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Dissertation: Choosing the Right Symbol: Choosing the Right Symbols: Brothers of Italy and League's Mobilization of Traditional Worldviews against Modernity"

This dissertation investigates the relationship between modernity and traditionalist political movements in Italy, with a focus on the symbolic mechanisms used by far-right parties to challenge the perceived negative aspects of modernity. Central to this analysis are the parties Brothers of Italy (Fratelli d'Italia, FdI) and the League (Lega), which mobilize traditional symbols and values in response to societal issues such as moral decay, economic instability, and identity crises, often seen as by-products of modern life.

The thesis begins by presenting a theoretical foundation for understanding modernity, grounded in the work of key sociologists like Durkheim, Weber, and Giddens. It defines modernity as a period characterized by rationality, secularism, and individualism, but also marked by anomie—a breakdown of social norms and values. The discussion then highlights how traditionalism emerges as a response to the existential disorientation that modernity can induce, offering a sense of stability and meaning. Religion and tradition are depicted not merely as relics of the past, but as enduring sources of collective identity and moral guidance that continue to influence contemporary politics.

The core of the dissertation analyzes the rhetoric and strategies of the Brothers of Italy and the League, focusing on how they use traditional symbols to attract electoral support. These symbols—ranging from religious motifs to nationalist myths, slogans and images such as the the Italian family and the Christian cross—are designed to resonate with voters who feel alienated by modern, secular, and individualistic values. The symbols serve not just as markers of identity but as instruments of political mobilization, simplifying complex social issues into emotionally charged narratives. The parties advocate for a return to an idealized past, using symbols to draw a sharp distinction between "authentic" Italian values and the threats posed by globalization, immigration, and liberal social policies.

Nevertheless, the thesis argues that this symbolic rhetoric ultimately fails to resolve the deeper structural problems of modernity. While such symbols provide a temporary sense of cohesion and belonging, they lack substantive content and are often contradictory, failing to offer realistic solutions to the crises they critique. The vagueness inherent in these symbols allows them to be interpreted flexibly, but this same ambiguity limits their effectiveness in addressing the challenges they critique.

The conclusion reflects on the broader implications of this symbolic politics. It suggests that while traditional symbols may offer emotional solace to those disenchanted with modernity, they cannot fully counterbalance the forces of rationalization, secularization, and individualism that define contemporary society. The dissertation thus contributes to understanding how far-right populist movements harness tradition to confront the challenges of modernity but also exposes the limitations of this approach in providing sustainable solutions to an increasingly complex world.

Ta rozprawa bada relację między nowoczesnością a tradycjonalistycznymi ruchami politycznymi we Włoszech, koncentrując się na mechanizmach symbolicznych wykorzystywanych przez partie skrajnej prawicy do kwestionowania postrzeganych negatywnych aspektów nowoczesności. Centralnym elementem tej analizy są partie Bracia Włosi (Fratelli d'Italia, FdI) i Liga (Lega), które mobilizują tradycyjne symbole i wartości w odpowiedzi na problemy społeczne, takie jak upadek moralny, niestabilność gospodarcza i kryzysy tożsamości, często postrzegane jako produkty uboczne współczesnego życia.

Rozprawa rozpoczyna się od przedstawienia teoretycznych podstaw do zrozumienia nowoczesności, opartych na pracach kluczowych socjologów, takich jak Durkheim, Weber i Giddens. Nowoczesność jest definiowana jako okres charakteryzujący się racjonalnością, sekularyzmem i indywidualizmem, ale także naznaczony anomią — rozpadem norm i wartości społecznych. Dyskusja podkreśla następnie, jak tradycjonalizm pojawia się jako odpowiedź na egzystencjalną dezorientację, którą może wywoływać nowoczesność, oferując poczucie stabilności i sensu. Religia i tradycja nie są przedstawiane jedynie jako relikty przeszłości, lecz jako trwałe źródła tożsamości zbiorowej i moralnego przewodnictwa, które wciąż wpływają na współczesną politykę.

Główna część rozprawy analizuje retorykę i strategie Braci Włochów oraz Ligi, koncentrując się na tym, jak wykorzystują one tradycyjne symbole do zdobywania poparcia wyborczego. Symbole te — od motywów religijnych po nacjonalistyczne mity, slogany i obrazy, takie jak włoska rodzina i krzyż chrześcijański — są zaprojektowane tak, by trafiać do wyborców, którzy czują się wyobcowani przez nowoczesne, świeckie i indywidualistyczne wartości. Symbole te służą nie tylko jako oznaczniki tożsamości, ale także jako narzędzia mobilizacji politycznej, upraszczając złożone kwestie społeczne do emocjonalnie naładowanych narracji. Partie te opowiadają się za powrotem do idealizowanej przeszłości, używając symboli do wyraźnego odróżniania „autentycznych” włoskich wartości od zagrożeń wynikających z globalizacji, imigracji i liberalnych polityk społecznych.

Niemniej jednak rozprawa argumentuje, że ta symboliczna retoryka ostatecznie nie rozwiązuje głębszych strukturalnych problemów nowoczesności. Choć takie symbole dostarczają tymczasowego poczucia spójności i przynależności, brakuje im treści merytorycznej i często są sprzeczne, nie oferując realistycznych rozwiązań kryzysów, które krytykują. Niejasność tych symboli pozwala na ich elastyczną interpretację, ale ta sama niejednoznaczność ogranicza ich skuteczność w rozwiązywaniu problemów, które poddają krytyce.

W zakończeniu rozprawa rozważa szersze implikacje tej polityki symbolicznej. Sugeruje, że choć tradycyjne symbole mogą oferować emocjonalne ukojenie tym, którzy są rozczarowani nowoczesnością, nie są w stanie w pełni zrównoważyć sił racjonalizacji, sekularyzacji i indywidualizmu, które definiują współczesne społeczeństwo. Rozprawa przyczynia się zatem do zrozumienia, w jaki sposób ruchy populistyczne skrajnej prawicy wykorzystują tradycję do konfrontacji z wyzwaniem nowoczesności, ale również ujawnia ograniczenia tego podejścia w dostarczaniu trwałych rozwiązań dla coraz bardziej złożonego świata.

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And I learned that for every retired dancing bear, the moment comes when freedom starts to cause its pain. What does it do then? It gets up on its hind legs and starts to dance. It repeats the very thing the park employees are trying their best to get it to unlearn: the behavior of the captive. As if it would prefer its keeper to come back and take responsibility for its life again. “Let him beat me, let him treat me badly, but let him relieve me of this goddamned need to deal with my own life,” the bear seems to be saying.¹

¹ Witold Szablowski, *Dancing Bears: True Stories of People Nostalgic for Life Under Tyranny* (Antonia Lloyd-Jones tr, Translation edition, Penguin Publishing Group 2018).

1.1. Introduction

This dissertation aims to investigate the relationship between issues related to modern life and its characteristics, and anti-modern/traditionalist political forces in Italy. The idea is to try to assess in which way traditional political symbols are mobilized to vehiculate traditional values and messages to the people, to alleviate or remove instances of social tensions that are the consequence of modernity. Populist forces in fact weaponize traditional symbols to communicate certain values that, they argue, are lost or about to, and construct arguments that view such loss as one of the core reasons for moral, economic, and social decadence. To do this, this thesis will first start with an introduction of the study of modernity; it will then proceed to discuss the concept of anomie as presented by Durkheim, which will be instrumental for the understanding of why modernity may present inherent anomic flaws. Finally, the thesis will focus on two far-right, traditionalist political parties – namely, Fratelli d’Italia and Lega, to analyze how their mobilization of traditional symbols may seem to remedy the aforementioned flaws, but ultimately fail in doing so due to the poor communicative strength of highly symbolical rhetoric.

Modernity has been studied at large in virtually all of its aspects and characteristics. To modernity, many phenomena that our contemporary life is impregnated by have been attributed: to the awakening of rationality and responsibility made possible by the Enlightenment,² through the Holocaust at the hands of Nazi Germany,³ to the vast disorientation of modern man.⁴ Modernity is the time of rationality and rationalization, scientific inquiry, and definitive control over the nature of humankind.

However, the materialistic approach that is prevalent in the modern understanding of man and his nature does not entirely grasp his characteristics, nor tell everything about him. Objects that would escape the “modern” label still inform to a great extent contemporary social life. One of such objects is religion together with its mysteries, which cannot be explained without a more or less great dose of *faith*. In fact, faith and modern science are

² Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: ‘What Is Enlightenment?’,” 1784.

³ Zygmunt Bauman, *Modernity and the Holocaust*, New Ed edition (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 1991).

⁴ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

disputing objects that, although not negating entirely one another, are radically different in the way people are required to approach them. If we were to use Reckling's⁵ conceptualization of Weberian rationality, i.e. as the "theoretical mastery of reality", it is only natural to conclude that, if both religion and science are ultimately meant to make sense of the world, science puts man above nature and religion the opposite, as the invisible forces that manage his destiny are well beyond his powers. In this sense, the debate over "what is true" is everything but closed, and the race to meaning has reasonably few rules and restrictions.

Another pre-modern object that still plays a major role in providing meaning to people is tradition. Tradition gives meaning in the sense that it informs people about who they are and why they are that way, by drawing on the past to design a future that answers to the needs of a certain community. Whether a given tradition is historically traceable or "mythical" is of little importance, since it is its meaning for the community to ultimately determine its role. If three such concepts can still exist and influence contemporary life, and if it is true that they are not as modern as they are not disputable by recurring to rational means, it means that Modernity is not a done deal.

Modernity owes many of its theoretical concepts to the Enlightenment, that set in stone the role of individual reason in society. Suppose Modernity and the Enlightenment are somewhat of two overlapping concepts. In that case, Immanuel Kant's answer to the hypothetical question "What is the Enlightenment?" is probably the best source to reinforce the understanding that tradition is a pre-modern concept: in 1784 he wrote a short essay, titled "Was ist Aufklärung?", in which he said that « *Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore: Sapere aude! Have courage to use your own understanding!* ».⁶

⁵ Falk Reckling, "Interpreted Modernity: Weber and Taylor on Values and Modernity," *European Journal of Social Theory* 4, no. 2 (May 1, 2001): 153–76, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13684310122225055>.

⁶ Kant, "An Answer to the Question: 'What Is Enlightenment?'"

Going back to the distinction between modern and pre-modern, it appears that religion and tradition's ultimate unquestionability offers an undue resistance to man's rationality. The optimistic orientation of modernity relies in fact on the belief that rationality can and will resolve collective issues, positively impacting human suffering.⁷ The words that define Modernity are in fact "*progress, advance, growth, liberation*",⁸ as the past is not a reliable source of information anymore, since it is the present to be considered as functional for the construction of the future. However, these accounts of Modernity are partial: as will be shown in the next chapters, critiques and issues go hand in hand with the positives.

By all accounts, it can be argued that Modernity, especially High- or Late-Modernity, i.e. our current times, is the time of possibility. When religion and tradition fall, the present becomes a complicated moment where so-called "free choices" must be made by each individual according to his own values, interests, and abilities. Still, it must be argued that tradition's "collapse" is far more nuanced than a complete debacle, more resembling an atomization process. In this sense, in Modernity the past does not help man as it used to. In fact, Heller defined Modernity as a period where "*everything is open to query and to testing; everything is subject to rational scrutiny and refuted by argument*".⁹ "Everything" here is not hyperbolic, as no realm of knowledge is immune to inquiry and scrutiny. Religion and tradition too, in fact, are often re-molded to better suit the present time, although maintaining the core characteristics and the underlying inexplicability in rational terms. These concepts will be put to use later on in this dissertation, when the notion of *invented tradition* will be introduced to explain the case studies of the second chapter, and it will also be used to try to understand why populist forces often resort to old narratives to solve present issues. The notion of invented traditions is strongly linked to the concept of agency: if it is true that responsibility of action can be petrifying for the average individual, then one could make the argument that much of the approval these movements are able to gather among their polities lies in the fact that, as it will be demonstrated later on, their rhetoric pushes strong on the

⁷ Peter Kivisto, "Postmodernity as an Internal Critique of Modernity," in *Postmodernism in a Global Perspective*, ed. Samir Dasgupta (SAGE Publications India Pvt, 2014).

⁸ Göran Therborn, *European Modernity and Beyond: The Trajectory of European Societies, 1945-2000* (London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications Ltd, 1995).

⁹ Agnes Heller, "Is Truth Historical?," *Thesis Eleven* 29, no. 1 (1991): 14–32, <https://doi.org/10.1177/072551369102900103>.

idea that agency should be given, at least partially, to the authority. The outcome of such a transfer of power is, in theory, relief from a burden.

Another underlying theme of this research is the dominant role that Western Universalism plays in structuring life within its borders. The prime example of this belief is contained in Fukuyama's essay "The end of history?" where he posited that the end of the Cold War after the fall of the Communist states meant that the world was ready to embrace Western values, progressively transforming into free-market liberal democracies.¹⁰ More than twenty years later we can not only note how incredibly wrong this idea turned out to be, for reasons that go well beyond the simple international contingencies that brought us here, in the middle of a war on the European continent and the full-scale invasion of Gaza by Israel. As Huntington rightly pointed out in his "The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order", the idea that our culture and values are universal is profoundly misleading and patronizing of other worldviews.¹¹ In fact, Fukuyama's view would not only reinforce the Christian idea that time is linear and, thus, a progression towards what is good and just:¹² but it also reignites the often implicit notion that we Westerners got here first and the Other must follow if it wants to live peacefully with us. Still, the reason behind this thematization remains: that is, the fact that this universalism potentially creates one of the biggest points of rupture *within* the same society these values are drawn. As a matter of fact, the hypocrisy that Huntington speaks of in his book (pg. 184) is not only harmful to the relationships with our non-Western counterparts, e.g. when the West draws incredible double-standards to justify its friendly relations with an ally that infringes human rights because of the fruitful economic trade that it needs, while simultaneously denouncing human rights infringements in another country because of the need to maintain the power balance. Rather, in these modern times where Western society's potential for self-awareness is at its highest point, this creates an existential confusion in its people about what the West is, which in turn becomes a questioning of their individual ontological security. The self-evident hypocrisy of the

¹⁰ Francis Fukuyama, "The End of History?," in *Conflict After the Cold War*, 4th ed. (Routledge, 2012).

¹¹ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011).

¹² Oscar Cullmann, *Christ and Time, 3rd Edition: The Primitive Christian Conception of Time and History* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2018).

Western world destabilizes the possibility of positive and coherent identity-construction processes, as current actions are deprived of the capability to reflect and reinforce such identities, becoming instead an undermining force. This is just one of the many assists that the mismanagement of everyday politics gives to populists, reactionaries, and revolutionaries of any type. The narrative that sees the achievement of freedom, civil and human rights, and democracy as the ultimate goal of the West, which is the same narrative that justifies the West's internal arrangement as the fundamental guarantee of our freedoms, crumbles when the management of our relationships with the others is actually subordinated to material needs, economic interests, and political opportunism to the point of turning the back entirely to those otherwise paramount values. This cleavage is in fact systematically exploited, as it will be shown, by populist and traditionalist forces.

The disenchantment that follows has two consequences: on the one hand, it creates a vertical split between different social segments into “supporters” and “opposers” of a specific policy; on the other hand, this vertical separation increases the chances of following a given policy incoherently or partially, causing a further crack within the aforementioned segments. This is due to the accountability that Western political elites enjoy with respect to their citizens, even though it varies across different institutional settings. Thus, political hypocrisy is transformed into social instability or distrust, which deepens and furthers political hypocrisy and stagnation. The current international developments, if not new, bring new force to this kind of interpretation. For example, the current timid military and financial support to Ukraine in its war against Russia pales substantially when compared to the support that Israel enjoys, especially when it is factored in their respective observance of international law. This situation has reached the point of creating such an unstable environment to lead Macron and his government to feel the need for France to ban pro-Palestinian manifestations,¹³ infringing and deviating from a core value of Western democracies for the sake of apparent cohesion. A paradoxical situation such as the aforementioned cannot be

¹³ Layli Foroudi, “French Court States That Pro-Palestinian Protests Should Be Banned Case by Case,” *Reuters*, October 18, 2023, sec. Europe, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/french-court-upholds-government-instruction-ban-all-pro-palestine-protests-2023-10-18/>.

solved without an upfront admission of guilt – which is necessary for any credible awareness construction process – both from the political elites and from civil society.

