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"Multiculturalism Has Come Back to Bite Us During Pandemic": A CDA Of Pauline Hanson's Statements on COVID-19

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Abstract:
Pauline Hanson has long been a controversial political figure, renowned for her xenophobic views. Like other radical right populists, her political discourse is based on the exclusionary opposition between 'the people' and various 'Others'. The present study analysed Pauline Hanson's political discourse, focusing on a collection of statements and news published on her official website (https://www.senatorhanson.com.au/) on the implications of COVID-19 for the Australian society and economy. The analysis applied CDA to the study of populist political discourse. In particular, the study explored the way actors and facts are framed, investigating how the 2020 COVID-19 crisis has been exploited to support nativist policies, feeding fears, and scapegoating 'the Other' for the nation's problems. The COVID-19 pandemic seems to have offered Hanson an opportunity to attack minorities and immigrants. In particular, through her political communication, echoing Donald Trump's Sinophobic language, Hanson has sought to exploit the COVID-19 crisis to manufacture anti-Chinese sentiments in Australia to legitimise her party's standing on issues like immigration. Hanson's populist rhetoric has also been articulated through attacks on international organisations like the World Health Organisation and the United Nations. Moreover, she vowed to refuse a coronavirus vaccine and appeared to support conspiracy theories and misinformation.

Keywords: Pauline Hanson; political discourse; Australian populism; COVID-19; Critical Discourse Analysis

1. Risk society, COVID-19, and populism

The present study explores the concept of 'risk society' in connection with the situation of precariousness generated by the COVID-19 pandemic. It then focuses on populist politics and its reaction to pandemics and, in particular, on Australian senator Pauline Hanson's standings.

'Risk society' means that we live in a world out of control. There is nothing certain but uncertainty (see Beck in Yates). The concept of 'risk society' was elaborated by the German sociologist Ulrich Beck in a famous essay in 1986 (English translation Beck, *Risk Society*), interestingly enough, the year of the Chernobyl disaster, in some ways foreseeing the catastrophe, which is extraordinarily topical again in times of pandemic. The risk par excellence, at least in our frightened eyes today. His analysis is still used today as a reference for talking about Europe, cosmopolitanism, and the problems of the modern world. In fact, he himself had extended it to global society, addressing the issue of security lost due to terrorism, biological weapons, climate change, and the financial crisis. These risks are not only produced and distributed by societies; they are also not easily visible and countable, they are not attributed to people or organisations which could be deemed responsible, they can affect everybody, but in different ways, and they are managed by scientists. Beck wrote, "*Risk* may be defined as a

systematic way of dealing with hazards and insecurities induced and introduced by modernization itself" (Beck, *Risk Society* 21, emphasis in the original).[1]

Beck's insights, however, "have not become common knowledge," as the Italian sociologists Chiara Giaccardi and Mauro Magatti point out. So we reached 2020, in which we suddenly and dramatically realised not only the absence of a vaccine against COVID-19, but, more generally, the possibility of a health risk. COVID-19, therefore, has undoubtedly represented an unprecedented global health risk but, more than anything else, it has highlighted how societies around the world were unprepared, overwhelmed by lack of control and uncertainty. After all, as mentioned earlier, Beck warned us about modern society's diminishing capacity to control the dangers it itself produces and told us that the risks were not the result of modernity's defeats but, paradoxically, of its victories, the negative consequences of which are too often overlooked (see Di Vico). In the light of these assumptions, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to fit into the framework of the risk society as a danger produced by the victories of the modernisation process in its global dimension.

However, COVID-19 belongs to a very particular type of risks that risk theory does not adequately explain. The uncertainties linked to COVID-19 pandemic seem to have revitalised populist movements worldwide. Several definitions of populism have been suggested in the frame of discursive approaches to the political phenomenon. In the light of Cas Mudde's argument and propositions (see "The Populist Zeitgeist"), we subscribe to the view that populism essentially revolves around two elements: individualism and the Manichean dualism that contrasts 'the pure people', characterised as hard-working, simple, honest and productive, to 'the corrupt elite', parasite and expression of the economic power. Populism may be viewed as:

> *a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the* volonté générale *(general will) of the people* (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 5-6, emphasis in the original).

Right-wing populist leaders, in particular, tend to adopt nativist approaches: the construction of an 'us', the idea of community or 'heartland' against 'them' as an enemy to fight, a tendency to defend the rights of the native-born population against those of the immigrant subjects. The risk represented by COVID-19 threat to public health has prompted nativists to exacerbate their positions.

