56	17	4292	-	-

Table 5. Keywords in (5) vs. EnTenTen13 (6) including frequency in (3) and (4)

At first glance, many of the lexical items among the comment keywords appear to mirror use in both of the editorials corpora. Thus, we can find lexical evidence of all of the three main semantic groups proposed above for the editorials: (1) lexical items referring to the migrants themselves (*refugee(s) migrant(s), immigrants*) as well as their status and living conditions (*fleeing, xenophobia, assimilate, asylum*); (2) those referring to places which are part of the crisis (*Hungary, Arabia*); (3) other protagonists in the crisis (*ISIS, Assad, Merkel, Juncker*). Yet, if we take a closer look at the data, important differences begin to emerge. First, there is a tendency among commenters to use both *refugee* and the more general *migrant* and *immigrant*: if we take the combined uses of *migrants, migrant, immigrant*, and *immigrants* (totaling over 1000 uses among commenters) a parallel discourse of *economic migrant* begins to emerge next to the one that portrays *migrants* as refugees *fleeing* war and persecution. Added to this we can also see a number of lexical items used either much more frequently (*Syria(ns), ISIS, fleeing, immigrants, Europeans, Merkel*) or exclusively (*Assad, assimilate, xenophobia, Hungarians, destabilizing, unskilled, boon, Arabia, destabilized*) in the comments as compared to the editorials. As we can see from these examples commenters appear to focus on the possible negative results of migration demonstrated by such lexical items as *destabilizing/destabilized, unskilled* and *assimilate*. Collocation data offer more insight into usage of the latter term, with negative markers accounting for most uses. If we continue our search of keywords beyond the top 25 presented in Table 5 we can find a number of terms that would appear to paint a more negative picture of the migrants and the situation: *illegals, displaced, jihadists, Muslim, influx, overpopulation*. It would appear, then, on the basis

of keyword data, that, unlike the editorials that depict migration and migrants in Europe in generally positive terms, in line with what we would expect from the liberal stance of the *New York Times*, the commenters make wide use of lexical items focusing on more negative aspects of immigration (*assimilation, destabilization, influx*) and the migrants themselves (*Muslim, jihadist, unskilled*). Furthermore, if indeed the editorial is aimed at forming and formulating public opinion about (im)migration, it would also appear, at least on the basis of lexical use, that commenters do not necessarily share the newspaper's point of view on this topic.

The final stage in the empirical study consisted of a qualitative analysis of a sample of comments from (2) aimed at determining the degree to which the comments agreed or disagreed with the tenets and opinions expressed in one editorial. In the 50 comments taken into examination (the first to appear in the comment thread) 49 expressed some form of disagreement with the views expressed in the editorial. The main *topoi* to emerge from the comments (together with exemples) can be summarized as follows:

(1) economic advantage should not be confused with cultural, ethnic and religious issues/differences
- *no mention at all of the cultural suicide the EU will be committing by letting all these young men in (and the inevitable terrorism)--give it a rest.*

(2) the *New York Times* (editorial board) does not completely understand its readers and reality
- *The Times Editorial Board should do the following before writing any more rose-colored glasses editorials telling Europe what to do […] Read all of the many 1000s of comments published every day next to every OpEd and Editorial about the current situation.*

(3) if the *New York Times* takes such a pro-active pro-(im)migrant stance in the EU, they should do the same for the United States
- *If it is such a boon for Europe, it should also be a boon for the United States to accept more immigrants as well as more Syrian refugees. Perhaps the NYT editorial board would like to follow up with a similar op-ed pronouncement for the US?*

(4) it is easy for the privileged class (represented by the NYT staff and readership) to advocate such views, especially since they do not have to concern themselves directly with the results of immigration
- *So easy to say this from the distant safety of New York, 4,500 miles away and across "the Big Pond". Go tell it in in depressed Belgrade or Budapest, Ljubljana or Zagreb.*

(5) the arguments set forth in the editorial are based on questionable sources and are generally one-sided
- *Your reporting on the migrant/refugee crisis has been largely one-sided to your readership.*

Even though the qualitative analysis focused on only a small sample of the comments, the results are rather striking. The comment(er)s would appear to be almost overwhelmingly in disaccord with the views expressed in the editorial. We will discuss the implications for the editorial and CDA of such an albeit incomplete analysis of user-generated comments in the concluding remarks in the next section.

6. CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the data analyzed here from the *New York Times*, the editorial is clearly written from a perceived dominant position, and the arguments are presented in such a way as to influence public opinion about an important and troublesome event such as migration in Europe. The editorial board must have considered the topic to be of considerable significance, so much so that they published 51 editorials about the situation, which were clearly aimed at influencing public opinion over an approximately two-year period. While not all of these editorials enabled commenting, 35% of them did clearly demonstrating a positive view of editorials as a 'digitally facilitated space' (KhosraviNik 2018) in which commenters can exchange intelligent and informed opinions.