Navigating modernity thus reveals to be an incredibly difficult task, as it encompasses the whole spectrum of human life, from the micro- to the macro-levels of arrangements and institutions. Giddens’ enlightening concept of reflexivity, as explained later on, will show the real implications of the “constitutive rules” that characterize modernity in our current setting.

After providing a robust background on modernity, the thesis will briefly explain the traditional order and its values, as they are represented in modernity. The idea is to juxtapose the two broad concepts to better understand their differences.

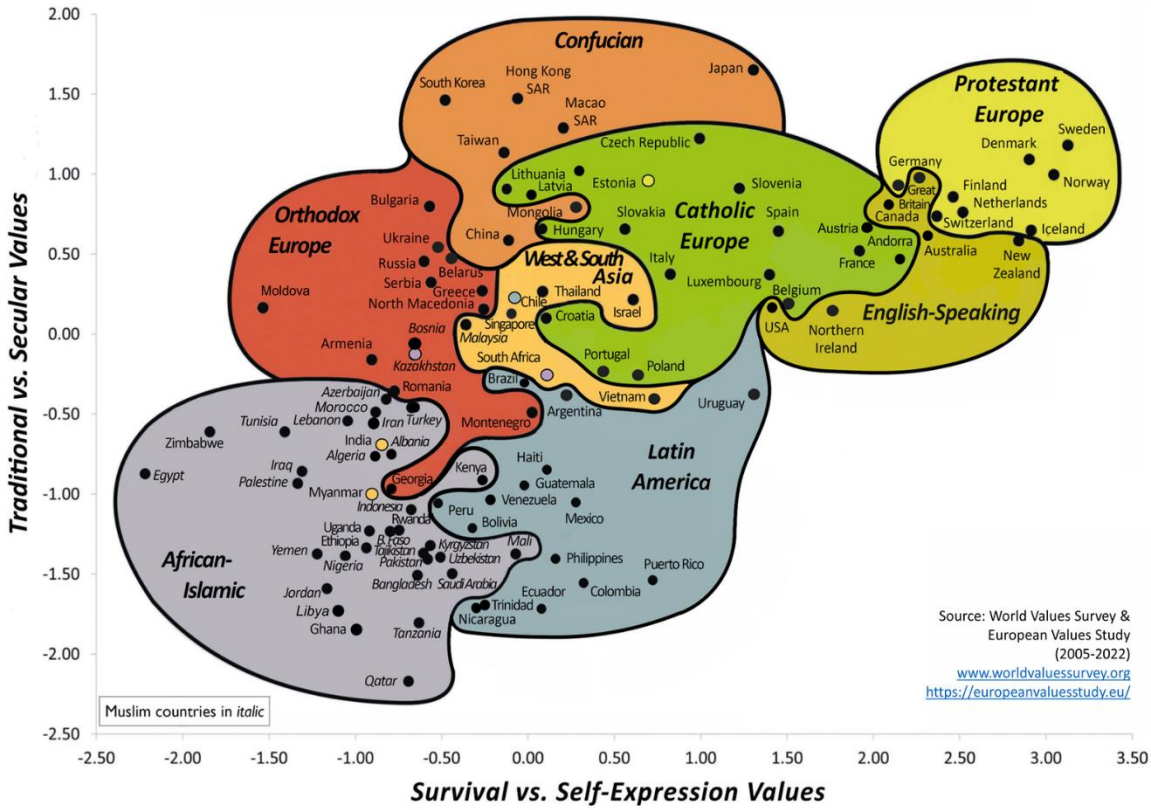
1.2. The Italian context

This thesis' contribution will be that of analyzing two Italian Far-Right Parties, namely the Lega and Fratelli d'Italia, from a Traditional/Modern juxtaposition, that is, by analyzing how and why the political offer of the two parties is imbued with Traditional conceptualizations of communal living. The two organizations, in fact, rhetorically resort very often to an ancient past of greatness and wealth of the Italian People to justify and legitimize political proposals that mimic, at least in theory, the characteristics of such a past. Their political discourses, by their very nature, are thus full of symbols that are inspired by the *traditional family*, pagan symbols, traditional sexuality, suspicion towards immigrants, etc., since homogeneity of values is praised as the only way forward to the creation of a secure and collaborative society. These values, it must be noted, are framed so as to belong to the Italian ethnicity, to create a cleavage between the insiders and the outsiders. This helps them, among the others, to justify their anti-migratory policies.

However, to these stereotypically Traditional views are juxtaposed by the same parties other Modern images, as both, even though with different trajectories, have nationalistic ambitions: images and concepts like the common language and culture across the state, Christianity as a common denominator of Italian roots and identity, the primacy of Italian cuisine etc. are dominant objects of their discourses. Moreover, they are often built so to represent an antithesis of the foreign identities that are constructed as threatening and dangerous to the livelihood of the common person. Thus, an analysis of these symbols and rituals will be conducted. For these reasons, the research question of the thesis will be "What are the main symbols of the Italian far-right and how are they employed communicatively to answer Modernity's problem?". As it will be shown later, such highly symbolical speeches cannot and will not answer any of the aforementioned problems, since they are abstract, vague, and ultimately fail to construct modes of behaviors that are truly belonging to any given community. In fact, images and symbols reveal themselves extremely useful in the populist, traditionalist rhetoric, as they are easily spread and ultimately void of any fixed meaning, so that they can be filled with whatever is deemed to be useful for such movements' leaders.

There are many reasons why Italy is an important test for this investigation. The juxtaposition mentioned before resonates with the Italian context. This table, which will be used and explained later, is quite indicative. First, one can notice that in Figure 1.1 below, on the secular-rational/traditional axis, Italy is just above the 0.00, scoring higher than Catholic countries like Portugal and Poland, but lower than Spain and the Czech Republic.

The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map 2023



2.1: The Inglehart-Welzel World Cultural Map - World Values Survey 7 (2023). Source: <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/>

As further evidence of how relevant religion is in the country's politics, it must first be noted that it was always governed by a governing coalition led by the Christian Democrats until the fall of the Prima Repubblica. Today, even though the parties' landscape has changed radically and there aren't official repositories of the Christian values as once was, influences of the Catholic Church and, in general, of more or less religious worldviews keep affecting the political environment across the board. Bailey and Driessen defined the Italian context as

“catholic pluralism”, that is an ecosystem intrinsically soaked in a varying religious offer not dominated by a single institution.¹⁴ It is probably for this reason that different parties still link themselves to catholic roots of some sort: on the right, Salvini and Meloni, maintain ambiguous stances on the abortion right, to keep the Christian constituency,¹⁵ and the former went so far as to kiss Mary’s Rosary during a press conference just after the European election;¹⁶ on the left, Five Stars Movement’s leader Giuseppe Conte unveiled his Catholicism when he kept silent on whether allowing or not surrogacy in the country;¹⁷ lastly, Partito Democratico’s Anna Maria Bigon, member of the Veneto’s Regional Assembly, left the room and didn’t vote in favor of the motion to give certainty to the right to access euthanasia – interestingly, a motion proposed by the Lega’s President of Regione Veneto, Luca Zaia, – due to her religious views, allowing the proposal to fail.¹⁸

¹⁴ Tom Bailey and Michael D Driessen, ‘Engaging Post-Secularism: Rethinking Catholic Politics in Italy’ (2017) 24 *Constellations* 232.

¹⁵ Agenzia ANSA, ‘Diritto di aborto: la Lega si astiene e si sfilia sui pro life nei consultori - Notizie - Ansa.it’ (*Agenzia ANSA*, 18 April 2024) <https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/politica/2024/04/18/diritto-di-aborto-la-lega-si-astiene-e-si-sfilia-sui-pro-life-nei-consultori_b3ded7b5-9b52-4710-97c6-151186daaedb.html> accessed 3 August 2024.

¹⁶ *Europee, Salvini Bacia Il Rosario in Conferenza Stampa: “Ringrazio Chi c’è Lassù”* (Directed by La Repubblica, 2019) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rj1_GG1AIJ8> accessed 3 August 2024.

¹⁷ ‘Conte e i dubbi sulla maternità surrogata. Così il M5s si smarca dal Pd e guarda alla Chiesa’ <<https://www.ilfoglio.it/politica/2023/03/21/news/cont-e-i-dubbi-sulla-maternita-surrogata-cosi-il-m5s-si-smarca-dal-pd-e-guarda-alla-chiesa-5084284/>> accessed 3 August 2024.

¹⁸ Partito Democratico, ‘Una ferita quel voto in Veneto. Sul fine vita il Pd darà battaglia’ (*Partito democratico*, 29 January 2024) <<https://partitodemocratico.it/una-ferita-quel-voto-in-veneto-sul-fine-vita-il-pd-dara-battaglia/>> accessed 3 August 2024.

1.3. Theoretical background: Rationality, Religion, and the Nation-State in Modernity

Different understandings of Modernity and various definitions and ideas will be presented and made use of, in the attempt to reach a strong theoretical grasp of the main theories, upon which the analysis of the case studies will built.

The first conceptualization of Modernity refers to it as being “new”, detached from what is traditional and “old”, in a similar way as it was first used by the Romans to acknowledge the beginning of the Christian era and the end of the Pagan one.¹⁹ In this sense, Modernity is the progressive abandonment of traditional, rural ways of life. The second and most important background description of Modernity is Ritzer’s: «[modernity is] *an encompassing process of massive social changes that, once set in motion, tends to penetrate all domains of life, from economic activities to social life to political institutions, in a self-reinforcing process*»,²⁰ together with Baudelaire’s capture of its fugitiveness and transitoriness²¹ and Heller’s definition, previously mentioned, we obtain the first part of this dissertation’s general framework. This environment poses threats and opportunities to individuals. The massive social changes Ritzer mentioned are infinite and never slow down. From the first industrial revolution to today, the Western world has changed face numerous times, with industrialization and production rationalization as its backbone. With the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, the West’s imagination finally became truly *global*: this was fostered by the development of telecommunications on a global scale, something unprecedented and unthinkable just a few decades before. This new imagination crowds people’s minds with inputs: from the 24/7 news from all over the world to social media, the sheer number of symbols and images is unfathomable.

This brings the discussion to the next issue, that is how individuals search for orientation means to navigate life. Following Chowers’ insight on Weber’s conception of

¹⁹ Jürgen Habermas and Seyla Ben-Habib, ‘Modernity versus Postmodernity’ [1981] *New German Critique* 3.

²⁰ George Ritzer (ed), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* (Blackwell Pub 2007).

²¹ Charles Baudelaire, *Baudelaire, Charles (1821–1867) - The Painter of Modern Life (Le Peintre de La Vie Moderne)* <<https://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/French/BaudelaireThePainterOfModernLife.php>> accessed 14 January 2024.

man, this latter is a sense-creating being, and meaning is constituted by values by which he orientates in his life.²² Taylor specifies that all men are already situated in a context of cultural meaning that functions as a backbone for men to have a common understanding of their values and actions. This, he explains, constitutes a “common meaning” for society’s members.²³ The same notion is also shared by Weber.²⁴ However, Weber follows up by juxtaposing this notion of cultural significance, which provides the most important and basic context-providing concept for man’s orientation, to the possibility that modern man possesses to finally choose within infinite sets of values, determining the central importance and role of individualism in modern life.²⁵ Another important concept Taylor adds is how life is interpreted by man in a teleological manner.²⁶ Following these three concepts, Taylor states that the value-orientation relationship can be inferred by the ability of humans to linguistically distinguish the content of actions and separate them according to their needs, for example in “good versus bad” assessments.²⁷ Finally, Taylor specifies how man is restricted by his biology, but is simultaneously able to comment and order different types of volitions.²⁸ This is the paradox modern man has to go through when searching for meaning: modernity is filled with long-lasting symbols and images that provide the overall cultural context of each one’s social life – the backbone upon which first instances of meaning are found or created – that conflict with new symbols or re-interpretations of them, coming from sources that are not necessarily proximate to the individuals. Further tensions arise between the collective and the individual dimension.

²² Eyal Chowder, “Max Weber: The Fate of Homo-Hermeneut in a Disenchanted World,” *Journal of European Studies* 25, no. 2 (June 1, 1995): 123–40, <https://doi.org/10.1177/004724419502500202>.

²³ Charles Taylor, “Engaged Agency and Background in Heidegger,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Heidegger*, ed. Charles B. Guignon, 2nd ed., Cambridge Companions to Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 202–21, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CCOL0521821363.008>.

²⁴ Max Weber, *Methodology of Social Sciences: Max Weber* (Transaction Publishers, 2011).

²⁵ Weber.

²⁶ Charles Taylor, “Interpretation and the Sciences of Man,” *The Review of Metaphysics* 25, no. 1 (1971): 3–51.

²⁷ Charles Taylor, ed., “Language and Human Nature,” in *Philosophical Papers: Volume 1: Human Agency and Language*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 215–47, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139173483.010>.

²⁸ Charles Taylor, ed., “What Is Human Agency?,” in *Philosophical Papers: Volume 1: Human Agency and Language*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 15–44, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139173483.002>.

The rationalization of all social spheres is another pivotal feature of cultural significance in modern life, as noted by Reckling's understanding of Weber's texts.²⁹ The roots of this phenomenon are to be observed in the origin and development of protestant ethic.³⁰ Rationalization can have different meanings; Reckling³¹ recalls two of them, and I quote: «*it can mean scientific rationality as 'an increasing theoretical mastery of reality by means of increasingly precise and abstract concepts' or economic-instrumental rationality as a 'methodical attainment of a definitely given and practical end by means of an increasingly precise calculation of adequate means'.*»³² For the scope of this research, the general definition of rationality will be a combination of the two. In fact, it will be posited that movements that ask for the return to traditional ways of life find fertile soil in the increasing sophistication of technology which, together with the economic-efficient division of labor, can forward social dissonance. This, it will be argued, is due to the fact that people do not often grasp the basics of a given technological instrument, say 5G technology,³³ and are thus vulnerable to misinformation and conspiracies. The skepticism or even fear that arises from such disputes is another factor of social friction.

Modernity saw the affirmation of the principle of secularization, by which the role of religion in public life declined over time. However, religion still plays a hugely influential role in the contemporary Western society. As noted by Chowers, religion is not just an instrument of interest projection and power-actualization, as theorized in the classical Marxist historical-materialist school; rather, religion is given the role of orienting basic man's emotional, intellectual, and spiritual needs.³⁴ Moreover, the role of religion has not changed

²⁹ Reckling, "Interpreted Modernity."

³⁰ Max Weber, *Gesammelte Aufsätze Zur Religionssoziologie 1*, 9th ed. (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988).

³¹ Reckling, "Interpreted Modernity."

³² H. H. Gerth Mills C. Wright, ed., "The Social Psychology of the World Religions," in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology* (Routledge, 1948).

³³ In the research Wasim Ahmed et al., "COVID-19 and the 5G Conspiracy Theory: Social Network Analysis of Twitter Data," *Journal of Medical Internet Research* 22, no. 5 (May 6, 2020): e19458, <https://doi.org/10.2196/19458>, one can find a case study that explored the conspiracy theory surrounding 5G technology and COVID-19 influenza. Interestingly, one of the websites that were used as a source to spread the conspiracy was named "Stillnessinthestorm". The image of stillness in an everchanging, turbulent context is telling and it reinforces the idea that many people may feel lost or lied to.

