

TECHNOSOCIAL ATMOSPHERES:  
MIGRATION, INSTITUTIONAL RACISM AND TWITTER

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In “The Fact of Blackness”, possibly the most quoted chapter of Franz Fanon’s postcolonial classic *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon 2007, originally published in French in 1952), the Martinican psychiatrist defines the predicament of the “man of color” in the “white world” through the conceptual tools of phenomenology, existentialism and psychoanalysis. Such predicament notoriously concerns “difficulties in the development of his bodily schema” in as much as for him the “[c]onsciousness of the body is solely a negating activity...a third-person consciousness” whereby “[t]he body is surrounded by *an atmosphere of certain uncertainty*” (Fanon 1986, 110, emphasis are mine). Fanon describes how for the black man the ‘corporeal schema’ of the body that allows for movement (such as reaching out for a packet of cigarette if one wants to smoke) is undercut by “a historical-racial schema” whereby the elements are no longer provided by “sensations and perceptions primarily of a tactile, vestibular, kinesthetic, and visual character”, but by the other, “the white man”, who has woven him “out of a thousand details, anecdotes, stories” (Fanon 1986, 111).

In France, the young Martinican doctor, who was educated to think of France as his ‘homeland’, finds himself repeatedly exposed to the objectification performed by the white gaze and voice: “Look, a Negro”, somebody says. “At first, he takes it lightly: It was true. It amused me.” (Fanon, 1986, 111). But with the repetition of the experience of being looked at and hailed ‘a Negro’, and specifically once exposed to the fear of the French boy who tells his mother that he is “frightened” of the Negro, he starts to feel different: “the corporeal schema crumbled, its place taken by a racial epidermal schema” (Fanon 1986, 112): as a result “[m]y body was given back to me sprawled out, distorted, recolored, clad in mourning in that white winter day” (Fanon 1986, 113). The white winter day and the distorted, recolored, mournful body enter a relationship of resonance which expropriates the black body of his own perception and relocates it as a dissonant element into the white, cold background that aims to define it by contrast.

Fanon's phenomenological account of his experience of racism in post World War II France is really so different from what contemporary migrants and asylum seekers experience in Europe? As Fanon put it, the racialized gaze and voice creates an "atmosphere of certain uncertainty" that disempowers the black body producing a disintegration of his bodily schema and its replacement with a fragmented "historical-racial schema". Colonial racism notoriously argued for a linear hierarchy of human races that posed the bourgeois European white man as the teleological apex of civilization with sub-Saharan Africans and Australian aboriginals classified at the opposite end, as residues of a primitive past (Da Silva 2007). Modern racist ideas and attitudes towards the non-white body were given ample cultural and social dissemination by the new means of mechanical reproduction – in print media such as books, magazines and newspapers, but also, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, in visual media such as photography and cinema, not to mention the large 'World Fairs' held in cities such as London, New York, Paris, Brussels and Chicago. Today, various "truths" and "feelings" about refugees and migrants are still produced and circulated through modern media such as books, newspapers, film and television, but increasingly also by means of a new class of semiotكنولوجies called 'social media' (Langlois 2014). Social media not only construct the social as social network out of the circulation of beliefs and desires (Terranova 2015 and 2016), but, it could be argued, also bear specific atmospheric qualities (even if such qualities would be described by the phenomenology of atmospheres as artificial, "de-realized and sensorially deprived", Griffero 2010, 25). What is more challenging for a phenomenology of lived atmospheric spaces, such technosocial atmosphere are always simultaneously "lived" and "measured".

This article focuses on the notion that social media can be described as spaces where atmospheres of hostility or solidarity towards migrants and asylum seekers are generated and diffused. In writing this article, a media theorist, a statistician and a legal scholar cooperated to explore the question of whether contemporary emotional attitudes of hostility towards migrants (which, as Fanon showed, are directed at the very proprioception of the nonwhite body) and the atmosphere of 'certain uncertainty' that is the lived expression of their legal and social status, can be perceived through an exercise of statistical data mining of the popular microblogging platform Twitter. Our inter-disciplinary collaboration, then, started with a paradox in relation to the philosophical concept of 'atmosphere'. If, as in Griffero, atmospheres "resist a 'representational attitude'" (Griffero 2010, 8) and are not reducible to discrete elements (*ibid.*, 38) in as much as they