In the case of global risks, according to Beck (see "Clash of Risk Cultures"), cultural perception, that is, the belief in the reality or unreality of the respective global risk, assumes central importance and often results in a "clash of risk cultures." Therefore, it should not be surprising that populists have not had an unambiguous response to the pandemic, but it is undeniable that, especially in the first stages of the virus outbreak, populists have underestimated the risk and dangers posed by COVID19. Populism and authoritarianism have, indeed, been discrediting the importance of experts and relativising the notion of truth in recent years. There have been many politicians supporting conspiracy theories, as well as the countless non-expert instructions to ignore the pandemic or resort to alternative treatments. Donald Trump convincingly suggested

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[1] He continues by saying: "Risks, as opposed to older dangers, are consequences which relate to the threatening force of modernization and to its globalization of doubt. They are *politically reflexive*" (emphasis in the original).

injecting hydroxychloroquine as a remedy to prevent and defeat COVID-19, to the extent that he assured that he himself took it once a day. A similar attitude was taken by his Brazilian counterpart, Jair Bolsonaro, another head of state who has always been reluctant to wear a mask and definitely inclined to reopen all economic activities, even though deaths and contagions in his country were remarkably high. Not to be overlooked is Boris Johnson's theory of relying on herd immunity, followed by a late admission of the problem. The situation generated wider risks to democracy and pluralism, not only for the rapid online circulation of such disinformation by motivated political actors. Such disinformation is circulated through social media, exploiting 'echo chambers', where citizens are no longer exposed to the official viewpoints of their adversaries, except in the most crudely caricatured ways. As Ruth Wodak (see *The Politics of Fear*) argues, the populist radical right has proven to be adept at exploiting the affordances of social media platforms. As noted by Engesser et al., the features of populist style, "such as simplification, emotionalization, and negativity, are perfectly in line with the Internet's attention economy" (1286). Populists exploited the pandemic to fuel xenophobic sentiments, blaming the Chinese and Asians, illegal and undocumented migrants, Roma people, and other ethnic minorities. Indeed, the situation increased the 'threat' of authoritarianism, nativism, and racism (see Bieber; Flew and Iosidifis).

Needless to say, the relationship between 'crisis' and populism has been one of the most important themes in the literature on the subject since its inception in the 1960s and 1970s. In fact, crises serve as an ideal incubator for the growth of populists as they increase socio-political divisions, creating new rifts that enlarge the distance between 'the people' and 'the elite', the government and the governed. Popular frustrations have therefore always been exploited by populists in an attempt to unify and mobilise broader social strata against the insensitive political 'elites' who are held responsible for their problems. It follows that the coronavirus emergency has represented a new facet of 'risk', acting as a sounding board for dissatisfaction and, more importantly, fear.

As *The Economist* writes, the coronavirus is exacerbating the policies of many countries, pushing them towards protectionism and complicating the resolution of shared problems, such as all the issues related to vaccines and economic recovery. The coronavirus crisis is forcing us to rethink the terms of globalisation and international relations at all levels, as French President Macron (qtd. in Mallet and Khalaf) said to *The Financial Times*, stating that he sees this phase "as an event that will change the nature of globalisation and the structure of international capitalism." One could not but agree with President Macron, who claims that "We are all embarking on the unthinkable" (Macron qtd. in Mallet and Khalaf). Indeed, Beck warned us about the risks of modernisation and globalisation, but the worst that he had envisioned was the risk of identity loss, not all the consequences of what many have termed the plague of our millennium.

The literature provides us with many studies regarding the link between crisis and populism (see Laclau; Moffitt; Mudde, *The Far Right Today*). The political crisis, which is itself part of a more general crisis, is thus a "necessary condition for populism" (see Laclau 177). The populists of the radical right, as skilful entrepreneurs of crisis, have benefited politically and then electorally from the three most significant crises of the twenty-first century: the September 11 attack, the financial crisis of 2008 and the so-called 'refugee crisis' of 2015 (see Mudde, *The Far Right Today*) which have been joined by the more recent pandemics. All these are conflicts, which began in a single space, but have affected everyone, thus transforming our century into a choral century, where there are gigantic issues that then manifest themselves in the lives of all of us.

However, it has to be said that the particular nature of the crisis provoked by COVID-19 did not offer the populists the same opportunity for advantage. As is the case with crises caused by natural disasters for which it is difficult to find the authorship, at the first outbreak, COVID-19 was difficult to politicise and bring to the level of political divisions typical of the 'us versus them'.