³⁴ Eyal Chowers, 'Max Weber: The Fate of Homo-Hermeneut in a Disenchanted World' (1995) 25 *Journal of European Studies* 123.

uniformly. In fact, as argued by Halman and Draulans, «[the] *processes of secularization, rationalization, functional differentiation, globalization, modernization, and postmodernization have all changed the role of religion and the Churches in Europe. Although such processes seem to occur throughout Europe, they do not seem to occur at similar speeds in all European countries. Therefore, differences in the degree to which societies are secularized are to be expected*».³⁵ In another perspective, Grace Davie put forward the idea that Europe has been experiencing a phenomenon she defines as “vicarious religion” that is the performance of religious rituals by an active minority on behalf of a larger majority that does not participate actively in, but approves it.³⁶ In another research she stated that the role of religion changed because the attitude with which people relate to it changed as well: traditionally, she argues, religious activities were imposed and/or inherited, while now people rationally choose to *consume* religion only insofar as it satisfies a need, which may be more or less stable over time, with consequences on the institutionalization of beliefs.³⁷ This finding is similar to Berger’s investigations: individualism as a core characteristic of modernity did not leave religion unscathed, as it is the individual who is in charge of shaping his values. The consequence, he states, is the personalization of belief.³⁸ Danièle Hervieu-Léger went so far as to say that individuals “belong without believing”, as they share identity features that are closely linked to the religion of their community, without actually partaking in it personally.³⁹ This remark is coherent with Dobbelaere’s understanding that in traditional societies collective and individual beliefs overlapped and the latter was strongly dependent on the former.⁴⁰ Moreover, he presents the Weberian

³⁵ Loek Halman and Veerle Draulans, “How Secular Is Europe?,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 57, no. 2 (2006): 263–88, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-4446.2006.00109.x>, pg. 283.

³⁶ Grace Davie, “Vicarious Religion: A Methodological Challenge,” in *Everyday Religion: Observing Modern Religious Lives*, ed. Nancy T. Ammerman (Oxford University Press, 2007), 0, <https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195305418.003.0001>, pg. 23.

³⁷ Grace Davie, “Is Europe an Exceptional Case?,” *International Review of Mission* 95 (July 10, 2006), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1758-6631.2006.tb00562.x>, pg. 27.

³⁸ Peter L. Berger, “Reflections on the Sociology of Religion Today,” *Sociology of Religion* 62, no. 4 (2001): 443–54, <https://doi.org/10.2307/3712435>.

³⁹ Danièle Hervieu-Léger, “The Role of Religion in Establishing Social Cohesion,” in *Religion in the New Europe*, by Krzysztof Michalski, CEUP Collection (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2006), 45–63, <https://books.openedition.org/ceup/1275>.

⁴⁰ Dobbelaere, K. 1995 ‘Religion in Europe and North America’, in R. de Moor (ed.) *Values in Western Societies*, Tilburg: Tilburg University Press.

argument that it is indeed the rationalization of the social sphere, mentioned before, that is responsible for this diminishing importance, insofar as religion becomes, as every other social realm, a simple subsystem of the whole instead of being the overarching, encompassing, foundational one.⁴¹ It thus seems a mistake to rule out religion as an identitarian feature of today's Europe. On the contrary, the fluidity that comes from the personalization of belief makes it a strong force to deal with when assessing or even fighting for social change. It does not matter if Mass is less and less attended in many countries, be they Catholic like Italy⁴² or Poland,⁴³ or Protestant like Germany,⁴⁴ if people still sympathize with the traditions, symbols, or images that are related to religion. This would be coherent also with what scholars have been saying about Putin's Russia. It is true that the historical trajectory of Orthodoxy has been to some extent different from Catholicism and Protestantism's,⁴⁵ and for this reason, that temporal power blurs political concepts with religious and mystical ones come to nobody's surprise.⁴⁶ This digresses both social and political boundaries, transforming a polity into an *ethnodoxy*, for which it is praised that a given ethnicity is strictly linked to its dominant religion and any deviation is seen as potentially harmful.⁴⁷ Thus, the idea that religion becomes an identity feature stricto sensu, rather than a spiritual characteristic of one's self that could co-exist with other religious and/or lay beliefs, is reinforced thanks to what could be defined as a neotraditional spin.⁴⁸ The point this thesis will make in the following chapters is that a substantial part of society

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² "Losing My Religion: More People across Europe Have Little or No Belief," euronews, October 8, 2023, <https://www.euronews.com/2023/10/08/meet-the-nones-an-ever-increasing-group-across-europe-with-little-to-no-religious-affiliat>.

⁴³ Daniel Tilles, "Dramatic Fall in Church Attendance in Poland, Official Figures Show," *Notes From Poland* (blog), January 14, 2023, <https://notesfrompoland.com/2023/01/14/dramatic-fall-in-church-attendance-in-poland-official-figures-show/>.

⁴⁴ euconedit, "Record 522,000 German Catholics Quit the Faith in 2022," June 29, 2023, <https://europeanconservative.com/articles/news/record-522000-german-catholics-quit-the-faith-in-2022/>.

⁴⁵ See for example Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, pg. 70.

⁴⁶ Bryan S. Turner, ed., *The New Blackwell Companion to the Sociology of Religion*, Reprint edition (Blackwell Pub, 2016), pg. 653.

⁴⁷ Vyacheslav Karpov, Elena Lisovskaya, and David Barry, "Ethnodoxy: How Popular Ideologies Fuse Religious and Ethnic Identities," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 51 (December 1, 2012): 638–55, <https://doi.org/10.2307/23353824>.

⁴⁸ Anna Ozhiganova, "'Spiritual and Moral Education' in Russian Public Schools: Constructing a Neo-Traditionalist Identity," *FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education* 5 (February 28, 2019): 107–25, <https://doi.org/10.32865/fire201951141>.

is still very much influenced by rhetoric built upon an ethnodoxo principle, especially when it appeals to traditional values that are deemed to be lost, as a symbol to portray the cultural identity loss in a given society: the identity loss could reveal itself to be particularly dangerous for democracy as we know it, if framed against minorities by populist political parties, with the intent of restraining such strata's freedom.

This leads directly to the definition and analysis of nation-state and nationalism. Connor writes that the nation-state describes a political entity in which borders coincide with the territory of its people, who, he claims, think they are ancestrally related.⁴⁹ This belief is the foundation of Anderson's "Imagined communities": the polity that is born due to the nation-state is constructed, he claims, «because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion».⁵⁰ Hobsbawm went further and claimed that the imagination is grounded on "invented traditions". That is, to answer to novel situations that people must face in the ever-changing Modern society, traditions take the form of reference to old situations even if mythical or quasi-historical.⁵¹ By integrating these definitions into Bean's reconstruction of the European history of war,⁵² together with Wimmer and Feinstein's history of institutional and sociological development,⁵³ the following is obtained: "The nation-state is the almost-universal political dimension, where self-rule and equality of citizens are at the core and its foundational basis is the overlap between the political power and its people sharing the same territory; people perceive they belong to one community based on identity construction processes that are not necessarily grounded in historical processes". This is supported by Durkheim's opinion, which sees the nation-state as another social environment for the individual, comparable to family or religion.⁵⁴ This explains why far-right traditionalist parties are attached to these concepts, and why they try to mobilize

⁴⁹ Walker Connor, ed., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2007).

⁵⁰ Benedict Richard O'Gorman Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (Verso 1991).

⁵¹ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press 1992).

⁵² Richard Bean, 'War and the Birth of the Nation State' (1973) 33 *The Journal of Economic History* 203.

⁵³ Andreas Wimmer and Yuval Feinstein, 'The Rise of the Nation-State across the World, 1816 to 2001' (2010) 75 *American Sociological Review* 764.

⁵⁴ Stephen R Marks, 'Durkheim's Theory of Anomie' (1974) 80 *American Journal of Sociology* 329.

symbols thereof, as they appeal to delicate imagery that easily resonates with people's feelings.

The state is among the defining elements of the modern world and its most relevant consequence was nationalism. Nationalism is a broad, encompassing concept that can be hardly resolved once and for all. As noted by Leoussi, nationalism depends on the time of the analysis; a conclusive conceptualization is thus impossible.⁵⁵ Gellner's definition, however, is perfectly visible in the neo-traditionalists' narrative: in "Nations and Nationalism" he wrote that «*nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent*».⁵⁶ In the same book, Gellner's reconstruction of the passage from the pre-modern, pre-state world to the modern one is emblematic of the relationship between modernity and nationalism. To sum up, the main difference between traditional and modern orders is the necessity of cultural reproduction and the means to achieve it. Pre-modern worlds were built on differences between the different social strata, both vertically and horizontally. The higher castes thrived on cultural monopoly, both to separate themselves between the other castes and make themselves consequential, and to separate themselves from the lower classes. These latter, on the other hand, didn't have the means nor the interest to meddle with each other, due to their different idioms and cultures that reproduced in close systems and made exchanges difficult.⁵⁷ He states that this separation gave the order an apparent sense of naturalness and inevitability, which helped to reinforce such a disjunction.⁵⁸ Conversely, modern orders are centralized and inherently mobile. Modern states now had the means to give to virtually any citizen generic training, to create common skills (i.e. common language, basic math etc.), that people could use to do any basic job, allowing them to replace and be replaced by others at little or no cost.⁵⁹ In this context, nationalism naturally comes out of the need to create a homogenous mass of citizens that share common values and communicate proficiently with each other. A universal class is born, and no subsystem, he argues, can survive on its own without mixing

⁵⁵ Leoussi S., ed., "Nationalism today", *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Pub, 2007).

⁵⁶ Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Blackwell 2006).

⁵⁷ *ibid.*

⁵⁸ *ibid*, pg. 16.

⁵⁹ *ibid.*

with and homogenizing with the others.⁶⁰ A further consequence of nationalism is nothing more than an Othering process, as noted by Triandafyllidou: national identity, as such, presupposes the ability to identify and recognize who is a member and who is a foreigner of the community in question, that is, the existence of other nations and other identities is in-built in the nation's identity itself.⁶¹

The picture that emerges here must be juxtaposed to those who critiqued the theory surrounding modernity and opted for the label "post-modernity". Their argument is based on the idea that modernity has not fulfilled its prophecies and, because of that, people have abandoned the idea that truth is one and discoverable through scientific inquiry. In Lyotard's words, post-modernity is untrustworthy.⁶² Grand narratives' demise gave forth to local determinism that is not able to provide overarching theories about life, its meaning and its order.⁶³ Grand narratives, described as encompassing theories that explain past, current, and predict future trends, have been considered as one of the hallmarks of modernity.⁶⁴ Their demise is in line with the anti-foundationalist approach the post-modernist have. It is for this reason that, for instance, post-modernists do not believe in the notion of human rights. Human rights are, according to them, a grand narrative that is located at the heart of the self-narrative of the West and, as such, cannot be placed as a Universal.⁶⁵ If modernity's advocates problematize the fact that modernity has not reached its potential, post-modernists embrace this as an inevitable reality.

⁶⁰ Ibid. pg. 40.

⁶¹ Anna Triandafyllidou, 'National Identity and the "Other"' (1998) 21 *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 593.

⁶² Jean-François Lyotard and Niels Brügger, 'What about the Postmodern? The Concept of the Postmodern in the Work of Lyotard' [2001] *Yale French Studies* 77, pg. 78.

⁶³ *ibid.*

⁶⁴ Peter Kivisto, 'Postmodernity as an Internal Critique of Modernity' in Samir Dasgupta (ed), *Postmodernism in a global perspective* (SAGE Publications India Pvt 2014).

⁶⁵ *ibid.*

1.4. Identity in Modernity: Is modern society inevitably anomic?

1.4.1. Premises

The aforementioned characteristics – namely, the role of religion, labor division, and the ever-increasing role of rationality in daily life instances – deeply separate modern life from traditional one. Probably, one of the most relevant changes is identity and the way it is constructed by the individual. While traditional orders are described as never-changing, stagnant, and reliable, and thus succeed in providing a series of safe paradigms to build one’s identity around, modernity, on the other hand, is ever-changing or, as Bauman put it, “liquid”, failing to offer such stable foundations for identity.⁶⁶ In this chapter, an answer to this question – that is, whether we live in anomic times – will be provided starting from the following: 1) what were the core characteristics of traditional orders? 2) what does it mean

⁶⁶ Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity* (Polity Press ; Blackwell 2000).

to say that Modernity is self-conscious? 3) does rationality answer “existential questions”? 4) can modern individuals find their ontological security? The answers provided will show the weaknesses of modernity and why some people believe that traditional orders better offer answers to day-to-day, as well as existential problems.

Traditional orders, Habermas argued, lived immunized from self-criticism due to the role that the concept of sacrality played.⁶⁷ Moreover, culture and nature were blended and made inseparable; in other words, there was total confusion about the distinction between subjects and objects. French anthropologist Maurice Godelier analyzed the different frameworks of understanding employed by pre-modern man; this notion is important to stress because the complex framework that modern man has to confront with is peculiar, and most importantly it is among the reasons why it is natural for individuals to want to go back to simpler conceptualizations of life. Godelier stated that «*the savage mind gives rise to a double illusion, an illusion about the world and an illusion about itself; an illusion about itself because the mind endows idealities with an existence outside of man and independent of him; these idealities are engendered spontaneously and thus the mind alienates itself by its own representations; an illusion about the world because the mind peoples it with imaginary beings similar to man, capable of understanding his needs and responding to them in a favorable or hostile fashion*».⁶⁸ Without the ability to separate «*things from persons, causes from motives, happenings from actions*»,⁶⁹ humans cannot really say to possess any knowledge about themselves and their surroundings, as everything they do and know they haven't mastered at a theoretical level.

An empirical example of this lack of mastery over reality was documented by Evans-Pritchard during his time spent living with the Azande tribe in Central Africa. The Azande believed in witchcraft and reconducted many of their misfortune to witches and directed many of their efforts to combat them. The elements of their thought were completely logical since the cause-effect relation was clear; however, the type of inquiry that satisfies *our* criteria of knowledge was not present, as they were not interested in it, even when facts

⁶⁷ Jürgen Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society, Volume I* (John Wiley & Sons 2015).

⁶⁸ Maurice Godelier, 'Myth and History' [1971] *New Left Review* 93.

⁶⁹ Habermas (n 57).

contradicted their beliefs.⁷⁰ Nature in pre-modern worldviews saw the existence of the sacred as a separate ontological domain inaccessible to us. The presence of a superior truth yet unintelligible is the precondition of traditional orders. Meaning, in such contexts, is given by mythical interpretations of the supernatural, not by scientific knowledge which, as such, is falsifiable and provable. Meaning is thus much more poised, unafraid of change because not subjected to testing; or, even better, when the sacred was challenged it possessed such a firm grip over people's beliefs that it could confidently dismiss any adversarial argument, leaving the scientific mind alone whispering "and yet it moves".⁷¹

Rationality and inquiry bring the issue to the second question raised – what does it mean to say that Modernity is self-conscious? To do this, Giddens' concept of *reflexivity* is introduced. Reflexivity is defined as «[what] *refers to the susceptibility of most aspects of social activity, and material relations with nature, to chronic revision in the light of new information or knowledge. Such information or knowledge is not incidental to modern institutions, but constitutive of them*». ⁷² Reflexivity is thus a foundational characteristic of modernity – as it deeply influences, for example, mankind's relationship with science, since scientific inquiry is reflected in how mankind thinks of itself – and, as such, inescapable.⁷³ By inference, self-consciousness is the ability to reflect on one's own identity, acts, opinions, and beliefs, and draw in new judgments. Modernity envisages this ability at community-level, as if the community were a living subject itself. The spirit of democratic government is somehow related to this consciousness as well, i.e. the idea that absolute monarchies with godly authority and totalitarian dictators are infallible tingles the stomach with the feeling that something is about to go wrong. Thus, democracy is in theory the system of government that allows individuals and groups to act politically based on new experiences, data, and also feelings. In a way, reflexivity is to men what software updates are to computers: individuals have grown theoretically accustomed to the idea that they can learn, search for, and discover truth, and remain open to the fact that such a truth is still up to debate. In the same way, as

⁷⁰ EE Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Abridged edition, Oxford University Press 1976).

⁷¹ Stillman Drake, *Galileo at Work: His Scientific Biography* (Courier Corporation 2003).

⁷² Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford University Press 1991).