are something that “escapes analytical, hence immobilizing, perception because everything that scientists touch, they reduce to immobility, transforming it into ‘dead nature’” (*ibid.*, 9), wouldn’t such reduction to immobility and transformation into dead nature be actually desirable in this case? Furthermore, the “vagueness” of atmospheres, which entails not the “perception of elementary sensible data, but our involvement in things or better situations” (*ibid.*, 17) is said to be not decomposable into numerical entities (*ibid.*, 18). And yet, we live in a world increasingly perceived by means of computational interfaces and info-visualisations, that is by means of what Vilém Flusser called “the universe of technical images” (Flusser 2011). Neo-phenomenological approaches to atmospheric perception which explicitly eschew the cognitive and the conscious in order to safeguard the vague qualities of perception can also be useful in framing the ways in which such aesthetic atmospheres today are the object of marketing-oriented design projects where techniques such as ‘priming’ of the body’s proprioception are implemented. For Brian Massumi, for example, the ‘soft power of priming’ characterizes the design of contemporary aesthetic atmospheres, working as a “form of conditioning, which modulates behavior by implanting presuppositions and activating tendencies in an open situation of encounter” (Massumi 2014, 29). In as much as priming does not operate through a ‘stimulus-response’ model but in “situational” ways, it “addresses threshold postures (presuppositions) orienting a participant’s entry into the situation, plus the associated tendencies that carry the orientation forward through the encounter” (*ibid.*, 29). Priming as a form of environmental ‘onto-power’ thus functions “by incitation or triggering, rather than punishment and reward, inducing participation rather than imposing a form” (*ibid.*).

The data collected on social networks that will be discussed later on in this study, enable a sensible, analytical perception (hence not atmospheric) of an Italian public opinion split between “positive” and “negative” feelings towards migrants/asylum seekers. However, such feelings need to be framed by a reflection on the so-called ‘institutional racism’, that is on that complex of policies, norms and administrative practices that perpetuate, reinforce or produce inequality and social unease in disadvantaged minorities (Bartoli 2012). Institutional racism can be described as a form of racism that is not so much explicit as subtle and as such as something that cannot be “unmasked” by identifying specific individuals who can be deemed responsible for it. As Carmichael and Hamilton put it, institutional racism derives from the action of forces that are constituted and respected by society and hence much less likely to cause widespread public

condemnation (Carmichael and Hamilton 1967). Migrants, in fact, do not just meet difficulties in their search for housing or a job, but are subject to discriminatory treatment by the very institutions that should protect them and promote their social integration. In our opinion, institutional racism can produce social atmospheres that authorize and normalize the expressions of racism and xenophobic violence towards people from non-European nations – and more specifically from the African and the Asian continents. Racist atmospheres that surround and envelop the migrant body are diffused by the media often in the form of racist declarations by authorities and institutional representatives, which are harmful to the image of the migrants. For example, one can cite the statement issued through a press release by the centre-left president of the Friuli Venezia Giulia region, Debora Serracchiani, according to whom “[s]exual violence is always a hideous and sick act, but more unacceptable when it is carried out by those who ask and receive hospitality [such as asylum seekers]”. When her statement was picked up by the press and debated in social media, Serracchiani answered her critics through her own Facebook’s page, arguing that it merely constituted a matter of “good sense” (*Fatto Quotidiano* 2017). Or one can cite the mayor of Albetton (Vicenza), Joe Formaggio, who unabashedly stated on radio: “Migrants? If they send them to us, we are going to wall their homes and fill them with manure... We are proudly racists... We do not want blacks and gypsies, over here they risk their lives” (Ventriglia 2016).