1.1 Australia, COVID-19 and Hansonism
In January 2020, the World Health Organisation declared a global pandemic. In Australia, the first wave was perceived as localised overseas and not as a disruptive agent at the national level. The first responses to the outbreak were complicated by crisis and recovery from a spate of bushfires. Restrictions generated frustration for many local enterprises with serious implications for their continued survival (see Hight). Nevertheless, as can be seen in Figure 1, in the first phase of the pandemic, Australia had almost defeated Coronavirus. Lockdowns, contact tracing, and public adherence to tough rules credited for success. At the time of writing this article, it has been a fortnight since the COVID-19 Delta variant has managed to breach various major cities' defences to the point that almost 80% of the population are living under restrictions.
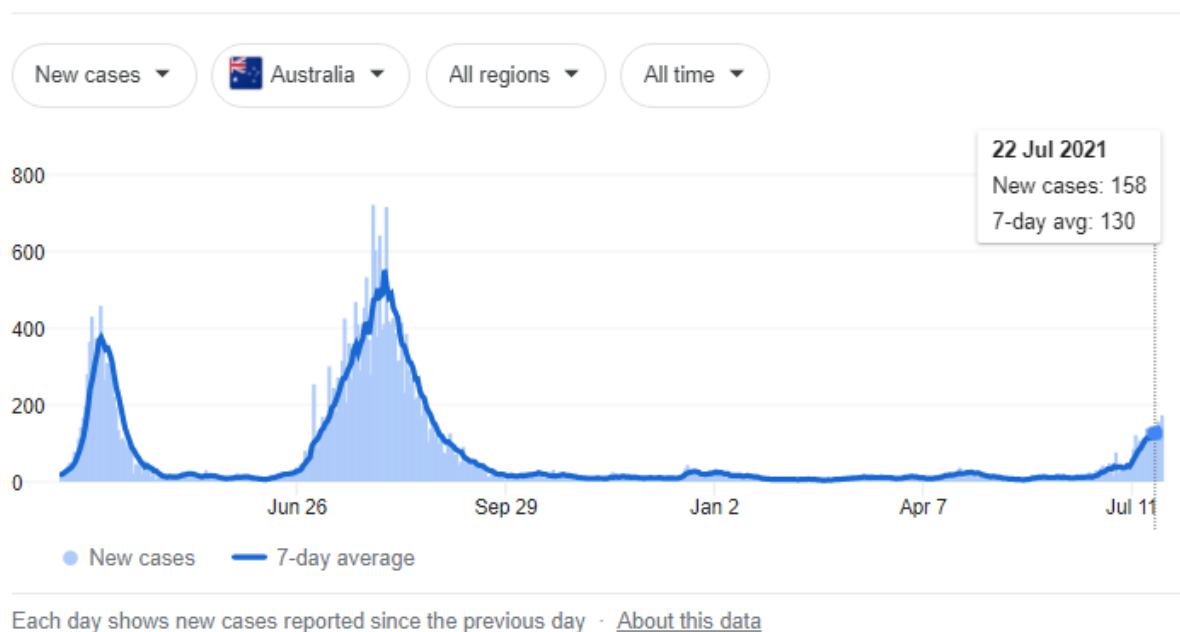

Figure 1. New cases of COVID-19 in Australia.
Source: Google Coronavirus Disease Statistics

What should be said is that, all things considered, Australians are generally quite satisfied with their lives. The Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey carries out an investigation every year. Before the outbreak of COVID-19, for example, the average life satisfaction score was about 7.92 on the 0-10 scale. Australians' life satisfaction has been reasonably constant at relatively high levels, driven by basic factors such as health, safety, and social contact. Australians are, thus, generally content about their society.

Nevertheless, the pandemic offered Australian nativist populists an opportunity to invigorate their exclusionary discourses with new motifs. The resurgence of populism across the world in the last decade had favoured the formation of right-wing populist parties in Australia and energised Senator Hanson's *One Nation* Party. The party has enjoyed two iterations of electoral success in the Australian federation, in the 1990s and from 2016 to date.

In 1995, Pauline Hanson joined the Liberal Party, then to be disendorsed the following year, shortly before the election, due to her derogatory comments about Aboriginals made in a letter to *The Queensland Times*. In 1996, despite the disendorsement, Pauline Hanson was elected to the Federal Parliament as an independent. In 1997, she founded *One Nation* Party but, in 1998, she failed to win re-election to Parliament. As a consequence of her numerous legal problems, in 2002, she was forced to resign from *One Nation*. After twenty years and nine failed State and Federal elections, in 2015, *One Nation* changed its name to Pauline Hanson's *One Nation* (PHON). In 2016, Hanson managed to be elected to the Australian Federal Senate, representing Queensland. At present, Senator Hanson is the leader of a party with two seats in the federal Senate and supporting the governing *Liberal* Party in Western Australia (see Napolitano).

Pauline Hanson has long been a controversial political figure, renowned for her xenophobic views. Like other radical right populists, her political discourse is based on the opposition between 'the people' and various 'Others'. When Hanson first stepped into the political arena in 1996 (see Kingston), the 'others' were identified with the Aboriginals alleged beneficiaries of undeserved excessive benefits, then the focus moved towards Islam, Muslims, and Asians seen as the cause of loss of Australian jobs, culture, and traditions.

While the target of racism has changed over the years, Hanson's avowal "to speak for the voiceless and the powerless against the established forces of the Australian party system" (see *Senator Pauline Hanson*) remains unchanged (see Napolitano). Hanson, therefore, constantly voices fears and disenchantment with major parties of all those who, like her, regret a reassuring past when job opportunities were guaranteed for all and when Anglo-Celtic immigration did not represent a threat to the white Australian lifestyle and security, which has become a topical issue in times of pandemic (see Deangelis; Napolitano). Moreover, similar to other contemporary populist leaders, Pauline Hanson's use of social media has been a key pillar of her political communication strategy.