⁷³ *ibid.*

efficiency is always perfectible in the workplace, thanks to new technologies and methodologies, scientists sharpen their tools and explore new domains of knowledge every day, with the result that what is true today may not be true tomorrow. This has shocking consequences on the relationship between the future and the present. If it is true that humankind as a species has vastly put its trust in scientific inquiry – especially in the healthcare, telecommunication, and transportation sectors – then every day we are supposed to be ready to discover some core insights about the world that we held dear up to this moment may crumble under the weight of evidence. While this may bring little or no repercussions to the highly-specialized minds behind the discovery, what is the consequence for everybody else? Science is, whether people believe it or not, the only global institution available to our species, but its grammar is complicated as it includes self-negation. The future-present relation, as such, becomes especially problematic when politics is added to the equation. While science is founded exactly on the premises mentioned, politics is subjected to another type of game and appeals to other sentiments. Politicians cannot play the “until further notice”⁷⁴ game, because it is a suboptimal equilibrium since information shared by the political elites usually has the characteristic of *cheap talk*, it carries no value in itself and is widely known to be prone to exaggerations and lies.

Moreover, communication always favors easy, straightforward messages that don't leave room for nuances and doubts. For this reason, when politics deals with highly sophisticated issues that require the explicit use of scientific knowledge, the future-present problem is there waiting.

To explain this trap, it's probably useful to resort to the COVID-19 example; it is important to notice, however, that the same reasoning applies also to moral issues, for example LGBTQIA+ rights. As soon as COVID exited China and hit the rest of the world, vaccine research took in huge funding and in 12 months came up with the first effective vaccine.⁷⁵ First, many sectors of Western societies did not believe this was possible, and raised concerns about its safety, especially due to the new technology employed in its

⁷⁴ Ibid, pg. 202.

⁷⁵ Edouard Mathieu and others, 'Coronavirus Pandemic (COVID-19)' [2020] Our World in Data <<https://ourworldindata.org/covid-vaccinations>> accessed 19 May 2024.

production.⁷⁶ Simultaneously, the scientific community defended their work and assured its safety and effectiveness with its usual methodology. However, the epistemic community has a limited reach and a big part of the advertisement was automatically taken up by the political elites, which of course took this opportunity to supply information shaped and tailored to their franchises. For instance, some Italian parties encouraged vaccination and dismissed any contrary claim,⁷⁷ while others took the chance to express their skepticism.⁷⁸ Now, it is not important to assess once and for all who was right in this particular instance: what matters is the simple fact that different positions were offered to the people, each one expressed with the utmost certainty. While this game was being played, the scientific community was assessing new data and evidence to understand how effective vaccines actually were, how long their coverage was, etc. For example, AstraZeneca showed adverse effects in specific cases and was partially banned.⁷⁹ This brings us back to the concept of reflexivity: after months of campaigns and banners by political activists, epistemic communities, elites etc., how easy can it be for individuals to just change their opinion? This is especially hard when the truth-relation is scientific - that is, the same data that was believed to be true yesterday, is found to be false today.

This type of self-consciousness is extremely complicated to handle and opens up to potentially infinite possibilities of truth that are sometimes in complete negation of previous ones. Self-consciousness in this context can be overlapped with self-criticism, as modernity is inherently introverted in itself: life, it can be argued in this context, is about ameliorating and fixing life, reflecting on itself. The efforts required from everyone to keep up with this are thus huge, as well as the plasticity one has to assume is needed to navigate through this seamless progress. When modern societies look at their past, the type of relationship they build with it is of an oxymoronic kind - their past represents both them and non-them, partly

⁷⁶ Md Saiful Islam and others, 'COVID-19 Vaccine Rumors and Conspiracy Theories: The Need for Cognitive Inoculation against Misinformation to Improve Vaccine Adherence' (2021) 16 PLoS ONE e0251605.

⁷⁷ Raffaella Polselli, 'Bonaccini: "Rafforzare campagna vaccinale e accesso ad alcune attività solo per i vaccinati"' (*Partito democratico*, 20 November 2021) <<https://partitodemocratico.it/bonaccini-rafforzare-campagna-vaccinale-e-accesso-ad-alcune-attivita-solo-per-i-vaccinati/>> accessed 19 May 2024.

⁷⁸ 'Salvini è sempre stato ambiguo sui vaccini' (*Pagella Politica*) <<https://pagellapolitica.it/articoli/salvini-e-sempre-stato-ambiguo-sui-vaccini/>> accessed 19 May 2024.

⁷⁹ 'Oracle BI Interactive Dashboards - DAP' <<https://dap.ema.europa.eu/analytics/saw.dll?PortalPages>> accessed 19 May 2024.

giving forth to a self-*othering* process that creates further cleavages between those that are still fond of it and those who would prefer to cancel it altogether. This is true not only for scientific knowledge.

Going back to the identitarian issue, modernity opened individuals up to infinite sources of inspiration and examples to shape one's identity. As stated in the first chapter, telecommunication and the media are now global by design - it would be irresponsible and limiting to deal only with national or, even more, regional issues. In the age of global economy, international organizations and collaboration-competition dynamics that affect every country, the world really is one. News don't carry only aseptic facts: they bring values, aesthetics, beliefs, worldviews; paired together with mainstream culture - movies, books, music - the modern imagination is truly borderless. Giddens explained this already in 1991, when China didn't enter WTO yet and the internet was used by less than a person per 100 inhabitants in a given country.⁸⁰ If we compare this context to the pre-modern one, where – according to Kivisto – the main source for identity-building was one's proximal group and homogeneity largely prevailed across the board,⁸¹ the implications are evident enough. He notes in fact that modern societies are idiosyncratically pluralistic, as individuals belong to many different circles at once with varying effects, and the private and public lives are more and more separated than they ever were.⁸² Simmel made the point that the origin of this social fact is to be traced back to medieval guilds that first acted as mediating institutions between the private and the public.⁸³ The consequence of these different stimuli and inputs is endemic anxiety and restlessness, as Simmel wrote already in 1904.⁸⁴ On a contrary note, Bauman saw that this self-criticism was «*toothless, unable to affect the agenda set for our life-political choices*». Whereas this is true is actually unimportant. Substantial possibilities to shape the agenda and change course of action of a polity exist for the common individual, be it citizen

⁸⁰ 'Visualizing Internet Penetration per Country 1991-2010 (Animation) - Pingdom' (*pingdom.com*) <<https://www.pingdom.com/blog/visualizing-internet-penetration-per-country-1991-2010-animation/>> accessed 19 May 2024.

⁸¹ Peter Kivisto, 'Postmodernity as an Internal Critique of Modernity' in Samir Dasgupta (ed), *Postmodernism in a global perspective* (SAGE Publications India Pvt 2014).

⁸² *ibid.*

⁸³ Georg Simmel, 'Fashion' (1957) 62 *American Journal of Sociology* 541.

⁸⁴ *ibid.*

or subject, virtually in every society. Étienne De La Boétie pointed out the open secret of every tyrannical government already mid-XVI century in his Discourse of Voluntary Servitude. He underlined how tyrants rest upon a certain will people possess to stay obedient no matter how harsh their conditions are, because it is them who possess the power to change the scenery dramatically just by stopping obeying. In fact, the power of the tyrant is nothing more than the power he is given through submission.⁸⁵ Thus, it is only just to recognize that democracies endow their citizens with formal and substantial rights to protest, let alone vote; this power citizens possess to directly affect the agenda, to go back to Bauman remarks, causes resentment if not met. A recent example of indignation is offered by campus protests in the US and Europe, which are relentlessly asking for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza,⁸⁶ likewise, it happened in the US to end the war in Vietnam.⁸⁷

The coping mechanism that is inherently part and foundation of modernity's syntax is rationality, so it is fair to address it as the first suspect to loosen this tangle. Habermas viewed rationality as readiness to learn, underlining that the cure to these infinite stimuli should be an attentive and responsible approach by which choices can be operated.⁸⁸ Bauman instead thought of rationality as a source of dehumanizing acts and conducts, which removed the possibility of behaving morally and create true meaning.⁸⁹ It is especially in moral questions that the true limits of rationality are manifest, and different scholars agree that modernity has left moral questions unsolved as they remain below the surface of mundane activities.⁹⁰ Existential questions, Giddens argued, are four: 1) about existence itself, 2) about the relations between the external world and human life, 3) about the existence of other

⁸⁵ *Discorso sulla servitù volontaria – Etienne De La Boétie - Casa editrice Chiarelettere* (2011) <<https://www.chiarelettere.it/libro/discorso-sulla-servitu-volontaria-etienne-de-la-boetie-9788861901957.html>> accessed 19 May 2024.

⁸⁶ Lois Beckett, 'Nearly All Gaza Campus Protests in the US Have Been Peaceful, Study Finds' *The Guardian* (10 May 2024) <<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/article/2024/may/10/peaceful-protest-palestinian-campus-protests>> accessed 19 May 2024.

⁸⁷ Philip Bump, 'Analysis | How Americans Felt about Campus Protests against the Vietnam War' *Washington Post* (24 April 2024) <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2024/04/24/polling-student-protests-vietnam/>> accessed 19 May 2024.

⁸⁸ Habermas (n 57), pg. 23.

⁸⁹ Chris Shilling and Philip A Mellor, 'Durkheim, Morality and Modernity: Collective Effervescence, Homo Duplex and the Sources of Moral Action' (1998) 49 *The British Journal of Sociology* 193.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, pg. 200.

persons, and 4) about self-identity.⁹¹ Traditional orders, he argued, were more capable of dealing with them, giving moral and cognitive orientation to the individual facing these questions. Past and future, although distinguished, communicated with each other: traditions allowed for the past to be drawn in for the construction of the future, limiting the available possibilities and, thus, the potential for existential anxiety. On the contrary, modernity is a time of possibilities (on Weber's same note).⁹² Rationality doesn't seem to be the instrument to resort to when dealing with existential crises.

This brings this argument to the fourth point raised before, that is the question of ontological security, which is built upon different layers of understanding of human nature. First of all, Giddens refers to the idea that each individual possesses the ability to discursively explain the reasons for their actions, to which the name *discursive consciousness* is given; secondly, each individual possesses a non-conscious awareness, named *practical consciousness*, that allows individuals to reflexively monitor their actions. That is, it provides the instruments they need to single out appropriate behaviors from inappropriate ones. This *practical consciousness* is constructed, he argues, in a similar way as basic trust is developed in children: children learn to understand that the momentary absence of their caretakers is normal and they outgrow its fear. This occurs when the child is able, thanks to its caregivers, to "constitute a formed framework for existence",⁹³ by which its "self" arises thanks to the juxtaposition of such a self to "non-me" objects, e.g. its parents routinely leaving and coming back. This is the first line of defense against existential dread. Routines, and habits, and acquired social norms are important as they cognitively and emotionally link individuals to their context. So, similarly to what occurs in children, individuals learn through their habits and rituals to cope with the unbearable fact that outside their simple reality, an infinite number of possibilities, risks, and danger is lurking.⁹⁴ When individuals' habits and routines are disrupted, like after a divorce or losing a job, the person does not feel secure anymore as it has lost agency in its life. The schemes that created a sense of action are gone and, reflexively, the meaning of such actions.

⁹¹ Giddens (n 62).

⁹² *ibid.*

⁹³ Giddens, pg. 39.

⁹⁴ Giddens, pg. 35-40.

Considering all the theories and facts that have already been reported, it is understandable to point out to the possibility that our times could indeed be endemically anomic.

1.4.2. Constitutive rules, Anomie and Missing Values

Anomie has been first conceptualized by Durkheim in his *The Division of Labor* (1893):⁹⁵ «*since a body of rules is the definite form which spontaneously established relations between social functions take in the course of time, we can say, a priori, that the state of anomy is impossible wherever solidary organs are sufficiently in contact or sufficiently prolonged*». ⁹⁶ Merton gave, sixty years later, another interpretation of anomie: rather than emerging when constitutive rules break up, leading to unsatisfied needs, anomie arises where discrepancies between means and goals exist.⁹⁷ The rules Durkheim wrote about shouldn't be confused with legal norms. The true object of inquiry with regards to anomie are, again, constitutive rules, that is those rules that norm behaviors in a society in a way that, if such rules are unknown or unfollowed, render the behavior unintelligible to the observer.⁹⁸ As Jaap Hage reports, Searle in "Speech Acts" defined constitutive rules as «[those rules that] *do not merely regulate but also define or create new forms of behavior*». ⁹⁹ The underlying requirement of constitutive practice is that all the participants/subjects of the endeavor regulated by such rules know them and trust each other that they will follow such practices.¹⁰⁰ If this understanding or performance is lacking, the behavior automatically doesn't achieve its goals. Anomie is, in both cases, a lack of coherence between rules and praxis, between the legal norm and what is actually accepted as the norm. Durkheim called, as a solution to the anomic problem, for a political process that foresaw a close relationship between civil society and political elites, to create a positive feedback loop by which a bottom-up process

⁹⁵ Marks (n 48).

⁹⁶Émile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society* (Simon and Schuster 1997).

⁹⁷ Christian Wickert, 'Anomie Theory (Merton)' (*SozTheo*) <<https://soztheo.de/theories-of-crime/anomie-strain-theories/anomie-theory-merton/?lang=en>> accessed 20 May 2024.

⁹⁸ Anne Warfield Rawls, 'Durkheim's Theory of Modernity: Self-Regulating Practices as Constitutive Orders of Social and Moral Facts' (2012) 12 *Journal of Classical Sociology* 479.

⁹⁹ Jaap Hage, 'Two Concepts of Constitutive Rules [Special Issue]' (2018) 4 *Argumenta* 21.

¹⁰⁰ Rod Watson, 'Constitutive Practices and Garfinkel's Notion of Trust: Revisited' (2009) 9 *Journal of Classical Sociology* 475.

was possible and incentivized: that is, policy-making should reflect the emerging praxes, to make sure that the constitutive rules are reflected in the legal body, i.e. the formal rules; he elaborated this solution from studying the division of labor, which he argued could have led to anomie in those cases where the different economic sectors were not able to communicate enough and update their understanding of each other.¹⁰¹

The innovative force of modernity relies on the fact that every citizen can bring their practices to public life, by associating with each other in a self-organizing fashion and building intersubjective rules. When this type of connection between constitutive rules and formal one is tampered with, for example, because the governments don't grant this liberty that spontaneously gives forth to social orders, anomie naturally arises, like a miscommunication bug. This severely impairs the ability that society has to learn from, coordinate, and understand itself, leading to a lack of solidarity and, thus, to an anomic society.

Garfinkel made the argument that, without appropriate constitutive rules, Trust is the first victim.¹⁰² Constitutive rules are thus the means modernity uses to understand itself, and it is clear that without them, the individual is lost as well: this leads the argument back to the concept of ontological security mentioned and explained before. In fact, as Rawls argued, Durkheim's point was that a society's main goal is to create shared social objects: that is, create an environment in which social objects are understood and treated coherently by all the members of such a community.¹⁰³ In absence of such a shared set of understanding, values, and beliefs, atomization naturally comes as a consequence and communication is impossible; this, Durkheim argued, is modernity's issue: a constitutive lack – or Anomie.¹⁰⁴ That is the case because, it must be stressed, humans are sense-making creatures that operate by constructing and attributing meaning, as argued before.

Constitutive rules are thus the bedrock of the modern social arrangement and, at the same time, among the main reasons for its malfunctioning. This is strictly related to the

¹⁰¹ Rawls (n 89).

¹⁰² Harold Garfinkel, *Ethnomethodology's Program: Working Out Durkheim's Aphorism* (Rowman & Littlefield 2002).

¹⁰³ Anne Warfield Rawls, 'Wittgenstein, Durkheim, Garfinkel and Winch: Constitutive Orders of Sensemaking' (2011) 41 *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour* 396, pg. 3.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

problem of ontological security, as the logical consequence of constitutive rules' lack is the absence of a firm grip on reality and meaning by the members of a given society. Do we live in an anomic society? Can we meaningfully communicate and create shared social objects that create comprehensible meaning? The answer may be yes for several reasons. To understand whether this holds true, this dissertation will analyze two different values unique to the West and considered constitutive rules of modernity in their own right: individualism and secularism.