The most significant expressions of ‘institutional racism’ as productive of a racist atmosphere can of course be found in those laws that limit the rights of not-citizens in sometimes disproportionate and illegitimate ways. We can refer to policies that limit access to social and economic rights on the basis of a disproportionate period of residency (see in February 2017 the passing by the Regional Council of Veneto of a law that prioritizes children whose parents reside in Veneto for at least fifteen years when assigning places to infants in nursery schools); the exclusion of non-Italians from access to public service (such as voluntary civil service, which has only recently been corrected); and the “supertax” imposed on citizens of non-EU countries for the release and renewal of residency permits. What is noteworthy about legislation on migration and asylum as a whole is its orientation towards “security” and the ensuing “precarization” (the ‘atmosphere of certain uncertainty’) of migrants’ juridical (and hence social and human) conditions, which produces legal forms of discrimination. The Bossi-Fini law of 2002, the ‘security package’ of 2008, the Minniti-Orlando decree of 2016 are all

expressions of a political will to criminalize the migrant, identifying her/him as a scapegoat of a society in crisis. One can think about the law n. 46/2017 that implemented the Minniti-Orlando decree, which eliminated the appeal proceedings for the granting of international protection. In this manner, an unreasonable distinction between citizens and non-citizens was produced, since, in Italy, decisions issued by the courts of first instance can generally be appealed. Appeal proceedings may lead to a complete re-examination of the case. The paradox introduced by the new law is that Italian citizens can appeal for minor matters, whereas the non-citizen cannot appeal to exercise a constitutional right such as the right to asylum (granted by Art. 10 of Italian Constitution). We must also consider that before the new law foreclosing the right to appeal in matter concerning asylum was approved, 70% of the appeal proceedings used to lead to the granting of international protection thus overturning the rulings of the territorial Committee (*Commissione territoriale per l'esame della domanda di protezione internazionale* – an administrative committee) and the court of first instance.<sup>1</sup> The fundamental value of the right to appeal is thus evident. Moreover, as the terms of the law No. 46/2017 dictate, the court of first instance, as a norm, is not required to hear the asylum seeker but can decide on his/her application only on the basis of a videorecording of his/her audition in front of the territorial Committee, in this way denying the right to be heard such as enshrined in the Italian legal order, and demanded by the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and by the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights. Such law has even been used to carry out a series of evictions of spaces squatted in the absence of a state policy of housing that considers the needs of the vulnerable members of society – thus criminalizing migrants, asylum seekers, “beggars” and homeless people. As it has been claimed, such legal norms have produced an “unequal legal right”, or even an “ethnic law” connoted by significant exceptions to common legal protections’ as stated by the president of the Human Rights committee to the Italian Senate (*Commissione straordinaria diritti umani del Senato* – Manconi 2017). The effects of this much-reviled normative intervention have soon become visible: judges do not comply with the obligation to hear the international asylum seeker – failing even to comply with the demand to watch the videorecording; police headquarters actively hinder the renewal of the residence permit during the appeal procedures thus denying the right to international

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1 See <https://altreconomia.it/diritto-asilo-appello/>

protection; and the police intervenes to clear spaces squatted by those asylum seekers whom, on the basis of obligations prescribed by European Union legislation, should receive from the State food, housing, medical care and more generally a “decent” hospitality.

Already the Bossi-Fini law (law No. 189/2002), in establishing a connection between the residency permit and the existence of a labor contract, prescribed the loss of the former in the case of job loss thus allowing for the creation of an army of low-wage and vulnerable workers. As in the law No. 109/2012 implementing the ‘Sanctions’ directive of the European Union (2009/52/EC), such law placed the migrant worker employed “under the table” and victim of exploitation in the uncomfortable position of having to choose whether to report the employee – and thus face the risk of expulsion and loss of payment for the work performed – or to continue to work in conditions of quasi-slavery. These are only some of the means, then, by which the ‘atmosphere of certain uncertainty’ which Fanon described are institutionally produced today. Given such conditions, one might ask whether racist feelings in society, such as expressed through social networking platforms, legitimize the governmental limitation of basic rights for migrants, or whether politics instigates and legitimizes such feelings to authorize restrictive and securitarian normative interventions, thus determining a precarization of the migrants’ conditions – their relation to Italy as a lived space and the situations they are exposed to. This precarization, in its turn, feeds feelings of closure and hostility in parts of Italian society. Hostile feelings expressed in social media would thus both feed on and feed back to legislation that delivers migrants and asylum seeker to a condition of vulnerability and precarization. They compound and reinforce the “thousands details, stories and anecdotes” about migrants and asylum seekers, which, however, also acquire specific media qualities (the ever-returning social media’s “fake news” about migrants’ luxurious daily allowances for example).