Senator Hanson's success lies in her determination to fight for the rights of all Australians all the time and in plain speaking, as she prides herself to have "the guts to say" what other people think. Her well-known statement, "I've got the guts to say what you're thinking," has often appeared on billboards and has also been printed on the *One Nation* branded gadgets, such as the stubby holder Featuring Hanson's image against a sunset orange background (see Fig. 2).

Figure 2. *One Nation* slogan "I've got the guts to say what you are thinking."
Source: *Senator Pauline Hanson*

The emergence of the Coronavirus has imposed a new scenario, which, if, on the one hand, has seen Australian politicians take quick and decisive action measures to protect health and the economy, on the other, has seen social cohesion dangerously neglected, which has led to alarming reports of racism mainly against Asian Australians.

In Australia, in the first phase of the pandemic, it was evident that the success of politics would lie in protecting the people rather than promising freedom and openness. Only in the months that followed, the consequences of the pandemic's management on health, the economy, and the social order saw the government wading through a variety of preventive measures. This, which might be called 'normalisation' of COVID-19, is leading to, and will continue to offer, the possibility for populist parties, both in power and in opposition, to politicise policies.

In this scenario, falls the urge for the "performance of crisis" (see Moffitt) needed by populists like Hanson to "divide 'the people' and their other, and to legitimate strong leadership by presenting themselves as voices of the sovereign people" (Moffitt 195). However, COVID-19 has prevented right-wing populists from using their traditional appeals to the people and allowing them all to emphasise the issue of migrants. Although declined in different ways, right-wing populists worldwide have all focused on the closing of borders.

Populists have paradoxically benefited from a situation in which the enemy of the world is, in fact, invisible. The pandemic has offered them the possibility of materialising 'risk' by identifying it with a vast range of 'others' on a silver platter. The enemy has thus become 'all the Others'. In particular, the COVID-19 pandemic seems to have allowed Senator Hanson to scapegoat minorities and immigrants. The strong wave of collective anxiety and fear towards China, triggered worldwide by the coronavirus outbreak, has resulted in racist attacks towards the Chinese community. This sentiment, together with the widespread use by the Australian press of the term 'Chinese virus', has contributed to the revival of anti-Asian racism, which in Australia dates back to the Gold Rush era of the late 19th century. In particular, through her political communication, echoing Donald Trump's Sinophobic language, Hanson has sought to exploit the COVID-19 crisis to manufacture anti-Chinese sentiment in Australia in order to legitimise her party's standing on issues like immigration. Through her populist rhetoric, Hanson has also often opposed international organisations such as the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations (UN). Moreover, she vowed to refuse a coronavirus vaccine and appeared to support conspiracy theories and misinformation (see also Sengul, "Australia"; "Never Let a Good Crisis").

2. Aims and purposes

The present study aims to investigate how Pauline Hanson's populist and nativist political discourse presents the implications of COVID-19 for the Australian society and economy. In particular, it focuses on which subjects are identified by Hanson as 'the Others' and thus as threats to the nation. The research investigates how such subjects are framed and what specific risks connected to the COVID-19 crisis are emphasised. The analysis aims at revealing how the pandemic wave was exploited to reinforce the nativist ideology and support xenophobic policies.

3. Data and methodology

The paper analyses a corpus collecting statements and news published on Pauline Hanson's official website (https://www.senatorhanson.com.au) including the words *COVID*, *Coronavirus*, and *virus* in the time span from 05 February 2020 to 25 January 2021, for a total of 26 texts, including 13,326 words. The analysis applies Critical Discourse Analysis to the study of populist political discourse. In particular, the study explores the way actors and facts are framed, investigating how the 2020 COVID-19 crisis has been exploited to support nativist policies, feeding fears, envisioning new risks, and scapegoating 'the Other' for the nation's problems. The analysis of discursive techniques is mainly based on Martin Reisigl and Ruth Wodak's Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) and on Teun van Dijk's strategies of positive

self-presentation and negative other-presentation. The analysis focuses on the discursive framing of the pandemic and connected risks and on the definition of in-group/out-group (see also Sengul, "Critical Discourse Analysis"). The study draws from the DHA analytical framework, focusing on five discursive strategies, as outlined by Reisigl and Wodak, and in "The Discourse-Historical Approach" by Wodak:

(1) Nomination: Construction of in-groups and out-groups;
(2) Predication: Labelling social actors more or less positively or negatively;
(3) Argumentation: Justification of positive or negative attributions;
(4) Perspectivization: Positioning speaker's point of view;
(5) Intensification/mitigation: Modifying the epistemic status of a proposition, intensifying or mitigating the illocutionary force of utterances

In addition to these discursive strategies, the research also relies on argumentation strategies developed by van Dijk, which include:
(1) Strategies of positive self-presentation;
(2) Strategies of negative other-presentation;
(3) Strategies of disclaimers and denial of racism

4. Analysis

The present study analyses the construction of risks connected to COVID-19 in Hanson's discourse, focusing on several categories of risk identified, namely: health risks for citizens and threats posed by vaccines; health risk posed by China; economic and social risks represented by China, other foreign nations, and migrants. In the examples that follow, emphasis is added by the author to highlight salient points, key words, and expressions in the texts.