1.4.3. Individualism and Secularism

Individualism in high-late modernity is not necessarily what was Weber's individualism, i.e. a logical consequence of the protestant ethic. Mediating institutions back then were fewer and more centralized. Tocqueville's fear of "atomization"¹⁰⁵ in modern liberal society was, at the time, more a prediction than a description. Mediating institutions grew to become substantially de-centralized and privately owned. Whether this may constitute a risk or not for democracy in and of itself is beyond the scope of this dissertation and should require a careful case-by-case analysis. However, the sectorization of society as a result of the new mediating institutions emerged over the last 40 years is out question. Individualism, as said before, is a constitutive practice of modernity, as you cannot have one without the other. However, it is declined differently in every society, with regional differences that remain clearly visible even within the same nation. For this reason, I will make use of the term "sub-community" hereon. For the sake of this thesis, reference will be primarily made to the European community and the Italian sub-community. This differentiation is important because when thinking about the European continent, the first thing that comes to mind is the fact that protestants and Catholics have coexisted for centuries, and shaped their sub-communities also according to their different beliefs, which led some observers, like Cohen and Hill, claim that protestant communities are more individualistic than their catholic counterparts.¹⁰⁶ This diverging sense and role of

¹⁰⁵ Dana Villa, 'Hegel, Tocqueville, and "Individualism"' (2005) 67 *The Review of Politics* 659.

¹⁰⁶ Adam B Cohen and Peter C Hill, 'Religion as Culture: Religious Individualism and Collectivism Among American Catholics, Jews, and Protestants' (2007) 75 *Journal of Personality* 709.

community is also corroborated by the rate of suicide: in protestant communities the number is still higher, even though, as noted before, the importance and presence of religion in both communities has decreased.¹⁰⁷ Not only that: another indicator of differentiation is the political choice and its historical trajectory. Of course, sub-communities' differences between each other are not only due to religion, but are to be traced back to their histories, which are evident when you look at the major parties in each country. In Italy until the Mani Pulite scandal of 1993,¹⁰⁸ the Belpaese was divided in three blocks represented by three major parties: the Christian Democracy (DC), the Communist Party (PCI) and the Socialist Party (PSI). France's fifth republic, born under Gaullist's sign, saw the emergence of a more fragmented and varying society already in the 1980s.¹⁰⁹ Going back to the issue that individualism thematizes for society, there are two major points of debate: the role of the individual in the economy, and the realm of individual freedoms that are granted to it.

Italy has been considerably divided on the individualism issue for all its republican period, as shown by its constitution, born out of a compromise between the Catholics, Communists and Socialists, with minor roles played by the Republicans and Liberals,¹¹⁰ the parties that held power until the 1990s. A theoretical free-market economy, ruled by the conservative Christian democrats, with the biggest communist party of western Europe is a paradox in itself.¹¹¹ The roots of this apparently oxymoronic entanglement are ancient and outside the scope of this thesis, but it is clear that individualism is not as sacred as somebody would think. Italy made divorce legal in 1970¹¹² and 4 years later DC tried to abrogate it; in

¹⁰⁷ Benno Torgler and Christoph Schaltegger, 'Suicide and Religion: New Evidence on the Differences Between Protestantism and Catholicism' (2014) 53 *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 316.

¹⁰⁸ Donatella Della Porta and Alberto Vannucci, 'Corruption and Anti-Corruption: The Political Defeat of 'Clean Hands' in Italy', *Italy - A Contested Polity* (Routledge 2009).

¹⁰⁹ 'France - Politics, Regions, Culture | Britannica' <<https://www.britannica.com/place/France/Government-and-society>> accessed 25 May 2024.

¹¹⁰ Sabrina Ragone and Giacomo D'Amico, 'The Evolution and Gestalt of the Italian Constitution' in Armin von Bogdandy, Peter M Huber and Sabrina Ragone (eds), *The Max Planck Handbooks in European Public Law: Volume II: Constitutional Foundations* (Oxford University Press 2023) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198726425.003.0006>> accessed 25 May 2024.

¹¹¹ Nancy J Davis and Robert V Robinson, 'Religious Cosmologies, Individualism and Politics in Italy' (1999) 38 *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 339.

¹¹² Alfred Friendly Jr ; Special to The New York Times, 'Italy's First Divorce Law Is Approved by Parliament' *The New York Times* (1 December 1970) <<https://www.nytimes.com/1970/12/01/archives/italys-first-divorce-law-is-approved-by-parliament.html>> accessed 25 May 2024.

the UK, the first law on divorce was in 1857;¹¹³ in France, in 1792 and abrogated after the Restoration.¹¹⁴ While these latter are considered to be the cradle of liberalism and individual rights, the same cannot be said about Italy. However, one shouldn't jump to any conclusion whatsoever: fully-fledged civil rights didn't simply exist everywhere else but in Italy: in the UK, until 1967 homosexuality was still a crime that foresaw harsh punishment.¹¹⁵ Spain, another catholic country, legalized divorce in 1981, six years after Franco's death, with a restricted number of grounds admitted by the courts.¹¹⁶ In a similar fashion, conflicting views exist about the role the individual should play in the economy, whether single-parents or homosexual couples should be entitled the right to adopt children, whether transitioning from a sex to another should be legal or not, about euthanasia, abortion.

The belief that "individualism [...] is the heart of modernity"¹¹⁷ is only partial, as it gives priority to private property and economic freedoms over all the other realms of one's life, and takes for granted a fully-fledged, never-experienced type of individualism. Coming to the most recent developments, the rise of conservative and traditionalist far-right in Italy to government, and to substantial percentages in other parts of Europe (especially Germany with Alternative für Deutschland projected to more than 30% in the surveys, just caught in a major scandal over the moral judgment of the SS troops),¹¹⁸ makes it even more evident that individualism is at least a mutilated dogma, full of *ifs* and asterisks. Progressists and conservatives of all kinds battle for the appropriation of instances of civil and social rights with varying criteria and beliefs as their starting point. This doesn't result in an atomization of the positions: rather, it creates a rupture in the social strata, that start to perceive each other as a threat to their worldviews. The constitutive rule of individualism cannot be defined by a

¹¹³ 'History of Divorce in the UK' (*Stowe Family Law*) <<https://www.stowefamilylaw.co.uk/family-law/divorce/history-of-divorce-in-the-uk/>> accessed 25 May 2024.

¹¹⁴ Brigitte Ecolivet-Herzog, 'The New French Divorce Law' (1977) 11 *The International Lawyer* 483.

¹¹⁵ 'Sexuality 20Th Century' <<https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/transformingsociety/private-lives/relationships/overview/sexuality20thcentury/>> accessed 25 May 2024.

¹¹⁶ George E Glos, 'The Spanish Divorce Law of 1981' (1983) 32 *International & Comparative Law Quarterly* 667.

¹¹⁷ Salvatore Abbruzzese, *Comunione e Liberazione: Identité Catholique et Disqualification Du Monde* (Editions du Cerf 1989).

¹¹⁸ 'Germany's Far-Right AfD Party Expelled from European Parliament Group' (*euronews*, 23 May 2024) <<https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/05/23/european-parliaments-id-party-requests-to-expel-far-right-afd>> accessed 25 May 2024.

piece of legislation, no matter how big and omni-comprehensive one designs it to be. Individualism, at the end of the day, belongs to the grand narratives family, which aren't dead: they are still the fabric of modern society. In this sense, individualism arises as a source for anomie: the socio-political competition over its definition and limitation is ongoing, and each sector that's competing over such a concept – which is vertically divided like in Gellner's traditional world – isn't able to understand the others that carry different views. In traditional societies, as already explained, individualism wasn't a social concept per se. The collective had influence over modes of behavior, ambitions and possibilities given to the individual. However, deviation from traditional rules did not - theoretically - bring with it all the consequences that divergence from constitutive rules do: these latter are authority-based, instead of bargaining in a bottom-up fashion, and are vaguer and more abstract, allowing for room for interpretation.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, it seems quite obvious that constitutive rules are debatable and offer plenty of space for bargaining. Moreover, representative democracies - that is, all modern democracies - are still heavily authority-based and do not permit free-flowing negotiations as Durkheim would've hoped for, since decisions are taken at a centralized level; even though it is imaginable to re-shape modern states so to ensure increased subsidiarity, direct democracy instruments, regionalist or federalist arrangements with empowered local powers to increase the numbers of centers of powers and facilitate free-negotiation processes, one truth remains. Modernity's force is centrifugal and creates varying forms of association and subsequent worldviews that aren't easily stopped, nor reversible.

The same goes for secularism, another alleged pillar of modernity. First of all, the socio-political debate over its definition cannot be resolved; secondly, even if secularism were given a fixed meaning that everyone shared, disputing visions would be present nonetheless. Italy's way to secularism is in fact highly debated. Inglehart and Norris' definition – that is, that secularism predicts a fading importance of religion in industrial societies¹²⁰ – fails to appreciate what really has happened over the last century in Italy. Italy

¹¹⁹ Rawls (n 89).

¹²⁰ 'Review of Sacred and Secular. Religion and Politics Worldwide' (2006) 67 *GeoJournal* 373.

now has traces of what has been described before as ethnodoxy, even if it does not possess the authoritarian traits that it does in Russia. However, as shown later in the thesis, far-right parties insist on the religious tradition of the country and raise questions concerning immigration based on different religious affiliations. Islamism has been defined as an existential threat to Italians' way of life, and diffidence characterizes the relationship with newly arrived migrants, both regular and irregular. Also from other perspectives secularism in Italy is disputed. The nation does not embrace the French way of prohibiting the exhibition of religious symbols in public places; as a matter of fact, the opposite is true: Italy's schools still show the crucifix in every room where students take classes alone, without any reference to any other religion, even though such obligation was challenged before the European Court of Human Rights in 2011.¹²¹ Furthermore, the Italian national public broadcast company, RAI, still airs programs explicitly based on Christian catholic values, both for entertainment purposes, like *Don Matteo*,¹²² which depicts the life of a province priest who often solves criminal cases alongside the Carabinieri forces and imbues the show with Christian morals, or for cultural ones, like "A Sua Immagine" ("In His image"), where Christian themes are discussed with the objective of showing their relevance for modern life; the program also interviewed Pope Francis and it aired it on RAI.¹²³ These facts should not be surprising: per Eurobarometer 508, 74% of Italians identify themselves with their religion, well above the European average (53%).¹²⁴ Of course, the remaining segments of society actively fight what they describe as "infiltrations" from the Church, especially on the left and center-left. 5 Stars Movement ex-education minister Fioramonti tried to remove the crucifix from schools but failed, as the issue was seen as "divisive".¹²⁵ This scenario is more in line with Fox's findings

¹²¹ 'Lautsi and Others v. Italy [GC]' <[https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22:\[%22002-592%22%7D](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int/eng#%7B%22itemid%22:[%22002-592%22%7D)> accessed 12 September 2024.

¹²² Madeleine Johnson Editor Associate, 'Goodbye, Don Matteo' (*The American Mag*, 12 April 2022) <<https://theamericanmag.com/goodbye-don-matteo/>> accessed 12 September 2024.

¹²³ 'A sua immagine', *Wikipedia* (2024) <https://it.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=A_sua_immagine&oldid=141086192> accessed 12 September 2024.

¹²⁴ 'Values and Identities of EU Citizens - Novembre 2021 - - Eurobarometer Survey' <<https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2230>> accessed 12 September 2024, pg. 32.

¹²⁵ 'Crocifisso a scuola, la Chiesa contro il ministro Fioramonti che vorrebbe toglierlo dalle classi' (*la Repubblica*, 1 October 2019) <https://www.repubblica.it/scuola/2019/10/01/news/scuola_fioramonti_contro_il_crocifisso_nelle_aule_meglio_una_cartina_del_mondo_-237394202/> accessed 12 September 2024.

– political secularism as the separation between religion and public and private life is inherently victim of tensions and, as such, hardly solvable.¹²⁶

Italy remains a secular country on paper, since the Catholic Church is a separate institution, and the Christian catholic religion is not the religion of the state. However, as shown above, the relationship between the Italy and religion cannot be simply dismissed as minor and, as such, is source of friction between those who would like to get rid of any Christian symbol, and those who perceive such gesture as an un-Italian thing to do.

¹²⁶ Jonathan Fox, *Political Secularism, Religion, and the State: A Time Series Analysis of Worldwide Data* (Cambridge University Press 2015) <<https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/political-secularism-religion-and-the-state/F5C7B980C05F2485B1E6CC66839C6C6E>> accessed 12 September 2024.

1.5. Traditionalism as the antidote to Modernity

If all the theories above are true, and thus instances of anomie are somehow grounding the Modern world in its various aspects, then it should be quite clear why many people feel they have been left behind in this constant march toward the future. Modern values in this sense exclude people who do not believe in them, meaning that such values become a point of friction between the different social strata. For these reasons, some people hold conservative – or even reactionary – worldviews, with a view to maintaining the current, or previous, status quo. This is what has been defined as “traditionalism”. Traditionalism has been studied at large by different scholars and contains a plethora of movements, values, and beliefs that are hard to summarize in one paragraph. Sedgwick underlines that the traditionalist group is loose and comprises people ranging from hardcore traditionalists who are inspired by Guenon and Evola’s thought, to conservatives, or simply nostalgic people.¹²⁷ Starting from some definition of tradition, however, is helpful to expand on the issue.

The first definition is provided by Congar who, in his theological effort, went back to the Greek and Latin roots of the word *traditio*, which means “to transmit, to pass something”.¹²⁸ Tradition in this sense is something that is carried from the past, through the present, to preserve it in the future. Along the same lines, the second interpretation is Bruns’ figure of the “classicist” who, he argues, believes that the future will largely contain what history has determined to work so that one can always trace the future back to the past.¹²⁹ Together with these two notions, the third definition by Fischer adds an important feature: traditional values are those that are, or were, dominant in a given community, at a given time.¹³⁰ It follows that a value is said to be not traditional when it deviates from the previous or current dominant norms of behavior.¹³¹

These definitions provide a tool to assess whether a value is traditional or not, but the crucial point is that they don’t define the actual content of said value in any way. This means

¹²⁷ Mark J Sedgwick, *Against the Modern World: Traditionalism and the Secret Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century* (Oxford University Press 2009).

¹²⁸ Yves Congar, *The Meaning of Tradition* (Ignatius Press 2016).

¹²⁹ Gerald L Bruns, ‘What Is Tradition?’ (1991) 22 *New Literary History* 1.

¹³⁰ Claude S Fischer, ‘The Effect of Urban Life on Traditional Values’ (1975) 53 *Social Forces* 420, pg. 421.

¹³¹ *ibid.*

that the same value can be identified as traditional in one community and non-traditional in another, or the same value can become traditional in one community after it hadn't been for much time. To attempt to solve this issue, it is needed to state what community and what period are under analysis since this is the only way to carry out any meaningful investigation. This "analytical confusion" that lives in some accounts of the term was underlined by Eagleton in his critique of Gadamer's viewpoint on tradition, in which he stressed that one cannot hold history as a continuous stream with no interruptions, breaks, and changes, something he would go on to define as "*a grossly complacent theory of history*".¹³²

As an alternative to the previous explanations, there have been attempts to establish how traditional or modern societies are based on a specific set of values considered litmus tests of the traditional/secular axis. This is the case of the model provided by Inglehart and Baker's "Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values",¹³³ based on the research conducted by the World Values Survey.¹³⁴ In their work, they hold that traditional values emphasize the following: a) the importance of god in one's life; b) the importance of obedience and religious education in children rather than determination and independence; c) the unjustifiability of abortion; d) the sense of national pride; e) the importance of respecting the authority.¹³⁵ Modern values, they state, are their opposite, that is they emphasize independence, autonomy, the separation of public life and religious values, and a cosmopolitan outlook. In this way, though broad, content is provided, which renders evaluation possible. These values are part of the examples provided in this work, where individualism, secularization, and equality were brought as instances of anomie. The fil rouge of said values is easily identified: they emphasize the individual's agency in the meaning construction processes. As shown before, one of the crucial features of modernity is the constant pressure exerted on the individual to find meaning autonomously. Whether it takes the form of finding a job, finding a spouse, or developing some kind of spirituality, the modern attitude requires you to arrange all these realms on your own. Traditionalism, instead,

¹³² Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: An Introduction* (U of Minnesota Press 2008), pg. 63.