If institutional racism frames social media racism, however, such framing is also of a technical nature, expressing what Jonathan Crary, in his study of the changing nature of the “means of perception”, called the constant perceptual revolution that is a specific feature of modern societies (Crary 1990). This means that different media actualize different modes of perception, which, we might argue, also engender different atmospheres. If early twentieth century European audiences derived their perception of the racialised other through the media of cinema, print, photography and exhibitions, today they construct them by means of television, online news and social media. Each medium, it might be

argued, produces its own specific atmospheres in qualitatively different ways: in the 1940s, when Fanon experienced the disintegration of his bodily schema by the racialized gaze, the stately cinema palaces, with their golden gildings and thick velvet drapes, emanated an atmosphere of aristocratic entertainment for the working masses of the inter-war period who could there enjoy feelings of superiority in watching films that stereotyped and racialized the subaltern colonial Other (Richards 1984); in the post-World War II years, at least in Western countries, the cozy, domestic atmosphere of a switched on TV set illuminating the interiors of private homes expressed the comfort and ease of a newly found affluence which excluded ethnic minorities in the portrayal of a white and clean world; in the first decades of the new millennium, post-desktop computing and mobile based social media have changed the atmospheres of private and public spaces, enveloping the subject in what have been called 'echo chambers' which produce a feeling of being "amongst friends" but also of being "alone together" (Turkle 2011). As Jodie Dean has put it, social media are not simply networks of computers and protocols, but more significantly they are "affective networks, capturing people" (Dean 2010, 92). Furthermore, different platforms are designed to produce their own specific technosocial atmospheres, which are perceivable as 'first impressions' by users: the chatty, bar-like, quasi-intimate interfaces of platforms such as Facebook built around personal, articulated and egocentric networks of friends, acquaintances and family, for example, contrast with the more public, buzzing flow of hashtag-driven repartees on Twitter, which can also be differentiated from the chaotic and turbulent domains of IRC networks or the ways in which geolocative dating apps such as Tinder or Grindr eroticize public spaces (Coleman 2014; Terracciano 2017).

One of the most significant difference between modern media such as print, cinema, radio and television with relation to social networking platforms is the ways in which the latter are both "communicational" and "computational" media that rely on a fundamental division between the "front end" and the "back end" of the medium (Helmond and Gerlitz 2013; Kaldrack and Röhle 2014). Social media, that is, instantiate a basic aesthetic and perceptual division between the "front end" of users' interfaces and the "back end" of coding and data processing. If users perceive the specific atmospheres of different social media platforms as a composition of colors and elements, of functionalities and protocols which shape the rhythms and feelings of social communication, data scientists perceive the medium through the back end, that is they can



access the data flow (and its specific modalities of organization) by querying the social media database through the so-called Application Programming Interface (API) issued by the platforms.<sup>2</sup>

The social media platform taken under consideration in this article, Twitter, is a microblogging social networking service that allows registered members to post and interact by broadcasting short messages (max 140 characters) called ‘tweets’. Registered members can become a ‘follower’ of other users (whose tweets will become part of one’s streaming feed) and/or use the hashtag protocol (#) to view all tweets relative to a specific topic (for example #migranti or #iusoli). In Italy there are 6.9 millions of active users and 8 millions of registered ones, which has made Twitter an influential medium in providing the space in which something called ‘public opinion’ becomes perceivable, observable and also measurable. In this sense, social media platforms have become important means of production of ‘atmospheres’ and their “reception in a so-called diffuse aestheticization” (Griffero 2010, 6), and “simultaneously” the site of their analytical de-composition. If the average user with an account can, by logging in and accessing the front end of the platform, get a feeling of the general climate of opinion with relation to specific subjects by querying for a specific hashtag or through their algorithmically curated feeds, data scientists with the relevant software can provide a general map of the distribution of opinions and sentiments.

Data generated by the use of the platform at the back end are a mine of information on habits and consumptions, likes and dislikes, and beliefs and sentiments about specific events. Twitter thus is considered a relevant source of viewpoints and for this reason we turned to it to gather by means of data a technical (statistical) image of the sentiments and opinions of Italy’s ‘tweeters’ on migration. The use of statistics implies that something is lost (the non-metric vague qualities of technosocial atmospheres), but also that something is gained (a new kind of vision that makes perceivable the social life of data beyond the disorienting confusion of the live feed generated by the interface). The atmospheres of social media can be at times deemed “toxic”: they have been accused of producing an increasing polarization of views and opinions, a simplified and degraded understanding of complex issues, and of being medium for the diffusion of virulent forms of racism. At the same time, data info-visualization can become useful means to think about how to foreclose the emergence of racist atmospheres and how to design less toxic technosocial spaces.