4.1 Health risk: migrants and vaccines
Among the fragilities that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought to light, of course, 'health' comes first as it is everybody's first concern. In the examples that follow in this and the following sections, Hanson's communicative strategy emerges in her portrayal of COVID as the risk, which, in this particular historical circumstance, threatens health. The representation and presentation of risk offer the consequential logical opportunity to create the 'Other. The 'enemy' is thus identified primarily with those who carry the virus, namely the migrants, and then, as an immediate logical consequence, with those politicians who fail to protect Australians from migrants. The main target of Hanson's political attack is still the political class, which is accused of not having limited the invasion of the plague spreaders, that is, migrants. Hanson then skilfully strikes a chord with her supporters by emphasising that it is the most vulnerable who are at risk. Pauline Hanson contextually attacks universities as complicit in the spread of the virus, for admitting foreign students, especially from China, after 14 days of quarantine. She, therefore, in (1) attacks universities for putting economic interest before public health.

> (1) "This virus attacks the *vulnerable* in particular, the *elderly* and *frail* and *anyone* with *weak immune systems*, so the *universities* with their quest for income at the detriment of community health, should be held to account for the consequences of their risky actions."
> (Hanson Calls for Longer Coronavirus Quarantine Times, March 6, 2020)

Though the controversial Pauline Hanson declared not being anti-vax, she has not missed the opportunity to instil doubts and fears in her supporters about the risks of vaccines and potential vaccines. She thus mitigates the dangers posed by COVID and the need for a mass vaccination to make her position on vaccinations more powerful:

(2) Australia has *an incredibly low caseload of COVID infections* by any standard and that should mean we have the breathing space to properly *evaluate the dangers and effectiveness of any vaccine* without rushing to judgement.
(Senator Hanson Cautions Against Vaccine Celebrations, January 25, 2021)

(3) I've said all along that *vaccination should be a matter of personal choice* and that remains my position.
(Senator Hanson Cautions Against Vaccine Celebrations, January 25, 2021)

(4) By its own admission the TGA has *a long way to go before we can all be satisfied the vaccine is safe for the overwhelming majority of Australians to use*.
(Senator Hanson Cautions Against Vaccine Celebrations, January 25, 2021)

As a matter of fact, Hanson literally railed against the Prime Minister Scott Morrison, saying she would not take the COVID-19 vaccine, although the PM Scott Morrison declared it would not be mandatory The *One Nation* Senator has been accused of putting public health at risk by causing people to doubt the safety of the vaccine. To support her opinion, Senator Hanson posted an extremely clear and straightforward video on her Facebook page:

(5) I tell you what, I'm not happy about this. I'm quite angry because you have no right to say that I have to have this vaccination, because I tell you what, I won't be having it,
[…]
And put a vaccine into my body that hasn't been tested, its's not happening. But, that is my choice. And I'm just telling you out there, and the PM, you will not force me to have it. It will be my choice what I do.
What is going to be your decision?
(Pauline Hanson's Please Explain, 20 August 2020)

4.2 Health risk: China
Similar to Donald Trump, the main target of Hanson's scapegoating is the Chinese community. The COVID-19 crisis has indeed augmented Hanson's Sinophobic rhetoric through her political communication. As is well known, already in 1996, Senator Hanson was quite adept at using and demonising Asian immigrants. She claimed they were seriously endangering Australian culture, language, and lifestyle to justify her peremptory call for an end to immigration. Years later, she identified the same risk with respect to the Muslim community. In performing these crises, Pauline Hanson, as many right populists, makes extensive use of metaphors of contagion or pathology in her language. The most memorable one was employed when she claimed that Australia was "in danger of being swamped by Asians" (see Hansard col. 3861). The same metaphor was years later used for the Muslim threat. In the current crisis, the contamination is also literal, and the Chinese are represented as supporting unsanitary practices, ignoring the known consequences. In Hanson's discourse, China has thus intentionally promoted the diffusion of the virus:

(6) The threat of virus transmission from animals to humans caused by Chinese wet markets has been well documented for decades.
Despite this, China has wilfully continued to allow unhygienic practices, known to promote the evolution *and spread of deadly diseases and put the lives of billions at risk.*

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(China Must Be Held Accountable for the Coronavirus Pandemic, March 24, 2020)

Hanson has echoed Donald Trump's Sinophobic language, almost exclusively referring to COVID-19 as the 'Chinese virus' and has sought to prosecute her existing nativist agenda on issues such as immigration, welfare, and trade. She thus enacted a negative other-presentation, overtly accusing China of being the source of the evil of the pandemic:

(7) *The Chinese virus has uncovered several vulnerabilities.*
China must be held accountable for the coronavirus pandemic.
China has put all human life, worldwide at risk.
(*One Nation*'s Pauline Hanson Proposes Multi-Billion-Dollar "Advance Australia Fund," April 2, 2020)