¹³³ Ronald Inglehart and Wayne E Baker, 'Modernization, Cultural Change, and the Persistence of Traditional Values' (2000) 65 *American Sociological Review* 19, Table 1, pg. 24.

¹³⁴ Christian Haerpfer and others, 'World Values Survey Time-Series (1981-2022) Cross-National Data-Set' <<https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWVL.jsp>> accessed 5 August 2024.

¹³⁵ *ibid*, pg. 142.

inherently flips upside-down this process, since the individual embraces schemes that precede its existence, transmitted through codes, customs, and laws, relegating agency to an almost non-existent realm. Especially in the spiritual domain, it is clear that modernity has started overshadowing religious answers to existential problems, even though without a definitive success. Traditionalists believe in fact that scientific truths should not be considered as such, holding that true meaning comes from spiritual endeavors that escape mundane scientific activities.

Moreover, exercising agency requires the individual to bear the responsibility for its actions. Responsibility, however, requires preconditions to be fulfilled. Different approaches to the issue exist, like the capability approach – which holds that the individual should be made available with adequate means and should operate with freedom.¹³⁶ This means that in all those cases where these two preconditions are not fulfilled, the individual cannot be presumed – or asked to – behave responsibly. Still, in the EU, many people are below the threshold of poverty, have no access to housing, or medication, and leave education paths early. This severely impacts their ability to express their will in a society that requires autonomy and independence. The welfare state, in other words, fails to get everybody up to speed, enjoying the labor market with a positive outlook and the ability to choose without constraints. As it will be shown in the conclusion, these factors explain why the populist and neo-traditional far-right enjoys growing shares of the electorate.

¹³⁶ Jean-Michel Bonvin, ‘Activation Policies, New Modes of Governance and the Issue of Responsibility’ (2008) 7 *Social Policy and Society* 367, pg. 368.

2.1. Introduction: Fratelli d'Italia and Lega as Far-Right Parties

In the first chapter, an extensive theoretical understanding of modernity and its complexities has been provided. It had the scope of giving the context for this chapter which, as it will be shown, will focus on the rhetoric that Far Right Parties adopt in Italy. Fratelli d'Italia and Lega are two of the governing majority coalition in the current (2024) Italian government. The goal of this second chapter is to investigate whether ties between these two parties and traditional symbols and images exist and to explore how these worldviews are instrumental for mobilizing masses against modernity and its values that have been identified in the first chapter as potentially anomic problems. To undergo this examination, this dissertation will inspect speeches and manifestos of the parties in question, after providing a symbolic framework that will allow the undertexts these symbols conceal to resurface.

2.1.1. Fratelli d'Italia (FdI)

The Party was founded in 2012 as a result of a schism within the then Popolo della Libertà (PDL), a center-right coalition comprising Silvio Berlusconi's center-right party Forza Italia (FI) and Gianfranco Fini's far-right Alleanza Nazionale (AN); the nature of the dispute was multifaceted, but the last straw for the founders of the upcoming far-right Party was Berlusconi's decision to maintain the leadership of the coalition without going through a process of internal election,¹³⁷ together with PDL's decision to support the newcomer "technical government" led by Mario Monti.¹³⁸

To better understand FdI's roots and the legacy it carries on, it is necessary to go back in time. Even though an in-depth analysis of the history of the Italian Far Right parties is out of the scope of this dissertation, an outline is due to trace back their salient traits and contextualize the values FdI offers in the contemporary political landscape. Such a historical work is essential because of the many ties that link together more of 80 years of the Right's history. The following analysis will mainly make use of Piero Ignazi's work "From neo-

¹³⁷ Gianfranco Baldini, Filippo Tronconi and Davide Angelucci, 'Yet Another Populist Party? Understanding the Rise of Brothers of Italy' (2022) 27 *South European Society and Politics* 385.

¹³⁸ Alessandro Giuli, 'Scissione e liberazione. Che c'è dietro la rottura dentro il Pdl (se ci sarà)' <<https://www.ilfoglio.it/articoli/2013/11/13/news/scissione-e-liberazione-che-ce-dietro-la-rottura-dentro-il-pdl-se-ci-sara-56345/>> accessed 17 July 2024.

fascists to post-fascists? The transformation of the MSI into the AN” (1996), since it recollects the evolution of the two parties which preceded FdI: Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI) and Alleanza Nazionale (AN).

Soon after the end of WWII, the Italian political scenario was already rejoined by a Neo-Fascist force: Giorgio Almirante’s MSI. The Party in question had many souls and developed through the Italian “First Republic”¹³⁹ history (1946-1994) with a shapeshifting attitude. Each Secretary General tried, with mixed success in framing the Party’s offer according to their own needs and values, to offer what the public demanded. The three most important figures of MSI’s history are Giorgio Almirante, Pino Rauti, and Gianfranco Fini. Each of them had their own recipe when it came to managing and balancing the most militarist and authoritarian fringes of the Party, which was at times composed also by high-ranking officials of the army,¹⁴⁰ with the more moderate, democratic ones. The objective, clearly, was to maintain the former happy enough to be militant and active, while riding the latter’s “clean faces” so to be perceived as an established party instead of an anti-system political force. Under its everchanging skin, however, it always lied an ambiguous attitude towards the Fascist period. Somewhat emblematic were Almirante’s words, «*not disowning, not restoring*»,¹⁴¹ which can hardly be argued to be acceptable words in a democratic landscape, especially if pronounced by a man who was a Repubblica Sociale Italiana (RSI) official during the Nazi occupation of Italy.

This constant ambiguousness about its real nature was not only an important political tool, rather a core feature of the Italian Far-Right.

The Party was then transformed under Fini’s secretariate into AN, but this didn’t change much of its nature. As Ignazi described it, it wasn’t much more than a rebranding moment.¹⁴² However, a progressive abandonment of some of the harshest stances took place

¹³⁹ The term signals the political setting and parties that dominated Italy before Mani Pulite, the judicial operation that investigated the major parties’ corruption and illegitimate financing schemes. The Prima Repubblica period goes from 1946, its foundation, to 1994. See Sondra Z Koff and Stephen P Koff, *Italy: From the First to the Second Republic* (Taylor & Francis US 2000) for more.

¹⁴⁰ Piero Ignazi, ‘From Neo-fascists to Post-fascists? The Transformation of the MSI into the AN’ (1996) 19 *West European Politics* 693, pg. 69.

¹⁴¹ *Giorgio Almirante - Non Rinnegare Non Restaurare* (Directed by Fondazione Giorgio Almirante, 2018) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xn-BNv6EvpU>> accessed 16 July 2024, timestamp: 1:54.

¹⁴² Ignazi (n 113), pg. 705.

over time, and in ten years from its birth the party really started looking different from its predecessor.¹⁴³ Still, this shouldn't overshadow the fact that changes pushed for by the leadership of the Party didn't result in a complete renovation: the bulk of AN, especially its elites, were the same people that just a few years prior, in 1995, voted in an internal survey of the Party and, with an astounding 62% of preferences, approved the statement «*notwithstanding some questionable choices, Fascism was a good regime*».¹⁴⁴ Tarchi as well has stressed the uncertainty that surrounded the Party's worldview, moving along different lines to strike a balance between its roots and electoral needs.¹⁴⁵ In fact, the coalition with Berlusconi's FI, considered a populist, center-right party,¹⁴⁶ had to be understood also under this perspective.

Going back to the schism between AN and FI, this set of information allows us to understand which political culture gave strength to the creation of Fratelli d'Italia: Ignazio La Russa, two-thirds of the new leadership together with Guido Crosetto, come in fact from a long MSI-AN militancy;¹⁴⁷ ¹⁴⁸ the latter, instead, was part of FI and was a former Christian-Democrat (DC).¹⁴⁹ The three new leaders shared the view that the center-right PDL coalition wasn't suited to carry on its electoral base interests and sought to bring a new political force to life to fill what they believed to be a political vacuum. The beginning was rough: even though they shared a long-standing support and a political structure to start from, FDI was only the third political force in the right-wing coalition that ran for the 2013 election.¹⁵⁰ In 2014 the party held an internal election for the new leadership, won by Meloni, and set their agenda. Here they embraced EU-skeptic stances, distancing themselves from the traditional

¹⁴³ Piero Ignazi, 'Legitimation and Evolution on the Italian Right Wing: Social and Ideological Repositioning of Alleanza Nazionale and the Lega Nord' (2005) 10 *South European Society & Politics* 333.

¹⁴⁴ Ignazi (n 113), pg. 705, as per Baldini and Vignati's survey of 1995, table 3.

¹⁴⁵ Marco Tarchi, 'The Political Culture of the Alleanza Nazionale: An Analysis of the Party's Programmatic Documents (1995-2002)' (2003) 8 *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 135.

¹⁴⁶ Ignazi (n 142).

¹⁴⁷ 'Da dove arriva Giorgia Meloni' (*Il Post*, 23 September 2022) <<https://www.ilpost.it/2022/09/23/giorgia-meloni/>> accessed 17 July 2024.

¹⁴⁸ 'Chi è Ignazio La Russa' (*Il Post*, 13 October 2022) <<https://www.ilpost.it/2022/10/13/ignazio-la-russa-storia/>> accessed 17 July 2024.

¹⁴⁹ 'Crosetto, Guido - Enciclopedia' (*Treccani*) <<https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/guido-crosetto/>> accessed 18 July 2024.

¹⁵⁰ Gianfranco Pasquino, 'The 2013 Elections and the Italian Political System' (2014) 19 *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 424.

center-right positioning that brought PDL to power just a few years before to be much more in line with what AN stood for:¹⁵¹ this didn't surprise many, as the new party was not only led by ex-MSI and AN figures but was also filled with alike personnel.¹⁵² From 2014 to 2022 the Party saw its numbers incessantly increasing, up to the astonishing 25.99% at the last Parliamentary election that confirmed its primacy in the Italian context and allowed it, together with FI and Lega, to rule the country in a coalition government.¹⁵³ Even though its governing role has now tampered with its most extremist views – for example, it lost almost entirely its EU-skeptic opinions in favor of a more EU-reformist approach – one cannot but insert FDI in the European Far-Right family.

2.1.2. League

The history of the second party under scrutiny is more difficult to rationalize. It was born under the name “Lega Nord” (*Northern League*), thanks to the coming together of different Leghe (*Leagues*) across the northern regions, that battled for more political and economic autonomy from the central institutions based in Rome. Before its birth, many movements managed to voice local and regionalist interest from the end of the 1970s to the 1980s, such as the Union Valdôtaine, the Liga Veneta, and the Western Lombard Union of Umberto Bossi,¹⁵⁴ a key figure of what would have become just a few years later one of the Lega Nord (LN) key personalities. This “leaguism” challenged the idea that Italy was ethnically homogenous, revived regional and local peculiarism – for instance, the Liga Veneta was born out of the Philological Veneta Society that pushed for the use of the Venetian dialect instead of the Italian language¹⁵⁵ –, invested much attention in the re-discovery of local “traditions”, and ostracized southern immigrants in the region for being

¹⁵¹ Leonardo Puleo and Gianluca Piccolino, ‘Back to the Post-Fascist Past or Landing in the Populist Radical Right? The Brothers of Italy Between Continuity and Change’ (2022) 27 *South European Society and Politics* 359, pg. 361.

¹⁵² *ibid.*

¹⁵³ Agenzia ANSA, ‘Elezioni 2022: per Fdi quasi 5,9 milioni di voti in più - Notizie - Ansa.it’ (*Agenzia ANSA*, 27 September 2022) <https://www.ansa.it/sito/notizie/politica/2022/09/27/elezioni-2022-per-fdi-quasi-59-milioni-di-voti-in-piu-_bb6c900c-d1c9-4f1f-bb8f-753465925454.html> accessed 18 July 2024.

¹⁵⁴ Marco Tarchi, ‘THE LEGA NORD’, *Regionalist Parties in Western Europe* (Routledge 1998), pg. 143.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*

lazy and dirty.¹⁵⁶ “Secession” and “Federalism” were key points of such movements, and the first incontrovertible success came from Bossi’s Lega Lombarda which scored 8.9% at the EU Parliamentary election of 1989, while the Lega Veneta struggled to reach similar numbers.¹⁵⁷ It was only natural for the two allied movements to join forces and become a single political entity, which occurred in 1991 under Bossi’s leadership.¹⁵⁸ The Lega Nord was born just a few years before Mani Pulite wiped away virtually all the traditional parties that contended the power from the creation of the republic, ready to play a major role in the national scene.¹⁵⁹ In 1994 Bossi entered negotiations with Berlusconi’s new creature, Forza Italia, and managed to transform the 8.4% electoral share into 117 MPs, 18.6% of the Parliament’s seats, obtaining three ministries.¹⁶⁰

From the end of the 1990s through the 2000s, Lega Nord underwent various transformations that eventually changed the party’s soul entirely. In the consolidation phase of their power, Spektorowski considered LN’s political offer to be ethno-regionalist and exclusivist,¹⁶¹ while McDonnell emphasized their regionalist-populist nature, the honest people being the northern inhabitants, and the enemy being ever-changing.¹⁶² In fact, it must be noted that LN radically changed its mind on many issues – the EU, the relationship it must entertain with the “traditional parties”, the approach towards migration, and globalization – to the point where it is virtually impossible to trace continuity in its ideology.¹⁶³ In 2002, Bossi and AN’s leader Fini wrote together a piece of legislation on migration regulations that *«was widely seen both in Italy and abroad as the tough answer of the far-right to the supposedly ‘soft’ policies previously introduced by the center-left»*.¹⁶⁴ This collaboration

¹⁵⁶ Paolo Barcella, ‘Percorsi leghisti: dall’antimeridionalismo alla xenofobia’ [2018] *Meridiana: rivista di storia e scienze sociali*: 91, 1, 2018 95.

¹⁵⁷ Ignazi (n 142).

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁹ Robert Leonardi and Monique Kovacs, ‘The Lega Nord: The Rise of a New Italian Catch-All Party’ (1993) 8 *Italian Politics* 50.

¹⁶⁰ Giorgia Bulli and Filippo Tronconi, ‘The Lega Nord’ <<https://flore.unifi.it/handle/2158/403721>> accessed 24 November 2023, 57.

¹⁶¹ Alberto Spektorowski, ‘Ethnoregionalism: The Intellectual New Right and the *Lega Nord*’ (2003) 2 *Global Review of Ethnopolitics* 55.

¹⁶² Duncan McDonnell, ‘A Weekend in Padania: Regionalist Populism and the Lega Nord’ (2006) 26 *Politics* 126, pg. 127.

¹⁶³ Leonardi and Kovacs (n 134), pg. 961.

¹⁶⁴ Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell, ‘The Lega Nord in the Second Berlusconi Government: In a League of Its Own’ (2005) 28 *West European Politics* 952.

may have surprised LN's older supporters, who heard Bossi screaming "[...] *never with the MSI, never [...] we carry on the Fight for Liberation done by Partisans*" just a few years prior.¹⁶⁵ However, these changes coexisted, at least partially, with the original policies that brought the various *Leghe* together, namely more autonomy for the northern regions and less subsidies from the state towards the southern ones. This is evident from the electoral shares Lega Nord gathered in the north, whatever the occasion. In the 2008 general election, it obtained the relative majority of votes in several Lombardy and Veneto provinces, testifying to its roots in such places, while scoring weakly everywhere else, for a meager 8% nationwide.¹⁶⁶ The 2013 general election was even worse, also due to the center-right parties' general trend that saw a dramatic decrease in their total share. Still, some northern provinces saved LN from total failure, especially in the rural areas of Lombardia and Veneto.¹⁶⁷

Its populist and right-wing approach was finally set in stone just a few years later when the autonomist-regionalist politics left the party entirely in favor of a more nationalistic approach that paid explicit attention also to the southern regions, shifting dispraise and rejection from the southern Italians to African immigrants, leveraging on the need to preserve Italian cultural and political national unity. This resulted in a rebranding operation, too, within which they took "Nord" and the sun of the Alps (Flag of the Northern Padania), off the Lega's name and logo, which became "Lega per Salvini Premier". This change was mainly carried on by Matteo Salvini, who became and is still nowadays leader of the party: he was elected in the 2013 party's election and confirmed in 2017.¹⁶⁸ The EU-skeptic stances became central to the party's identity which moved along different axes – such as an "Italy's first" approach in the EU community to justify increased public expenditures and derogation

¹⁶⁵ *Bossi Antifascista* (Directed by Mario Pazzaglia, 2008) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WUB5z3I6S8>> accessed 19 July 2024.