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2 Twitter Search API for information <https://dev.twitter.com/rest/public/search>



On Twitter, data (literally “what is given”) is available in form of posts with a maximum length of 140 characters, while the social membership is very differentiated and transnational. In this study, we made the choice to consider only posts written in Italian. The statistical exercise used words prefixed by the ‘#’ (hashtag) sign, that is through signs which allow the post’s author to index keywords or topics allowing other users to easily follow the discussion or “thread”. Some rules and restrictions of Twitter search require attention in collecting data, which can be accessed through the specifications provided by the platform’s public API (Application Programming Interface), mediated by the use of a specific App and, in this case, also using an ad-hoc software (R-statistical program).<sup>3</sup> Twitter’s terms of use dictate that text streaming is limited to search against a sampling of recent Tweets published within the time limit of a week, with a rate limit of calls made to the app within a time frame and with a limit of the amount of posts that can be extracted.

Our statistical exercise then started by defining a boundary which delimited a corpus of 96467 gathered messages with specific features (such as type of hashtag, time of collection and number of tweets), in two different timeframes: A, which concerns the time between the 8<sup>th</sup> and the 25<sup>th</sup> of October 2016; and B, which spanned the time from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 30<sup>th</sup> of July 2017. While in the first timeframe, we only looked at the recurrence of the hashtag #migranti, in the second time frame we also added the hashtag #iussoli – which refers to the debate in the Italian parliament around a law granting citizenship to children of migrants born in Italy.<sup>4</sup>

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3 R is a language for statistical computing and graphics, free software available at <https://www.r-project.org>

4 Such proposal (S.2092 [*Ddl Ius Soli*] *Modifiche alla legge 5 febbraio 1992, n. 91, e altre disposizioni in materia di cittadinanza*) was approved in 2015 by the Italian *Camera dei Deputati* (one of the two chambers of which the Italian Parliament is composed) but not by the *Senato*, so it was abandoned because of a technicality – such as the impending end of the government (the Parliament elections were scheduled for March 4<sup>th</sup>). The real reason, however, was the lack of broad political consensus around the reform of the Italian law on citizenship, which had been under discussion since 2003 (the current legislation dating back to 1992, when Italy was not yet characterized by a structural and permanent migration). Moreover the legislative proposal was very moderate, since it would have granted the right to Italian citizenship only to those minors born in Italy to foreign parents, of whom at least one was required to hold a 5-year residence permit (*jus soli*), and to those minors who were either born in Italy or arrived within the last twelve years, having attended the school for at least 5 years and whose parents are legally present (*jus culturae*). The legislative proposal subordinates the recognition of citizenship to the possession of a residence permit

Type of hashtag	#migranti	#iussoli
Time of collection (from-to)	A. 08-25 October 2016 B. 03-30 July 2017	B. 03-30 July 2017
Number of tweets	A. 12754 B. 56471	B. 32761
Language	Italian	Italian

We thus followed a method that is practiced daily by a multitude of data analysts, through which social media atmospheres are decomposed into statistical aggregates and numbers. We were interested in whether particular events increased the volume of tweets and hence users' participation and also in identifying whether such facts and news moved users' opinion towards feelings of aversion or inclusion to migrants. The exercise was necessarily statistically limited and it serves the purpose here of showing some of the ways in which technosocial atmospheres are consistently and continually subjected to the kind of numerical reductions that phenomenologists abhor – and the value of such statistical exercises for anti-racist technopolitics (Medina 2015).

The main approach used to extract novel information from a corpus or a collection of texts is defined Text Data Mining (TDM – Sullivan 2001) – which could be described philosophically with Alfred North Whitehead a form of technical 'prehension' (Whitehead 2010), whereby language is processed by extracting meaningful indices through statistical methods as a summary of words included in texts and grouping words based on a specific metric (cluster analysis, see Johnson and Wichern 2002) to determine similarities or classified words in positive or negative perceptions (sentiment analysis see Stone et al. 1966; Turney 2002). Basically the main goal is to start from an 'atmospheric perception' of an intensified public debate around certain issues, and then try to verify it statistically, thus sacrificing the vagueness of atmospheric perception to analytical representation in the hope of gaining new insights into the relationship between public opinion and the social life of data.