(8) *One Nation* recognises the need for flexibility, both from employers and employees during *this Chinese COVID-19 pandemic.*
(A Nation-Building Infrastructure Program Can Save Australia, April 3, 2020)

(9) The funds from the stimulus packages are starting to filter through to workers who have been stood down or sacked as a result of this monumental China virus slow down.
(*One Nation*'s Pauline Hanson Proposes Multi-Billion-Dollar, "Advance Australia Fund," April 2, 2020)

(10) The Queensland Senator said, "Australian's [*sic*] want rapid safeguards put in place to ensure China and other opportunistic countries are prevented from buying up housing stock, prime agricultural land, businesses, and corporations affected by this *Chinese virus*."
(China Must Be Held Accountable for The Coronavirus Pandemic, March 24, 2020)

Unlike her first iteration, Hanson's contemporary resurgence occurs within what Mudde, in *The Far Right Today*, refers to as "the fourth wave of the far-right" (169), whereby the populist radical right has become increasingly tolerated, normalised and mainstreamed in the 21st century. Hanson's political communication, therefore, is arguably more consequential in the contemporary context, given that her ideas have been increasingly accepted in the mainstream (see Mudde, *The Far Right Today*). Australians saw the end of 2019 and the beginning of 2020 impacted by devastating bushfires when the coronavirus started spreading chaos worldwide. This virus knows no borders, no nationalities, is gender-neutral and can affect anyone. The WHO warned against linking the virus to a specific area or group, due to the risk of stigmatisation. They deliberately removed 'SARS' from the name, even with the virus causing severe acute respiratory coronavirus disease (SARS-CoV-2). This was done to avoid igniting panic and fear in communities already deeply affected by the SARS outbreak in 2003. Labels matter. Language matters. Words matter. Attributing a nationality to the virus and separating it from any scientific link is clearly irresponsible, divisive and racist.

4.3 Economic and social risks: China, foreign nations and migrants
As seen in excerpt 10, China is at the centre of Hanson's protectionist politics when she presents it as the source of all evil. The string *Chin** is always associated with a negative context in the corpus. Co-occurring words such as *overreliance, dependence, coronavirus, risk, Covid-19* all contribute to skilfully building up negative qualities of the enemy. In Hanson's discourse, China has brought the virus, it wants to buy 'us', and she also denounces the overreliance on Chinese

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manufacturing. She claims Australia is too dependent on both exports towards China and on import of Chinese manufacturing.

> (11) Australia's economy is exposed as a result of an over-reliance on *Chinese* manufacturing and dependence on *China* as a destination for our food and mineral exports.
> Now, it is safe to say, the lives of our citizens are exposed.
> By refusing to take the appropriate steps required to prevent the evolution and spread of COVID-19 coronavirus, *China* has put all human life, worldwide at risk. *China* must be called out and any attempts to attack or criticise people for referring to COVID-19 as a "*Chinese virus*" should be pushed back on.
> (China Must Be Held Accountable for The Coronavirus Pandemic, March 24, 2020)

In the example, it is interesting to note that the words *China* and *Chinese* are repeated quite frequently in a short passage, thus exploiting intensification to reaffirm the nation's responsibility.

To support the protectionist policy against globalisation and foreign interests in the country, Pauline Hanson's accusations go, of course, beyond China. In these examples, it is interesting to notice the strategies of positive self-presentation. Australia is represented positively as the envy of the nations, while *foreign investors* are defined in highly negative terms, with the simile *hovering like vultures*.

> (12) "*Australia is the envy of nations* around the world so I don't blame *foreign investors for hovering like vultures, ready to snap up our assets when they come up for sale*," Senator Hanson said. "This improvement comes only after decades of my warnings, so it shows how important it is to keep highlighting the shortfalls and for all of us to be relentless in demanding protections. We need to remain vigilant into the future to *protect our jobs and economy.*"
> (Australians Force Govt Action Against Predatory Foreign Ownership, December 3, 2020)

> (13) "Our unemployment numbers are surging, our stocks have been knee-capped, housing prices are set to fall, and our dollar is weakened which places Australia in the most vulnerable position we have seen for a very long time. *I won't tolerate China or any other country coming in here and buying Australia up for a song*, leaving our people without a say."
> (China Must Be Held Accountable for the Coronavirus Pandemic, March 24, 2020)

Contrasted with the image of vultures, the description of Australia as a precious possession, which can be snatched away causing significant loss, is skilfully strategic to the construction of risk. This shows how Pauline Hanson, as all far-right populists, communicatively and discursively constructs fear in order to exclude, and marginalise, non-native inhabitants and minorities. In particular, she has always addressed Asians—as she did in her 1996 Maiden speech—, and, subsequently, Muslims, and refugees. Of course, the aim is to legitimise draconian policies. Here the fear of losing one's status increases with the loss of trust in a government neglecting the needs of the virtuous tax-payers, 'us', the true Australians, whose money is instead used to assist those considered as unworthy, 'the Other'.

