FILLING THE KNOWLEDGE GAP. THE EVOLUTION OF TRENDS IN ACADEMIC PAPERS FOCUSSED ON THE PHENOMENON OF IMMIGRATION

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ABSTRACT: *This research started from Zygmunt Bauman's paradigm, according to which, society is rapidly changing. This fluidity, captured in the term "liquid modernity", is asserting modifications on both general and individual levels. The phenomenon of immigration is a complex, multifaceted one, for two reasons. First, to the fact that is generated by multiple factors, such as famine, wars, economic hardships and most recently even climate change. Secondly, it can be associated with multiple domains of research both within and even outside of social sciences. Thus, immigration represents a theme which grants the researcher a certain level of freedom, in choosing paradigms, perspectives and methods applied in the research.*

Julio Cesar dos Reis and Mauro Dalle Lucca Tosi believe that by studying the trends within a scientific field, one can understand the main tendencies within a certain subject and even predict future ones. Due to the fact that it is a relatively new phenomenon, there are no papers which have analyzed the evolution of the theme of immigration within academic articles, what are the main perspectives and paradigms. This paper provides an in-depth analysis meant to identify the ways in which academic research focused on immigration has evolved In the last decades. The main research method used in this paper is document analysis. The research unit chosen for this paper was the scientific article which included "immigration" as a keyword. All the scientific articles included in my research were retrieved from the Web of Science database.. In my analysis, I Looked at two different dimensions. On one hand, I evaluated the content of the article, looking at aspects such as: peer-reviews, study sample, flaws and limitations within the study. I looked at key-words, to identify the main ones and to see if there was any change within the themes with which immigration is associated. Immigration began to become popular as an academic topic starting with 2010, when there were more articles on the subject than ever before. Their number increased significantly once again after 2015, when the immigrant crisis occurred. Recently Immigration was associated with assimilation rather than Integration. Most researches are quantitative, focussing on Peoples attitudes. The paper will discuss these and further preliminary findings.

Key words: *Immigration; Evolution; Trends; Future predictions; Knowledge gap;*

Argumentation. Relevance of the research. Motivation

Since the beginning of the XXIst century, there has been an unprecedented increase in the number of international immigrants. An indicator which clearly reflects the expansion of the immigration phenomenon is the amount of remittances, money which are sent by immigrants to their family which remained in their country of origin. According to a report conducted by the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), the total sum of money send by immigrants back home has increased almost seven fold in only two decades "from $128 billion in 2000 to $831 billion in 2022." [IOM, 2024].

The number of refugees has steadily increased year after year, up to the point which, in 2023, as a direct consequence of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, the world has witnessed "one of the largest forced displacement crises since World War II" [UNHCR, 2022]. In 2023, two thirds of the forcible displaced people were internally displaced, thus only a third of them have been forced to leave their country. At present times, there are more than 122 million refugees' word-wide. Out of these, almost half of them [55%] "are internally displaced people" [UNHCR, 2024], thus 45% of the displaced people have left their country. We can clearly see

an increase in the numbers of international immigrants.

Besides the war in Ukraine, another conflict has contributed to the refugee crisis. Since the beginning of the conflict, "well over 1 million displaced, hungry and traumatized people crammed into a small sliver of land" [UNHCR, 2024a]. Moreover, some experts in the field of armed conflicts, are stating that in present times, there are well over more "than 110 armed conflicts" [Geneva Academy, 2023]. However, it is important to emphasize that these conflicts are not entirely similar, "Some of these conflicts make the headlines, others do not. Some of them started recently, while others have lasted for more than 50 years." (ibidem). More than half of them take place on the African Continent. While 45 conflicts were registered in the MENA [Middle East and North Africa] Region, 35 occur in other areas on the African continent. At the opposite end of the scale, the continent with the fewest recorded active armed conflicts is Europe. (ibidem)

Monica Şerban has listed multiple reasons for which immigrants are leaving their home countries and wonder into the world. First, people abandon their country in order to search for better opportunities. Most of the times, the incentive for this decision was a financial one.

Secondly, there are also the cases in which they were forced to abandon their homes for reasons over which they had little to no control, such as armed conflicts, spread of diseases, climate change. Third, they might take into consideration other incentives besides money, such as career opportunities or better schooling and health systems for their them and their families. [Şerban, 2011].