The statistical analysis proceed in three major steps: first a collection of those messages or tweets with the hashtag #migrants and #iussoli (the latter only for the second time-frame); secondly a pre-processing step was

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by the parents of the minor and also dictates certain age limits. The fact that such restrictive and moderate proposal was not approved by parliament in our opinion demonstrates the existence of institutional racism as defined above.

performed and url, links, tweeter user's names, twitter special words (as RT<sup>5</sup>), photos and emoticons were removed.<sup>6</sup> Thirdly, in order to extract words, a tokenization was applied: each message was split in its words and thus segmented, punctuation was substituted by a blank space, empty words were not taken into account (as articles).<sup>7</sup> Then, a so called 'sentiment classification' was performed using the tools of Sentiment Analysis (SA) or Opinion Mining (OP) – a technique that analyzes textual information and detects opinions, attitudes and emotions in relation to a person or facts, such as opinions on migrants, as with our tweeters' messages. For this specific purpose, a sentiment score for each posted tweet was calculated in order to obtain the measure of the positive or negative value of the text – the score formula is defined as the difference between the number of positive words and negative ones. In such exercises of data mining, if the score is higher than zero the message is classified as positive emotion, if lower than zero as negative emotion. In case of score equal to zero, the sentence is considered as neutral, but in this article this case was not take into account. A correct classification of words is obtained using a lexicon in Italian. As, unfortunately, classification in this field is difficult for non-English languages, an experimental lexicon was considered.<sup>8</sup> Thus a vague social atmosphere, such as that experienced through the front-end interfaces by individual users, was translated into a series of technical images or info-visualisations that allow for an analytical perception of what one could name the 'twittersphere'.

In Fig.1 the analysis concerns the hashtag '#migrants' and the first time frame period. For each day of collection the number of positive and negative messages is displayed, the maximum peak is reached on 12th October. Differences in emotions are also wider for the period going from the 10th to the 18th of October. We suppose that the neutral messages correspond to tweets that are about news and description of facts instead of users' opinion as displayed in Fig.2. Furthermore due to some limitation of the sentiment lexicon used, it is possible that some tweets were misclassified as neutral. Nevertheless we prefer to illustrate even the neutral tweet in order to understand the maximum number of tweet for each day. The number of neutral tweets on the 24<sup>th</sup> of October can be temptatively and possibly

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5 RT meaning is ReTweet, it is a reposting of a Tweet.

6 Sequence of printable characters representing emotion defined through human facial expression

7 A word that has only a grammar function with no meaning in itself.

8 A lexicon is a list of words classified by emotion, here an English lexicon was used, available in R package 'lexicon'.

related to news of at least 12,000 migrants being “rescued” by the Coast of Sicily between the 21<sup>st</sup> and the 24<sup>th</sup> of October 2016 (*Redazione Roma* 2016), with a number of casualties due to drowning during the difficult journey by sea. The general trend is for tweets to deploy terms connoted as “positive” by our lexicon.

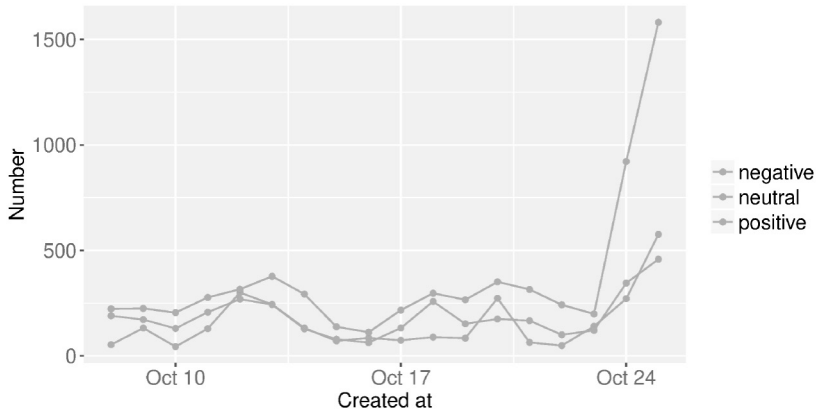


Fig 1: Classification of emotion based on messages containing #migrants during October