> (14) Tudge thinks expanding the English lessons from 510 hours over five years, currently *costing taxpayers* $1-billion, to unlimited lessons over an unlimited time

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frame will improve overall English efficiency. If *new migrants* won't access at least two hours of *taxpayer-funded lessons* over five years, why would *they* commit to a longer time frame or more hours? This is the problem. It is *not the taxpayer's responsibility* to pay for them to learn English. If *they* chose to come to Australia, *they* must learn the language at *their* expense or otherwise find another country to live, where *they* can communicate.
(English Language is Vital for Everyday Life, and Survival, September 7, 2020)

Migrants, usually seen as a risk for the language and culture of Australia, are here associated to a risk for the spread of COVID-19. It is worth drawing attention to Hanson's main political concern as she has always called on the Australian Government to start both a language and an 'assimilation test' for migrants before granting them permanent visas. Here the lack of language proficiency is presented as a cause of virus spread. As I considered the following excerpt as illustrative of Hanson's exploitation of COVID, I decided to leave the whole text highlighting the representation of the involved subjects:

(15) *I love Australia. I will love this nation with pride until the day I die. I have always respected the people from many different nations and cultures* that live here, with whom I interact almost daily, and who help to make this the best country on earth. However, *we* are not perfect and *we* can't stick *our* heads in the sand and pretend that *we* don't have *our* problems. My comments in the media this week reflected an honest assessment of failures in the management of *our multiculturalism that have now come back to bite us during the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic has revealed that the failure to assimilate into Australian* culture and learn English can indirectly be deadly. Governments of all persuasions are guilty of being soft on promoting assimilation and the need for English language proficiency, for the benefit of the individual and society as a whole. *Many* who come to *Australia* are happy to enjoy the good things—*our* safety and stability, *our* friendly way of life, *our* relatively good government services, *our* generous welfare support—but then believe it's acceptable to reject the culture and common language of *their adoptive nation*, and *we* now see the consequences.
Health advice during this emergency has been published only in English, *our* national language, so it meant *many residents from non-English speaking backgrounds*, who have rejected the English language, *missed the safety message. We* now have an emerging second wave and the Melbourne housing apartment harsh lockdown. The two weeks in quarantine for the *3000 residents will be aided by taxpayer*-funded food, alcohol and drug deliveries, government financial handouts, and more than 500 police guards. *I want the best for Australia* and *its many residents from all cultural backgrounds*. That is why I will keep highlighting the problems that need to be fixed, that many people feel afraid to discuss. *We* need to be allowed to debate the problems that exist in *Australia*—including issues that revolve around multiculturalism and Aboriginals—otherwise *we* will never smooth out the bumps that hold *our* nation back. *I have said many times that criticism is not racism*. To reject certain opinions and stifle debate on the issues that affect *our* nation is an attack on free speech and also a roadblock to a better future for all *Australia.*
(Multiculturalism Has Come Back to Bite Us During Pandemic, July 7, 2020)

Through perspectivisation, Hanson stated her love for Australia, to which she even includes disclaimers and denial of racism, in order to present her voice as representative of the people. The strategy of nomination can be exemplified by the use of linguistic forms such as 'our own', establishing an 'us'/'them' dichotomy. As shown by Reisigl and Wodak, this binary

construction typical of right-wing populism, has an exclusionary function for those who are not considered as belonging to the 'real people.' Hanson's rhetorical strategy develops along the lines of an insinuating "it is not me who is racist, it is they who are the risk," the usurpers of funds, language, and enviable social institutions such as public housing.[2] The latter has been a further opportunity taken by Senator Hanson for scapegoating of poor working class and migrant communities when Labor government in Victoria announced that nine public housing towers in Melbourne were placed under a *hard lockdown*. Hanson's comments towards the 3,000 residents of the towers, who were practically described as drug addicts, have been the focus of much controversy as her language, like Trump's, often resembles hate speech aimed at exacerbating the creation of risk.

4.4 Political risk: Labour party and international organisations

One of the typical motifs of populist politics is constituted by the harsh critique against the political elites, considered as unresponsive to the problems of the true people. In this corpus, several examples of attacks on political opponents are present. The internal enemy is represented by the Labour party, accused of not being able to respond to the economic problems caused by the pandemic. Through a perspectivisation, in excerpt 16, Hanson feeds suspicion against bureaucracy and emphasises the dangers represented by Labour's actions as opposed to the interests of Queenslanders:

(16) I'm *suspicious* that Premier Palaszczuk's management of Covid-19 has now transitioned from that of a health crisis to one that is increasingly a convenient Labor campaigning platform.
I'm also *concerned* that the Premier, who is elected by the people, repeatedly defers her authority to an unelected health bureaucrat who has free reign to implement any restrictions she wants.
In my view, *it's a dangerous power* structure that is taking Queensland *down a path of economic destruction.*
(Palaszczuk's Politics Vs The People Of Queensland, May 22, 2020)

