
Borders as the ultimate (de)Fence of Identity: an ontological security approach to exclusionary populism in Italy and Spain

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Abstract: This paper looks at the discursive construction of the concept of border and its interaction with identity in two exclusionary populist movements: *Lega* in Italy and *Vox* in Spain. The study, based on the analysis of an *ad hoc* selection of discourses by the two parties' leaders, applies clause-based semantic text analysis to detect the main discursive representations of the “us” and the “others” as threatening ontological security and the performative role played by borders as the ultimate (de)Fence for identity. Results show that Matteo Salvini focuses his discourse on the manipulation of physical space, representing Italy as the space for Italians and proposing to “close the borders” as the only way to stop the “invasion”. Santiago Abascal, on his side, constructs Spanish identity as inherently and proudly “anti-Islamic”. Borders, therefore, are inviolable for those considered incompatible with local values, namely “Muslims”, represented as a “natural threat” to Spanish identity.

Keywords: Populism, Ontological Security, Borders, Political Discourse, Spain, Italy