¹⁶⁶ 'Eligendo Archivio - Ministero dell'Interno DAIT - Politiche 2008' (*Eligendo*) <<https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it>> accessed 22 July 2024.

¹⁶⁷ 'L'Italia tripolare (ovvero nel Paese dei ciechi l'orbo è re): analisi sul voto del 24-25 febbraio - YouTrend' (4 March 2013) <<https://www.youtrend.it/2013/03/04/litalia-tripolare-analisi-voto-febbraio-2013/>> accessed 22 July 2024.

¹⁶⁸ 'Matteo Salvini ha vinto le primarie della Lega Nord' (*Il Post*, 13 May 2017) <<https://www.ilpost.it/2017/05/13/primarie-lega-nord/>> accessed 22 July 2024.

from fiscal rules,¹⁶⁹ a long battle against EU sanctions against Russia¹⁷⁰ as the aftermath of this latter's invasion and annexation of Crimea in 2014 – that accompanied other far-right stances, like a general appreciation of Putin's harsh internal politics based on Orthodoxy, low immigration, and autocratic control over political dissent that Salvini took as a model.¹⁷¹ Lega's relationship with Putin's Russia United was more than an ideological affinity: the two Parties got into formal alliances and partnerships,¹⁷² to the extent that Salvini recognized the Crimean referendum to get annexed to Russia¹⁷³ – while all the international observatories didn't¹⁷⁴ – and almost got caught in an international fraud scheme.¹⁷⁵ The ongoing full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia only temporarily got Salvini to change his mind about Putin's regime: since the beginning of the war, he has been among the pacifist family that condemned Russia's actions, favoring a diplomatic solution;¹⁷⁶ in the last months, Lega has been openly disapproving of their governing partners' military aid schemes,¹⁷⁷ a move that can be seen as a new impulse to distance himself from his governing allies to gather votes from the more extremist fringes. The most recent European election corroborates this hypothesis. Salvini

¹⁶⁹ Vivienne Walt, 'Why Italy's Matteo Salvini Is the Most Feared Man in Europe' (*TIME*, 13 September 2018) <<https://time.com/5394448/matteo-salvini/>> accessed 23 July 2024.

¹⁷⁰ Lally Weymouth, 'Perspective | "Italy Has Done a Lot — Maybe Too Much"' *Washington Post* (19 July 2018) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/italy-has-done-a-lot-maybe-too-much/2018/07/19/dc81a292-8acf-11e8-8aea-86e88ae760d8_story.html> accessed 23 July 2024.

¹⁷¹ 'Russian Propaganda Is State-of-the-Art Again' *The Economist* <<https://www.economist.com/europe/2016/12/08/russian-propaganda-is-state-of-the-art-again>> accessed 23 July 2024.

¹⁷² Hannah Roberts, 'Italy and Russia: A Love Affair That Hasn't Quite Ended' (*POLITICO*, 6 April 2022) <<https://www.politico.eu/article/italy-russia-love-affair-no-end/>> accessed 7 May 2022.

¹⁷³ Weymouth (n 169).

¹⁷⁴ Carol Morello, Pamela Constable and Anthony Faiola, 'Crimeans Vote to Break Away from Ukraine, Join Russia' *Washington Post* (16 March 2014) <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2014/03/16/ccec2132-acd4-11e3-a06a-e3230a43d6cb_story.html> accessed 23 July 2024.

¹⁷⁵ Luigi Ferrarella, 'Soldi russi alla Lega, l'operazione fu fatta saltare da chi la stava organizzando. I pm: «Salvini sapeva del petrolio, non della tangente»' (*Corriere della Sera*, 17 January 2023) <https://milano.corriere.it/notizie/cronaca/23_gennaio_17/soldi-russi-alla-lega-l-operazione-fu-fatta-saltare-da-chi-la-stava-organizzando-salvini-sapeva-del-petrolio-ma-non-della-tangente-01cbe45b-874f-445c-a5f7-1f9f12db6xk.shtml> accessed 23 July 2024.

¹⁷⁶ 'In Europa e nel mondo, persino in Russia, nessuno si fida più di Matteo Salvini' (18 April 2024) <<https://lespresso.it/c/politica/2024/4/18/in-europa-e-nel-mondo-persino-in-russia-nessuno-si-fida-piu-di-matteo-salvini/50684>> accessed 23 July 2024.

¹⁷⁷ 'Ucraina, scontro nel governo: la Lega attacca Meloni sui sistema di difesa dati a Kiev. Crippa: "I missili sono armi difensive?"' (*la Repubblica*, 12 July 2024) <https://www.repubblica.it/politica/2024/07/12/news/lega_contro_meloni_armi_ucraina-423392902/> accessed 23 July 2024.

nominated former General of the Italian Army Roberto Vannacci – famous, inter alia, for his strong anti-LGTBQAI+ stances and fascist lures¹⁷⁸ – for a seat as a MEP in a political stunt that left in discontent both key figures of the party and several regional movements, stayed in the EU-skeptic, far-right European Parliament political group Identity and Democracy with the likes of LePen and Orban, and is now in an open conflict with his allies on various domestic issues.

These two paragraphs served the purpose of justifying the labeling of Lega and FDI as far-right parties; sharing this positioning, they have developed similar/ common communicative strategies through the employment of traditional symbols / symbols belonging to traditional worldviews, which we will examine in the next paragraphs.

¹⁷⁸ ‘Vannacci invita al voto inneggiando alla “X Mas” fascista: “Fate una ‘Decima’ sul simbolo della Lega” (La Stampa, 31 May 2024) <https://www.lastampa.it/politica/2024/05/31/video/vannacci_invita_al_voto_inneggiando_alla_x_mas_fascista_fate_una_decima_sul_simbolo_della_lega-14350174/> accessed 23 July 2024.

2.2. Traditional Symbols in Modern Politics

The explicit objective of this chapter is to analyze and contextualize FDI and Lega's speeches to find references to traditional worldviews. However, it must be stressed that this effort should not overshadow, nor underplay, any other sort of symbolic signals that may be extraneous to the traditional domain. Symbols that don't belong to the "traditional" family fall out of the scope of this research and are, as such, left out from the analysis, even though these two Parties are not to be considered strictly traditional: rather, and this is the ultimate point of this thesis, they use such symbols to make sense of the modern world and shape it according to their needs and goals, while never disregarding the indisputable fact that we *do* live in what can be referred to as Modernity, or Late-Modernity.

2.2.1. What are Symbols and What They Are Used For

Around symbols and symbolism, a wide literature exists. Here, Giorgio Fedel's "Simboli e Politica"¹⁷⁹ ("Symbols and Politics", 1991) will be used as the main framework for referencing the vast categories, interpretations, and uses that have been studied in the field. More specifically, the analysis that will be carried out here will deploy three different understandings of symbols: a) symbols as subjectivity;¹⁸⁰ b) symbols as signification;¹⁸¹ c) symbols as dissociation.¹⁸²

The first interpretation contemplates that symbolism constitutes the agent's mental equipment and his linguistic ability; symbolism, that is, is like a genre of which language is the most important type.¹⁸³ For example, Lizardo in his "Cultural Symbols and Cultural Power", argues that «[symbols] *serve to evoke or access this pre-existing potential in patterned ways*».¹⁸⁴ The pre-existing potential the author refers to is the ability of the individual to use symbols to activate pre-established meanings of the world.¹⁸⁵ Another

¹⁷⁹ Giorgio Fedel, *Simboli e politica* (Morano 1991).

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*, pg. 22.

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*, pg. 30.

¹⁸² *ibid.*, pg. 57.

¹⁸³ *ibid.*, pg. 22.

¹⁸⁴ Omar Lizardo, 'Cultural Symbols and Cultural Power' (2016) 39 *Qualitative Sociology* 199, pg.

202.

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*

definition helpful to understanding what is meant by subjectivity concerning symbolism is provided by Young in his “The Politics of Cultural Pluralism”, «[individual symbolization is] *the capacity to relate past, present, and future through a set of reconstructed images which generalize individual experiences*».¹⁸⁶ This means that symbols activate the individual perceptions and understandings of the world that pre-exist the symbolic dimension, and make it possible for them to relate to a generalized scenario, which empowers communication between different subjects. In this sense, as Langer puts it, symbols activate the mind and render the articulation of semantic content possible.¹⁸⁷ The most radical conceptualization of this interpretation of symbols is Fedel’s re-interpretation of Edelman’s point: this latter argues that language and symbols aren’t individual reflections of the reality that surrounds them; rather, language and symbols create, through individual articulation, the reality they prescribe based on individual perceptions.¹⁸⁸

The second understanding of symbols, i.e. as signification, «*focuses on means and instruments of symbolic activity*»;¹⁸⁹ that is, symbols are instruments that the mind uses to refer to something else.¹⁹⁰ Stebbing and Hayakawa, among the others, underlined the arbitrariness that is behind this process.¹⁹¹ More specifically, Stebbing argues that words become symbols when we know what they stand for, and what they relate to.¹⁹² If any difference between a sign and a symbol existed at all,¹⁹³ signs are different from symbols because they have a direct, or physical, relation to what they stand for, which means they have only one possible meaning for everybody who sees them.¹⁹⁴ Schutz argued that signs, differently from symbols, are not exhausted by their *standing for something else*, stating that

¹⁸⁶ Crawford Young, *The Politics of Cultural Pluralism* (Univ of Wisconsin Press 1979).

¹⁸⁷ Susanne K Langer, *Philosophical Sketches / by Susanne K. Langer*. (Oxford University Press 1962), Ch. 3.

¹⁸⁸ Fedel (n 154), pg. 29.

¹⁸⁹ *ibid*, pg. 30.

¹⁹⁰ *ibid*, pg. 30-31.

¹⁹¹ Lizzie Susan Stebbing, *Revival: A Modern Introduction to Logic (1950)* (Routledge 2018), pg. 13; Samuel Ichiyé Hayakawa and Alan R Hayakawa, *Language in Thought and Action* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich 1990), pg. 27.

¹⁹² *ibid*, pg. 13.

¹⁹³ Alfred Schutz, *Collected Papers I*, vol 11 (Maurice Natanson ed, Springer Netherlands 1972) <<http://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-94-010-2851-6>> accessed 29 July 2024, pg. 287.

¹⁹⁴ Fedel (n 154), pg. 32.

«*smoke is certainly more than a sign of fire*».¹⁹⁵ Symbols can thus *stand for* many different things. Of all the positions that treat symbols as signification, two are the most interesting for this research's scope: one, as argued by Schutz, states that symbols can connect the ordinary, physical dimension individuals have everyday experience of, to the transcendental-divine one;¹⁹⁶ the second one, of which Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca are proponents, emphasizes the underlying emotional dimension that symbols, especially non-linguistic ones, manage to evoke. This connection between significant and signified is irrational, Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca argue, which is the reason why the relation between the two is of the emotional type; to prove this, they bring the example of the flag, which, as soon as it is shown to an audience, evokes positive or negative feelings that are not related to the piece of fabric itself, but to the thing(s) it *stands for*.¹⁹⁷ Symbols, in this sense, have the useful ability to recall something else; they can do it incredibly well, especially when they are non-verbal, eliciting immediate emotional reactions that bypass any rational construction of meaning.

The third and last category, i.e. symbols as dissociation, interprets symbols as a form of dissociation from reality. One example of this position is found in Umberto Eco's "Trattato di Semiotica Generale": he argues that every time we are presented with a sign,¹⁹⁸ we can be lied to.¹⁹⁹ The point is, symbols and the things they stand for are two separate objects, whose correlation doesn't exist per se, but is fabricated in the individual's mind. Thus, symbols can substitute what they stand for, opening to any distortion and oversimplification.²⁰⁰ It was probably with this in mind that Arnold wrote, in his "Symbols of Government", that «[the] *history of the symbols of government is a succession of romantic but unnecessary sacrifices of human life or comfort in their honor*».²⁰¹ Fedel highlights how the literature treats some symbols as promissory ones: in these instances, symbols aren't false because they do not correspond to the reality of things, or behaviors; rather, symbols here are false because they

¹⁹⁵ Schutz (n 167), pg. 289.

¹⁹⁶ *ibid*, pg. 316.

¹⁹⁷ Chaim Perelman and others, *The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation* (University of Notre Dame Press 1969) <<https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctvpj74xx>> accessed 29 July 2024, pg. 332.

¹⁹⁸ In Eco's interpretation, the difference between symbols and signs is irrelevant to explaining the concept.

¹⁹⁹ Umberto Eco, *Trattato di semiotica generale* (La Nave di Teseo Editore spa 2016), pg. 89.

²⁰⁰ Fedel (n 154), pg. 58.

²⁰¹ Thurman Wesley Arnold, *The Symbols of Government* (Yale University Press 1935), pg. iv.

intended to promise something that hasn't materialized.²⁰² It is the case of promissory symbols for the allocation of resources that strike as important in this context.

Goodin underlines how symbols must be looked at with suspicion, as they inherently deserve less attention than their actual content.²⁰³ However, this comes with severe difficulties: if we trace back all the different definitions and categories provided here, it becomes natural to conclude that symbols are objects irrationally framed and understood by individuals. This means that symbols, especially when understood as complex appeals to emotions of any sort, de-facto conceal their content and render, as such, very difficult for the interpreter to realize when the thing they stand for is not being delivered; in other words, the emotional strength of symbols conceals their meaning. This tactic, as it will be shown, goes hand in hand with the traditional rhetoric employed by FDI and Lega, for instance when they resort to symbolic mottos like “God, Fatherland, and Family”.²⁰⁴ Traditional symbols find an easy way into people's minds, hiding content that would otherwise be very difficult to articulate and “sell”.

2.2.1.1. *A Political Note on “Traditionality” and its Vagueness*

The ambiguity that surrounds the contested definition of “traditional”, it must be stressed, is not confined to analytical efforts. Traditional values don't seem to necessarily carry any content per se (as the set of definitions provided shows), and this represents an important resource for traditional politics: conservative forces use this term loosely exactly because it is employed as a symbol, rather than content, that elicits different emotions in different people if none of the two criteria (i.e. community and time) are specified. By appealing to emotions, as said earlier, rationality is bypassed and different members that hold traditions dear can come together, even if the traditions in question are different from each other if not entirely conflicting. For all these reasons, the word “traditional” will be often deployed in this work not as a descriptive term, rather as a normative one. As an example of

²⁰² *ibid*, pg. 60.

²⁰³ Robert E Goodin, ‘Symbolic Rewards: Being Bought off Cheaply’ (1977) 25 *Political Studies* 383.

²⁰⁴ *Meloni: «Dio, Patria e Famiglia? Non è Contro La Modernità, Significa Difendere Una Identità»* (Directed by Corriere della Sera, 2022) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V5S4U6NT99s>> accessed 24 January 2024.

this approach, Wilkinson's studies on Russia's deployment of traditional policies are helpful. In her work on anti-LGBTQIA+ laws in Putin-led Russia, she described how policy content was able to operationalize traditional values, as only practice was able to substantiate the rhetoric that would have otherwise remained pure narrative.²⁰⁵ In this way, the only available test to investigate traditional values is nothing more than "what people believe are traditional values".