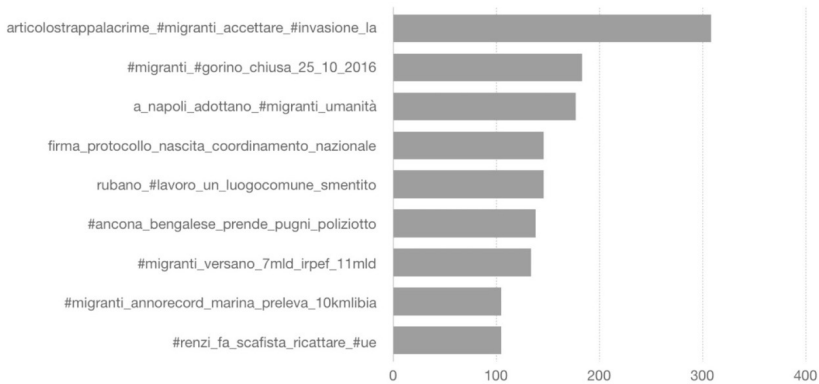


Fig 2: Frequent combination of words used in messages containing #migrants during October

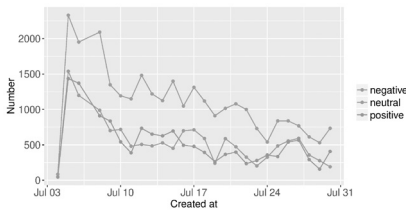


Fig 3: Classification of emotion based on messages containing #migranti during July

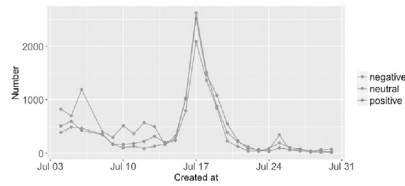


Fig 4: Classification of emotion based on messages containing #iussoli during July

In Fig. 3, which is about the second timeframe (from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 31<sup>st</sup> of July 2017), the trend of messages is decreasing and there is a slight trend towards the expression of negative emotions, while it is worthwhile noticing how the number of messages is three times those collected in October. Thus, the news that the discussion of the law granting citizenship to children of non-Italian citizens born and raised in Italy (the so called ‘ius soli’) had been moved to Autumn 2017, provoked a quantitatively larger amount of tweets than those collected during a week marked by the reporting of casualties during a particularly intense wave of landing of migrants’ and asylum seekers in Italy’s Southern borders. The differences between positive and negative emotion is quantified in about 50 tweets. An interesting feature is highlighted in Fig. 4: when a specific hashtag is identified, according to definite events such as the postponement of the ‘ius soli’ legislation, users’ opinion becomes divided, neutral texts decrease and positive and negative sentiments increase. The highest peak is 17th of July.

Our limited statistical exercise allows us to articulate a number of speculations, that could be the object of further interdisciplinary research into the constitution of technosocial atmosphere and the relation between the phenomenological vagueness of lived atmosphere and the statistical exactness of data mining. One could thus postulate that technosocial atmospheres such as those generated by Twitter are likely to be triggered by outside events as mediated by other kinds of media (a TV talk show, news as reported by print media also in their online version); that technosocial atmospheres present not so much homogeneous hostile or racist sentiments towards migrants but a general polarization of opinion split between positive and negative sentiments; that the ongoing catastrophe of shipwrecks and

casualties suffered by migrants trying to cross through Europe's militarized southern borders does not cause any intense debate – as shown by the difference for the time frame when citizenship rights for migrants are debated. At the same time, the polarization of opinion that is consistently reproduced by statistical data mining could be a sign of a larger atmosphere of polarization in the nation, but it could also be the result of the ways such media function and also due to the methodology of Sentiment Analysis and Opinion Mining.

To conclude our interdisciplinary collaboration inspired by the concept of atmosphere has allowed us to consider the ways in which research about the phenomenology of lived experience, the power of legislation and institutional racism, and the tools of data mining can be usefully deployed to consider the ways in which atmospheric modes of perception are generated in contemporary society and culture.

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