Evolution of modernity

This paper is centered on the idea that modernity, especially late, reflexive- modernity, which is characterized by the ease through which social modifications occur, might have a certain influence on the way in which the issue of immigration is being researched, by analyzing the "evolution of a scientific field at a concept level" [Dalle & Cesar, 2020, p.71] However, in order to grasp the complexity of the reflexive modernity, we must understand the main principles of modernity as a whole.

Modernity is complex structure. It is more than a phenomenon, due to the fact that it encompasses multiple aspects, including a person's reference towards time, space, way of thinking and of acting, and even the way one is perceiving itself. In social sciences, modernity is viewed as a time-related structure, which is characterized by the way societies are structured, being "built on the principles of individual freedom and instrumental mastery" [Wagner, 2020, p. 143]. Moreover, it is important to emphasize the fact that the first descriptions of modernity were cemented upon a euro-centric, western perspective, because the first societies which fit in the description of modernity were from the exact same areas, "such societies start to emerge in Western Europe and North America from the late eighteenth century onward" (ibidem).

It is very difficult to clearly establish the exact moment in time when Modernity occurred. Thus, researchers in different domains of social sciences, such as sociologists, philosophers and political scientists believe that "as a historical period, modernity began in the seventeenth century" [Allan, 2011, p.3], and is rooted in a series of social and national principles which stem from era of the "Enlightenment and positivism"(ibidem). However, it is important to emphasize that the first modern societies appeared much later, in "at the end of the nineteenth century" [Wagner, 2020, p. 145], when people began to realize that some "European societies were in some way ahead of others" (ibidem). I believe that there are two explanations which can justify this delay. First, people needed more time to internalize and correctly apply the principles of modernization.

Second, society, due to its complexity, does not suffer alterations every time changes of paradigm occur among individuals. Events of a certain dimension are necessary in order to generate resistant social modifications. Some historical events, which are thought to have significantly contributed to the modernisation of European societies were the American and French Revolutions, and the Industrial Revolution [Allan, 2011, p.3], which occurred towards the end of the 18th century.

From a sociological perspective, the incipient phase of modernity is marked by "some significant rupture with past socio-political organization […] putting social life on new foundations" [Wagner, 2020, p. 145].

Sociological paradigms in modernity

According to professor Vlăsceanu, sociology has established itself not only as the science which studies modernity, but also the transition of different societies from their traditional form into a modern one. There are multiple sociologists who have implemented new ways through which the process of transition can be observed.

The first example is represented by Émile Durkheim, who studied societies based on the division of labor and its influence over human cohesion. For him, the distinction between pre-modern and modern societies could be highlighted through the differentiation between multiple types of solidarity. "He identified two forms of solidarity,- mechanical solidarity and organic solidarity, respectively" [Aron, 1965, p.21]. The first type of solidarity, the mechanical one, can be observed in a society which is characterised by fact that "individuals differ from one another as little as possible." [Aron, 1965, p.21]. The reason for the striking similitudes between members of the same society is that they "resemble each other " [Aron, 1965, p.21] due to the fact they "they feel the same emotions, cherish the same values, and hold the same things sacred." [Aron, 1965, p.21]. Thus, at this point in history, one cannot speak about the uniqueness of an individual. Before I continue to describe the type of solidarity in the modern society, I want to highlight the fact that Durkheim believes that modernity is somewhat disrupted from pre-modernity, because he views organic solidarity, which is specific to modern times as "The opposite form of solidarity, so-called organic solidarity" [Aron, 1965, p.21]. This new solidarity, which is specific for modern societies,"is expressed by differentiation" [Aron, 1965, p.21]. This point of view is relevant for our paper , because it clearly highlights the idea that, in modernity, multiple points of view are allowed to coexist, thus immigration can be associated with multiple paradigms, theories and key-words at the same time. As a partial conclusion for Durkheims contribution to modernity, pre-modern societies, were characterised by the mechanical solidarity, which was comprised of the social cohesiveness of small, undifferentiated societies, mostly in rural areas. On the other hand, organic solidarity can be identified in industrial societies, which are differentiated by a relatively complex division of labor. The term organic solidarity originates from the idea according to which citizens are "functioning much like the interdependent but differentiated organs of a living body" [Encyclopedia Britannica, 2010]. Thus, social scientists who are researching the topic of immigration are not part of a constant competition in order to prove which one has a better theory, but together, albeit unknowingly, they are able to present the multiple facets of immigration, allowing us, the people who use aggregates of their research, to have a rather complex image of the phenomenon.