In excerpt 17 she reinforces the distinction between us ('the rest of us', 'Queenslanders') and 'Labor', represented as 'the other', through the exclusive personal pronoun 'they':

(17) It's shameful and goes to the heart of what *Labor* stands for–*they* are users, *they* lack empathy, *they* think they're too good for *the rest of us*, and *they* don't truly care about *Queenslanders*.
(Labor's Palaszczuk Manipulates Queenslanders for Virus Shutdowns, May 15, 2020)

(18) *One Nation* continues to be the voice of the people because *we* don't arrogantly dismiss the issues of grassroots voters.
(Statement on WA Election Travel, January 8, 2021)

(19) Government seem to prioritise getting positive publicity rather than actually solving the problem *they* claim to be solving.

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[2] Australian Public housing is a form of long-term rental social housing for people on low incomes that are most in need, especially those who have recently experienced homelessness, family violence or have other special needs. Social housing properties are grouped into preferred areas which are made up of neighbouring suburbs and towns that are linked by public transport (Housing Vic).

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(Flawed Jobmaker Falls Short, November 10, 2020)

Another typical theme of populist rhetoric is the opposition to the politics of international organisations, generally viewed as supporting global business, defending the interests of the powerful against the masses. Hanson's rhetoric has been most frequently articulated through her attacks on international organisations like the World Health Organisation and United Nations (UN), which, in her opinion, act as "propaganda arm of the Chinese Government" (Murray, "The WHO"). She has clearly declared that World Health Organisation is "a waste of money" and is "full of lefty elitists who are pushing their own agenda of a one-world government" (Murray, "The WHO"). In particular, in the corpus, Hanson's attacks to the WHO and The World Economic Forum (WEF).

> (20) I'm not surprised that I've copped flak from *the arrogant lefties* for my suggestion that Australia should cancel its funding to that *useless monstrosity, the World Health Organisation.*
> Misinformation and flawed advice from WHO in this *China virus* crisis have magnified the problem and caused untold *unnecessary deaths*. It's inexcusable from an organisation responsible for the health needs of billions of global citizens and gets more than $4-billion in international funding.
> (Australia Should Cut Off World Health Organisation Cash, April 20, 2020)

> (21) *One Nation* leader Pauline Hanson has warned of *devastating consequences if Australia* adopts the World Economic Forum's plans for a "great reset" across the globe.
> (Pauline Hanson Urges Government to Reject "The Great Reset," November 10, 2020)

In the previous examples, we may identify how Hanson construes opponents. She defines the WHO as "arrogant lefties" and represents both the WHO and the WEF as generating catastrophic consequences on the world health and economy: "China virus crisis have magnified the problem and caused untold unnecessary deaths"; she "warned of devastating consequences." Hanson urges the Australian Government to cut its funding to the organisation over its handling of the coronavirus crisis. Moreover, Hanson harshly criticises the World Economic Forum because of the plan of "The Great Reset". The latter is a proposal set out to rebuild the economy sustainably following the COVID-19 pandemic and tackle the so-called climate crisis. Senator Hanson urged the Australian Government to reject The Great Reset saying the WEF's plans are "pushing us towards the socialist left Marxist view of the world" (Murray, "The Great Reset").

5. Conclusions
The present study has analysed Australian Senator Pauline Hanson's right-wing populist political discourse. It has focused on a collection of statements and news published on her official website (https://www.senatorhanson.com.au/) on the implications of COVID-19 for the Australian society and economy.

The analysis has revealed the discursive construction of COVID-19 as a source of multiple risks, namely to health, politics, economy, and society. Hanson fuelled uncertainty about the vaccine and even appeared to support no-vax positions and scepticism. She also appeared to exploit the pandemic to revive some of her dearest themes, scapegoating multiple enemies, outsiders, political opponents, and international powers. Her critiques are thus mainly directed at China, migrants, Labour, and international organisations. In particular, she attacks the

government for being a risk for Australia's culture, economy, and health, not adequately defending the interests of the people. She reproduces Sinophobic language, seizing the opportunity to oppose China both as a virus spreader and (like other foreign nations) as an exploiter of Australia in a moment of vulnerability. She contrasts the WHO for issuing unreliable health information and wasting international money with The World Economic Forum for using the pandemic as an excuse to pursue anti-capitalist agendas, with devastating consequences on the Australian economy.

Many have argued that populist leaders have not been able to manage the pandemic, yet many populist politicians have been able to use the pandemics to their advantage. Pauline Hanson has indeed exploited the pandemic to pursue her party goals. A savvy politician, she managed to politicise the pandemic, using any worrying updates, any institutional missteps to her favour. The idea of being "swamped by Asians" here transcends the metaphor, acquiring an association to the real invasion connected to the virus. Hanson took advantage of the crisis to spread hate against the other, give voice to and feed the people's fears and uncertainties, while presenting herself as the voice of the true Australian people.

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