The corpus-based study of the editorials and the comments demonstrates that frequency and keyword data can provide an overall impression of the lexical mapping of opinions about migration and migrants in Europe. While the editorials tended to depict both the situation and the participants (i.e. the migrants) in a positive light, providing criticism only in the case of actors who did not follow an open approach to the migrants/refugees (as in the case of some politicians in the UK or Hungary), the lexical data among commenters illustrates more negative opinions with a focus on specific ethnic and religious groups (*Syrians, Saudi Arabia, ISIS, Muslims, Jihadists*) and possible negative consequences (*assimilation, destabilizing, illegals*). The editorials and the comments would appear, then, to express relatively diverging opinions about the issue, which was subsequently confirmed by the preliminary qualitative analysis. Further qualitative analysis is necessary to determine the degree to which the other comments in the corpus reflect or diverge from the views expressed in the editorials.

At this point we should ask what the role of new media is in this process? Namely, do the features available on the web alter production and reception factors in the news? In the case of this particular newspaper, it would appear that the editorial board has a positive view about both the ability to comment and the comment(er)s themselves regardless of the opinions they express. As noted by Etim, user-generated comments are treated as real content on the nytimes.com through which "every point of view" can be expressed (Etim 2017b). While such an approach is clearly aimed at embracing readers' desires to interact with the news and each other, we should not underestimate the market forces at work to encourage customers to pay for online access to the news at a time when it is becoming increasingly difficult for newspapers to remain profitable. It is important to note that the nytimes.com allows only registered users to write comments and non-paying subscribers have a 10 article per
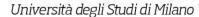
month paywall limit. Nevertheless, we should recognize the role that users' demands have played in changing the genre, at least in those cases when commenting is enabled.

Finally, we should ask how such developments should be viewed within a CDA framework? While contributions about the editorial, such as Van Dijk (2018), certainly offer valuable insight into dominant, conservative views about immigration and other issues, it is becoming harder and harder to ignore "meaning bearing forms" of the participatory web (KhosraviNik 2018: 587) such as commenting that allow text receivers to provide almost instantaneous reaction to an editorial, leaving important textual evidence as to how much the views expressed by a powerful news organization actually influence some readers (i.e. those that decide to engage in commenting). While "detailed analysis about a very few texts" (Fairclough 1995: 15) still offers crucial insight into text-producer discourse practices, in today's society, where the possibilities for online news readers to engage in content-building are increasingly exponentially, we need to complement such fine-grained analyses of greater amounts of media- and user-generated texts adopting tools, to cite Fairclough (ibid.) once again, "which can generalize across large quantities of media output".

Yet, we also need to reflect on the notion of news as mass communication in light of personalization offered by the participatory web (cf. KhosraviNik and Sarkhoh 2017). Thus, while the *New York Times* clearly frames its editorial content within an institutionalized liberal perspective in the debates about (im)migration (and other important and newsworthy issues), the views expressed by commenters and the linguistic means they adopt often – and, in this particular case, overwhelmingly – stand in contrast with the editorial board's clearly liberal stance about the issue. Commenters not only exploit important aspects of interpersonal communication (such as, for example, the wide use of first-person pronouns), but they also challenge the views expressed in the editorial and introduce and propagate new discourses about (im)migration. It would appear, then, that the interactive web allows users to challenge the traditional top-down model of news making and opinion forming. At least in the case of the discursive theme of (im)migration commenters use the textual means enabled by commenting to open up the debate with the institutional liberal views expressed by a newspaper such as the *New York Times*. However, we cannot forget that the commenting platform on the nytimes.com is not completely democratic: gate-keeping occurs at a number of different levels from registration on the site and paying for a subscription to being subject to moderators' criteria of what entails acceptable content for a comment to appear on the website. Thus, while the top-down news model traditionally espoused by CDA has undoubtedly been upended by the new participatory framework, economic and institutional power still remains in the hands of news organizations, as they can ultimately limit participation on many levels. Furthermore, we cannot forget that very few readers actually decide to engage in the commenting process, possibly exploiting other affordances offered by the online newspaper such as liking, sharing, embedding, etc. Moreover, those who decide to comment embrace other affordances offered by online environments (user names, hyperlinking, emoticons, memes, etc.), which certainly play an important role

in defining online participation and identity. They also create new discourses and engage in debates with fellow commenters, that represent other important forms of interpersonal communication. Such factors certainly need to be taken into consideration in future research.

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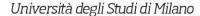
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