Emile Durkheim was not the only sociologist who, in his attempt to present the evolution from pre-modern to modern times, compared the society with an organism. Herbert Spencer also used the same metaphor, but rather in a different way. For him, the evolution of a society was not comprised of a two-stage procedure, but it was a rather tedious process, which consisted of multiple steps. His perception of society was deeply rooted in nature, more specifically in cellular biology. For him, "society is an organism, subject to universal laws applicable to all organisms" [Simon, 1960, p. 294], whose evolution can be observed through four distinct paradigms. First, he perceives "social evolution as progress toward an ideal social state" [Perrin, 1976, p. 1342]. For Spencer, society has its own way of self-adjusting, and can only occur if the human influence is limited. For him, due to the fact that "the direction of social change is from the homogeneous to the heterogeneous" [Bock, 1964, p.22], modernity will reunite people with different perceptions, who will manage to cohabitate peacefully. His main argument was that he "did not believe that racial differences could account for sociocultural differences" [Perrin, 1976, p. 1341]. His second was constructed on the previous one, thus "whole societies tend to differentiate into societal subsystems" [Perrin, 1976, p.1345]. Thirdly, he believes that modernity is characterised by a society's ability to alter its image, "differentiation of social structure"[Perrin, 1976, p.1351], which usually results into an "increasing division of labor" [Spencer, 1904, p. 297]. Even thuough his view towards modernity is similar to Emile Durkheim's perception, he had a completely starting point for its envision. According to Spencer, modernity is not based on social distinctions, but rather, upon the principles

of social balance. Each disturbance in the status-quo forces the society to implement new adaptation mechanisms, thus "impose new adaptive exigencies on existent social organization which require structural adjustments" [Perrin, 1976, p. 1350]. Finally, he points out that societies, as organisms, will continue to shape their forms, "civilized nations [...] has been becoming more various in the forms of societies it includes, and is still becoming more various" [Spencer, 1937, p.526]. Herbert Spencer's take on society is useful for our paper because he points out that in modernity societies are subjective to change, thus it is a guarantee for us that peoples' perception towards the phenomenon of immigration shapes its form in time.

For Max Weber, one of the most important features of modernity is rationalization, which occurs after people are disenchanted of their old beliefs. As a direct consequence, they are able to objectively analyze the events which occur around them. For this reason, and also due to the fact that he "could not accept a reified abstraction like Society" [Cascardi, 1995, p.120] Weber acknowledged the need of social researchers to take into consideration other units of analysis, in order to be able to make sense of the research subjects, "we never see society, but only groups of men and women" (ibidem). He is most famous for coining the term of bureaucracy, which refers to a "specific form of organization defined by complexity, division of labour, permanence, professional management, hierarchical coordination and control" [Rockman, 2019]. Moreover, Weber also researched the ways in which nations are structured, concluding that "history shows nothing permanent but continual war, conflict and change" [Cascardi, 1995, p.121]. Weber's ideas are relevant for our research because they show the inconsistency of modern societies, which are permanently shifting, thus forcing people to immigrate. By maintaining the principle of disenchanting, we force ourselves to be realistic and objective, thus we ought to look only at the characteristics of immigrants which are not dehumanizing.

Ferdinand Tönnies is another sociologist who emphasized the differences between pre-modern societies and modern ones. For him, the main difference was reflected in the way in which people were organizing their localities. In his research, he identified two distinct forms of cohabitation. On one hand, there was the gemeinschaft, which he perceived as "the original, natural and historical forms of common life" [Harris, 2001, 243]. Here, people are "having real organic life" [Harris, 2001, 17]. On the other hand, there is the gesellschaft, also reffered to as Society, which is viewed "as a purely mechanical construction", (ibidem). Gemeinschaft describes a rural, traditional community, based on family and social relations. As in Durkheim's perspective, the main two institutions are the Family and the Church. Interactions between people are based upon trust and collaboration. However, Tonnies's comparison between pre-modern and modern society differs from that of Durkheim's because he analysis the society from a micro perspective, concentrating on the intrinsic elements which motivate the individual to act rather than on extrinsic factors, which describe the way in which the individual is refering himself and his work to the people surrounding him. The most important contribution of Tönnies's work is that he managed to differentiate wesenwille, which he described as "natural or organic or essential will" [bidem, 95] and Kürwille, which "involves calculation, arbitrary freedom and rational choice" (ibidem).

Unifying the sociologists' ideas discussed until now, pre-modernity occurs before the 17th and 18th century. Communities were small, mostly in rural areas and were built upon family relations and social ties, centering around the Family and the Church as the most important institutions. Due to the fact that communities were reduced in size, people among them had similar purposes and beliefs. From a labor perspective, people were not highly specialized; most of them had similar agricultural activities. Social interactions were based on trust and collaboration, and usually occurred within the community. The transition from a traditional to a modern society occurred due to economic reasons. The shift from an economy based on agriculture to one consolidated on industrial production was a direct result of the limits of the former, which did not allow enough space for other capital owner to invest their money due to the fact that "agricultural economy had run up against the land constraint" [Grantham, 1999, 202]. Thus, rich people without land were forced to look toward other business ventures, building factories in urban areas, which were filled with workforce taken from rural areas. The new city folks internalized the main principles of the modernity and industrialization in their daily

interactions. Now, they were placing their interests above those of the community and the people around them, because traditional relationships between people have been eroded by mobility and labor division.

Sociological paradigms in post-modernity

Since the days of the thinkers who explained the transition from traditional to modern societies, "theoretical contexts developed a new sociology of modernity" [Vlăsceanu, 2010, p.18], which is significantly different, compared with the previous one. The new paradigm is called post-modernity and is characterized by the unique way in which it views the world, "as essentially fragmented and indeterminate" [Wood, 1997, p.541] and the possible solutions for different global issues because it "rejects any universalistic political projects, even universalistic emancipatory projects" (ibidem). There are multiple narratives which try to explain the transition from modernity towards post-modernity. For example, according to professor Vlăsceanu, there are two ways in which the evolution of modernity can be explained. On one hand, the transition between modernity and post-modernity takes place because all he resources have been exhausted, case in which global thinkers need to find or even generate new instruments meant to identify, analyze, explain and solve social issues. In this situation, Vlăsceanu differentiates between modernity and post-modernity. For him, the prefix post is a direct indication that the new modernity is "distant and opposed" [Vlăsceanu, 2010, p.19] towards the old one. On the other hand, the transition is generated by the new findings, which push for a better and new understanding of the world around us. In this case, Vlasceanu talks about "initial modernity and consecrated modernity" [Vlăsceanu, 2010, p.18] as two periods which do not oppose each. For him, the relationship between the two paradigms of thought could be used in order to "identify continuations and discontinuations, exhaustion and multiplication, separations and new constructions"(ibidem).

An interesting particularity of post-modernism is that it encompasses multiple theoretical orientations, which are focused on different subjects. Globalization is a central theme in the discourse of post-modernists, even though they refer to it in distinct ways. From an outcome's perspective, some may see it as a process which generates "cultural globalization […] or waves of globalization" (ibidem). Thus, for some it is a universal process, while for others it impacts certain areas of the world differently. As a direct result of globalization, in post-modernity, nations, in their classical form, are perceived as obsolete, and we are entering the era of post-nationalism, characterized by "new political configurations beyond the nation-state" [Giesen, 2004, p.1]. For others, post-modernity is associated with the proliferation of knowledge generated by the technological evolutions, "the fundamental principles dominating the net are thus [...] accumulation of knowledge/information," [Castells, 1998, p. 478]. This surplus of information allows post-modernist thinkers to acknowledge the negative aspects of modernity

The end of the XXth century was marked by an "intensification of theoretical reflections towards modernity" [Vlăsceanu, 2010, p.17]. J. F. Lyotard spearheaded the idea according to which reflexive modernity would be "questioning the legitimacy of the big historical narratives." [ibidem p.17]. This perspective was reflected in the writings of several sociologists, whose perceptions can be used in order to analyze the way in which the phenomenon of immigration has been researched in recent years.

French philosopher Bruno Latour attempts to reconnect the social and natural worlds by arguing that modernity creates hybrids among researchers. Scientists have mutated into extremely specialized individuals, who are limited by their expertise, and their research topics will be niched. He believes that society was never modern, but it became to be perceived this way because we are interacting daily with "mixtures between entirely new types of beings, hybrids of nature and culture." [Latour, 1993, p.10]. In case of immigration as a subjects, it will almost never be treated individually, but together with one or multiple topics. Starting from Latour's perspective, I am expecting to see if and in what way inter-disciplinarity is employed in research on immigration.

All of these themes, which are important for post-modernity, emphasize the fact that consecrated "configurations, constellations, patterns of dependency and interaction were all thrown into the melting pot, to be subsequently recast and refashioned" [Bauman, 2000, p.6]. This

procedure is specific for the liquid modernity, a term attributed by Zygmund Bauman to post-modernity, in order to emphasize the "constant mobility and change he sees in relationships, identities, and global economics" [Mattiazzi & Vila-Petroff, 2021]. For Vlasceanu, Bauman's perspective reflects "the new moral and political turn of history and culture" [Vlăsceanu, 2010, p.18]. In previous times, these manifestations, which often "stem from a common core of values and ideologies" [ibidem p.20], were configured within the geographical area of the national state, and were controlled by the national institutions. (ibidem) However, due to the explicit changes which occurred in society, national institutions have a lower level of influence towards multiple modernities. Another interesting finding expressed by Vlasceanu is that these multiple modernities can both appear and disappear (ibidem).

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Ulrich Beck focused on risk society, in which, due to the technological advances, risks generated "changes in societies" [Vlăsceanu, 2010, p.23],. Climate change, for example, create climate immigrants and the new technology used in modern warfare increase he numbers of immigrant who are fleeing war-torn areas. Starting from Beck's theory, I want to emphasize how modern crisis are intertwined with immigration studies, for example, how is perceived immigration generated by climate change or if this practice is seen as a threat.

Lastly, Paul Gilroy believes that both the timeline of modernity and post-modernity are influenced by the hegemony of western authors and need to be repriodized, in order to have a better understanding of certain social issues. Slavery was a central theme of his work, and thought that this reconceptualization of theories would "impact [...] the political and cultural history of black Americans and that of blacks in

Europe". [Gilroy, 1993, p.17]. In order to overcome the limitations of modernity, and have a better understanding of current and future social issues, including immigration, we can use Gilroy's perspective. It is important to emphasize the fact that examples of all of the three paradigms of reflexive modernity can be present within a paper simultaneously, to the theory of multiple modernities, which, from Bauman's perspective, represented a starting point, which allowed the apeearance of simultaneous "national or regional modernities, connected to the trajectory of the same modernity" [Vlăsceanu, 2010, p. 21]

Research framework:

The purpose of this paper is to identify the way in which the scientific research of immigration has evolved over time.

The general objective is to identify the main theoretical perspectives of reflexive, employed by social researchers who have studied immigration.

The specific objective is to identify the main topics which have been associated with immigration

The research question of this paper was: What are the most common themes associated with immigration?

Methodology

The main research method employed within this paper was quantitative content analysis. The research unit was represented by the keywords of the author. Each of the articles which we analysed had between three and five key words. In my research, I included a total of 1423 of articles, which covered a 14 year time-span, starting from 2010 and including 2024. I started with 2010 because it was before the refugee crisis from 2015 and I continued to present times because I wanted to see how contemporary crisis, such as Covid or the Invasion of Ucraine were associated with immigration. The source of the articles was the Web of Science database. Data has been analyzed within the Bibliometrix package in the R statistical application, in which I applied statistical procedures in order to identify Trend Topics, Most Relevant Words, Most Global Cited Docment, and Words' frequency over Time. In order to have a better image of the data, I included in my analysis only key-words which appeared over ten times in the analyzed period.

Data analysis

Most Global Cited Documents

Out of the 10 most cited papers on immigration, all of the authors were, at that time, employed by Universities in the US. However, three of them were not carrying only US citizenship, thus they immigrated at some point from other countries. In other words, the point of view of immigrants is not represented among the general narrative.

Key-words frequency over time

After immigration, race is one of the main themes which has been discussed within the papers which I have included in my research. The interesting aspect is that the frequency of race as a key-word increased only in recent years, starting from 2018. This might be directly influenced by the anti-immigrant rhetoric which was used by right wing politicians in the aftermath of the refugee crisis, in order to emphasize the fact that foreigners of other religions and nationalities were perpetrating criminal acts in European countries. After race, the most frequent key-words are integration and immigration policy. I consider this to be a very interesting finding, due to the fact that, in my opinion, these two key words reflect opposite attitudes towards immigrants. On one hand, integration might be an indicator of people inclusive attitudes towards immigrants, because they want to include foreigners in their society. On the other hand, immigration policy might reflect the concern of anti-immigration hardliners, who are opposing foreigners and are militating for harder immigration policies. Ethnicity is another important keyword, whose development, in my opinion, is comparable to the one of race which I have previously mentioned. However, an important aspect which should not be neglected is that it does not register the same evolution as race, because it did not register an increase after 2018.

Trend Topics

I have analysed the keywords by using two distinct criteria. On one hand, I undertook a vertical analysis, in which I focused on the frequency with which the keywords were used. On the other hand, I focused my research on the time frame, in order to determine the period in which the use of the words spanned.

From the point of view of frequency, naturally the most used key word was immigration. The highest point of use was recorded in 2017, which coincides with the aftermath of the refugee's crisis. However, an interesting discovery was that the use of the term immigration began in 2014, one year before the start of the refugee's crisis. Thus, somehow, certain sociologists might have anticipated the refugee crisis. The usage of the concept of immigration began in 2014, when the term illegal-immigration stopped to be used. One might say that the refugee crisis represented a switch in the paradigm towards immigration, generated by an increase in numbers. Or, it can also show that locals became accustomed with the phenomenon of immigration. A very interesting finding is that we can group certain key-words based on the highest number of times they have been used, Resuting thus 11 groups, of approximately three key-words each. However, the most relevant are the ones which also have similar time-frames. For this second classification, we have two distinct groups. On one hand, there are the key-words, migration, racialization, inequality, which span roughly from 2015 up to 2022, and are directly related to the refugee crisis, because they are reffering to people of a different race. This approach ended in 2022, when the Russian invasion of Ukraine took place. Back then, the flood of foreign immigrants was replaced by one which consisted of people with greater similarities and common interests such as religion or culture. On the other hand, there are the key-word, illegal-immigration, exclusion, social integration, which are nearly able to tell a story, that of westerners who still are willing to accept illegal immigrants, because they haven't deal with the refugee crisis yet. Another interesting finding, concerning the time frame, each of the key words has been used for at least two years and for a maximum of nine years. The one used for the longest period of time is immigration-policy, which is only natural, because is the element which is used to regalement the phenomenon of immigration. From a chronological perspective, the latest researches are concerning recent global events, such as Covid-19, Latin America and Brexit. Latin America is a reference to the group of immigrants from South America and Latin America who are trying to enter into Mexico and from there into he U.S.

My research has uncovered the long lasting debate integration and assimilation. These are two

distinct perspectives towards how immigrants accommodate within new societies. Assimilation has proved to be more used than integration, both in numbers and for a longer period of time.

Conclusions

Based on the data, the themes associated with immigration reflect an evolution in people's attitudes towards immigrants, from even questioning the legality of the phenomenon up to the way in which they are accepting foreigner, by talking about immigration policy. The main themes associated with immigration are race , integration, ethnicity and higher education. The paradigm of multiple modernities has been used, due to dichotomic perspectives toward

immigrants, thus reflecting two different realities. However, Beck's theory of risk is not directly observed because terms like terrorism or radicalization have not been used. However, the perspective of climate immigration is also missing.

Paul Gilroy perspective is not employed, by not using ideas of non-European researchers, when approaching the subject of immigration. However, Latour's theory is somewhat approved, because the researchers are coming from different academic backgrounds.

In the future, we can generate a clearer image towards the evolution of the immigration heme in social research, by refferring to data from two distinct databases, and even covering a larger time frame.

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