This operationalization in this context means that the acquisition of meaning and content of an object comes after the mobilization over said object. This goes well together with the ambiguity described in the paragraph on symbols. Traditionalism is a symbol in and of itself because its use precedes its transformation into content. This also means that debates over such symbols is a pure rhetorical effort. As it will be shown in the following chapter, this issue is of primary political and social importance and anticipates what probably constitutes the major shortcoming of traditionalism in politics, that is, the objects that traditional forces speak about do not seem to exist outside their framework and, as such, cannot be shared by a larger community to assess and debate them. The inherent subjectivity of traditionalism, especially when empowered and, one may argue, weaponized by symbological subtexts, gathers people only at the surface level. Ironically, what makes these people believe they stand together, if enunciated and articulated properly, may just lead to fragmentation instead of conglomeration.

Now it is time to assess how these values are operationalized and symbolized, to see how they are rhetorically employed to remedy the difficulties of Modernity, as these are outlined in Chapter 1 and emerge in the Italian context. To do this, a variety of speeches, texts, and manifestos for each party will be selected. The goal is to evaluate how these different modes of communication are filled with traditional symbols.

²⁰⁵ Cai Wilkinson, 'Putting "Traditional Values" Into Practice: The Rise and Contestation of Anti-Homopropaganda Laws in Russia' (2014) 13 *Journal of Human Rights* 363, pg. 367.

2.3. Symbols in Fratelli D'Italia

The first symbol that recalls Giorgia Meloni's attachment to a traditional worldview is the Fiamma Tricolore ("Tricolor Flame"). In 2014, when FdI was officially born, her party members and she chose to preserve it and keep it in the party logo. The symbol has been widely regarded as a manifestation of the continuity of the Italian far-right through the years.²⁰⁶ The Flame has sparked controversies in Italy since its first adoption by the MSI because of its disputed origins: Barrotta argued it came from the Arditi's symbol, a World War I Assault Unit of the Italian Army famous for their acts of bravery;²⁰⁷ Rao and others trace it back to the Repubblica Sociale Italiana, Mussolini's puppet state controlled by the Nazi Regime that fought against the Allies trying to liberate Italy from Nazi fascism.²⁰⁸

It doesn't matter, however, which of the two is true. The Fiamma is a powerful symbol because it stands for different things depending on who looks. The Italian left has always deeply criticized, even recently, FdI's choice to maintain it. Critiques have come from party members, civil society, and the intelligentsia, who see the Fiamma as a signal to rebuild and, eventually, consolidate, the Fascist ideology.²⁰⁹ On the right, instead, such a choice is defended and supported unanimously, as it is seen as a means to carry on the legacy of the parties and their figures that came before, some of which were undisputably fascist, like Giorgio Almirante.²¹⁰ However, supporters and opponents alike fall into this rhetorical trap. The Fiamma Tricolore can be seen as a symbol of signification, more precisely under the lens of emotional activation. The symbol has been used by fascist figures, who often

²⁰⁶ For reference, see Salvatore Vassallo and Rinaldo Vignati, *Brothers of Italy and the Rise of the Italian National Conservative Right under Giorgia Meloni* (Springer Nature Switzerland 2024) <<https://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-031-52189-8>> accessed 5 August 2024; Nicola Rao, *La fiamma e la celtica* (Sperling & Kupfer 2006).

²⁰⁷ Pierluigi Barrotta, *Storia del Partito Liberale Italiano: nella Prima Repubblica* (Rubbettino Editore 2019).

²⁰⁸ Rao (n 205); IIPost Editorial Board, 'Da dove arriva la fiamma del simbolo di Fratelli d'Italia' *Il Post* (12 August 2022) <<https://www.ilpost.it/2022/08/12/fiamma-fratelli-ditalia/>> accessed 25 January 2024.

²⁰⁹ 'Liliana Segre e Pd chiedono a Meloni di togliere la fiamma tricolore dal simbolo di Fdi: "Partiamo dai fatti, non dalle parole"' (*Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 12 August 2022) <<https://www.ilfattoquotidiano.it/2022/08/12/liliana-segre-e-pd-chiedono-a-meloni-di-togliere-la-fiamma-tricolore-dal-simbolo-di-fdi-partiamo-dai-fatti-non-dalle-parole/6760622/>> accessed 6 August 2024.

²¹⁰ Giorgia Meloni, *Io sono Giorgia. Le mie radici le mie idee* (Rizzoli 2021), pg. 112.

considered themselves to be the only ones to care about national pride and prestige and to protect national interests. The fact that the Fiamma is Tricolore is crucial since it encapsulates this care they posit to have for Italy. Even though this symbol's meaning remains unknown, some hints can be found in the general approach that Meloni and her acolytes use to refer to the fascist period, since the symbol comes from that semantic framework. Meloni has had tenuous words of dissent against Mussolini's regime on various occasions, and sometimes even went as far as to praise his political ability.²¹¹ During an interview with a French TV channel in 1996, she praised Mussolini's ability to protect Italian interests; at one point you can see a poster containing the message "Mussolini Man of the People".²¹² In her book, instead, when speaking about the fascist period, she dismissed any point of contact between her party and Mussolini's regime and followed this by claiming that history had already relegated to the past the regime's abolition of democracy and the racial laws.²¹³ Even more recently, she commemorated the death of Giacomo Matteotti, an Italian MP who was brutally killed in 1924 by Mussolini's acolytes after having criticized the newborn regime. She stated that Matteotti was "brave" for speaking his mind and that the murder was a Fascist crime.²¹⁴ But again, she often manifested a certain embarrassment and frustration when asked whether she feels anti-fascist or not, and she never answered positively.²¹⁵ The same goes for La Russa and other high-rank members of her party. Why this duality? Why condemn Matteotti's murder and the racial laws, while simultaneously carrying on the – literal – torch of the fascist regime?

The answer may lie at the intersection of three arguments. Cas Mudde and Kaltwasser popularized the first one in their "Populism: a very short introduction". They argue that populism is a "thin ideology", that is it lacks the normative substance to stand alone and must

²¹¹ 1996: *Giorgia Meloni 'Mussolini Était Un Bon Politicien' | Archive INA* (Directed by INA Politique, 2022) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XuoXr-zjqas>> accessed 6 August 2024.

²¹² *ibid*, min. 1.17.

²¹³ Meloni (n 209).

²¹⁴ 'Le giuste parole di Meloni su Giacomo Matteotti: i veri regimi sono altrove' <<https://www.ilfoglio.it/politica/2024/05/30/news/le-giuste-parole-di-meloni-su-giacomo-matteotti-i-veri-regimi-sono-altrove-6598337/>> accessed 6 August 2024.

²¹⁵ *Meloni: 'Se Sono Antifascista? Non Rispondo. Così Potete Dire Che Sono Una Pericolosa Fascista'* (Directed by Il Fatto Quotidiano, 2024) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C8exK5PJOYo>> accessed 6 August 2024.

always get attached to other ideologies, usually making use of already popular ones, to create a set of beliefs that answers the popular demand.²¹⁶ If we follow this logic, the deployment of fascist symbols must be understood as a weaponization of a tradition that marked with fire Italian history and left a cleavage that was never sewn. This brings us to the second and third concepts, which may be seen as complementary to each other. One, as proposed by Wodak, sees nostalgia as one of the key points of the far-right populist parties.²¹⁷ He argues this nostalgia for a far-gone past, if ever real, is mobilized thanks to the “politics of fear” of the ever-changing present that shows every day new possible developments of social values, scientific techniques, and human possibilities in general.²¹⁸ The last concept is the response to Weber’s “disenchantment”, that is “re-enchantment”. Firstly introduced in “Science as a Vocation”,²¹⁹ the “disenchantment” theory posits that science is a means that destroys, in Weber’s words, all values that are not rational and are instead mystical or magical,²²⁰ a process which lies at the core of Modernity.²²¹ By saying that the world has become disenchanted, he meant that while man’s control over nature has surely increased thanks to scientific means, it is also increasingly clear that there are things that simply escape man’s ability to understand them, with the logical consequence that no universal theory of life is possible by resorting to science.²²² The basis for this process is the faculty of “intellectualization”, i.e. the «*belief that no mysterious incalculable forces [...] come into play, and that one can therefore master all things by calculation*». ²²³ As we have already shown, this is far from being true. Many authors have argued the same: instances of magic and mystical worldviews have survived in many contexts and still lead individuals in the quest for meaning. Hanegraaf pointed out that secularization, regarded by Weber as one of the main domains where disenchantment should be visible, is actually far from being a done

²¹⁶ Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, *Populism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press 2017).

²¹⁷ Ruth Wodak, *The Politics of Fear: What Right-Wing Populist Discourses Mean* (SAGE 2015), pg. 194.

²¹⁸ *ibid.*

²¹⁹ Max Weber, ‘Science as a Vocation’, pg. 13.

²²⁰ *ibid.*, pg. 30.

²²¹ Richard Jenkins, ‘Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium’ (2000) 1 *Max Weber Studies* 11, pg. 12.

²²² Roger Brubaker, *The Limits of Rationality* (Routledge 2013).

²²³ *ibid.*; Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Beacon Press 1963).

deal in many communities,²²⁴ as already shown in the paragraphs regarding Italy; Jenkins instead specified that disenchantment and secularization are to be treated as different concepts that are not interrelated, and that re-enchantment – one among the reasons why God(s) presence still persists in the public life – is a proper Modern phenomenon.²²⁵ That’s why there are different instances that are held to be “re-enchanted”, like Nationalism,²²⁶ or philosophy, and the arts.²²⁷

By assembling together “nostalgia” and “re-enchantment”, it is easy to follow that people are easily manipulated in the simplistic narrative of the better past against a difficult present and an ominous future. Symbols like the Fiamma don’t just recall values, rather they are able to draw in memories, often fictitious, of a time when life was much easier and institutions – like the Fascist Government – made mistakes that, although inexcusable by any standard, were done in the interest of the people. That’s a self-reinforced creation that comes from the mobilization of such symbols, and their juxtaposition to the current times: adversary and complex Institutions like the EU, the foreign object par excellence, are compared to the simpler, national past ones to draw the distinctions that are necessary to dismiss their legitimacy, on the one hand, while on the other this process itself reinforces the strength of the symbols, since it’s their mobilization against the enemy that makes them even more revered. In the same way, the Italian left has often criticized the usage of the Fiamma in the political discourse, by doing so legitimized it and transformed into an umbrella under which alike – although not necessarily – people can find a common identity. Another perspective as to why a symbol such as the Fiamma still finds a spot in Italian politics comes from the behavioral science and evolutionary theory named “credibility enhancing displays”. The theory holds that displaying such a symbol signals the commitment to the group it refers to; the reason why this signal is believed is that displaying it is costly for those who do it – in

²²⁴ Wouter J Hanegraaff, ‘How Magic Survived the Disenchantment of the World’ (2003) 33 Religion 357.

²²⁵ Jenkins (n 220).

²²⁶ Josep R Llobera, *The God of Modernity: The Development of Nationalism in Western Europe* (Routledge 2020) <<https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/mono/10.4324/9781003086970/god-modernity-josep-llobera>> accessed 11 August 2024.

²²⁷ ‘The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age’ (2009) 46 Choice Reviews Online 46.

this case, under the form of public criticism. This symbol can also be considered to be a signal of responsibility by Meloni, who may try to convince her target that she is as invested as they are in carrying out, for example, specific policies.²²⁸

Identity is another important concept for FdI. In fact, in the same semantic category as the Fiamma, another symbol which is weaponized is that of the “roots”. The symbol is very important for Meloni, so much so that it was chosen as a subheading for her last book “Io sono Giorgia – Le mie radici” (I am Giorgia – My roots).²²⁹ Roots, which is another another symbol of signification, are inherently a traditional symbol: they are static, drenched in the terrain with no possibility of movement, and they recall the foundational past of something, rather than its present or future. It is not a coincidence that such a symbol has been used by Meloni and her acolytes. Her most famous speech – known as the “Io sono Giorgia” speech – revolved exactly around roots and identity. Both her book and the aforementioned speech contain the same symbols with the same objective: mobilizing people against the forces of Modernity that are said to be disrupting the traditional Italian way of life. For example, she said that “people couldn’t take away from her” the fact that she is a woman – with the subtle innuendo to her being a cis woman –, that she is a Christian and a mother.²³⁰ At minute 0:22 she says the word “roots” again, making the point that without roots and a common identity Italy and Italians will lose awareness of who they are and what they stand for as a community.²³¹ In this context, “roots” are thus weaponized against new worldviews and lifestyles, and life choices that are rhetorically presented as disruptive in and of themselves to the traditional ones. Going against the roots, that is, going against the identity of something is unforgivable: what she doesn’t say but strongly implies is that what we are is not something we choose, but rather is something we inherited, spousing exactly

²²⁸ For further references, see Ben Fraser, ‘Costly Signalling Theories: Beyond the Handicap Principle’ (2012) 27 *Biology & Philosophy* 263; Herbert Gintis, Eric Alden Smith and Samuel Bowles, ‘Costly Signaling and Cooperation’ (2001) 213 *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 103; Joseph Henrich, ‘The Evolution of Costly Displays, Cooperation and Religion: Credibility Enhancing Displays and Their Implications for Cultural Evolution’ (2009) 30 *Evolution and Human Behavior* 244; J Maynard Smith, ‘Must Reliable Signals Always Be Costly?’ (1994) 47 *Animal Behaviour* 1115.

²²⁹ Meloni (n 209).

²³⁰ *Centrodestra in Piazza, Meloni Contro Gay e Lgbt: ‘Sono Una Donna, Sono Cristiana’* (2019) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KmaluGJWbEA>> accessed 24 January 2024.

²³¹ *ibid.*

what Congar said about tradition. The individual act of choosing independently is assimilated as the eradication of what is in the name of what ought to be, following a moral that is inherently immoral from a traditional, nativist, and essentialist perspective. The simplification of one's identity in just three aspects – gender, religion, and family – is powerful precisely because it excludes more complex characteristics that are fundamentally personalistic and, as such, difficult to mobilize people around. Furthermore, this simplification conducted by these symbols functions as a dissociation from reality. The LGBTQIA+ community – weaponized as a symbol of all that is powerful, corrupted, and wicked in our times by the Far Right, but also used as a marketing tool by corporations²³² – is depicted in Meloni's speech as a monolith that moves in the shadows against tradition, which could not be farther from being true. In fact, tensions within the "Community" exist and are well documented.²³³ Furthermore, although the "Community" has been increasingly vocal in Western societies over the past decades, it is still quite marginalized both at social and legal levels.²³⁴ Using these instances as proof that traditional values and modes of behavior – in this case, following Inglehart and Baker's model, the category is "family" – are under attack because an alternative group exists makes it easier to conceal that the rhetoric stands on a false dichotomy, an "us and them" scenario that does not represent neither the various arrangements that can coexist between the two extremes, nor the simple fact that both can coexist peacefully. Finally, this symbol is ultimately a means of disassociation from reality because Meloni herself, by exercising her rights as an individual, has had a child outside her marriage,²³⁵ something that would have traditionally been a scandal and that is now a common and accepted life choice.

²³² 'The Trouble With the "LGBT Community" | Human Rights Watch' (28 July 2021) <<https://www.hrw.org/news/2021/07/28/trouble-lgbt-community>> accessed 11 August 2024.

²³³ Matthew Laviertes, 'Tensions between Trans Women and Gay Men Boil over at Stonewall Anniversary' *Reuters* (30 June 2019) <<https://www.reuters.com/article/world/tensions-between-trans-women-and-gay-men-boil-over-at-stonewall-anniversary-idUSKCN1TV0V0/>> accessed 11 August 2024; Jonathan Capehart, 'The Internal Challenges Facing the LGBT Movement' (*Washington Post*, 9 February 2015) <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/post-partisan/wp/2015/02/09/the-internal-challenges-facing-the-lgbt-movement/>> accessed 11 August 2024.

²³⁴ EU Parliament, 'The Rights of LGBTI People in the European Union' (2023) Briefing, pg. 3-4, 11.

²³⁵ 'Meloni-Giambruno, Quella Separazione Consumata in Tv' (*Famiglia Cristiana*) <<http://www.famigliacristiana.it/articolo/meloni-giambruno-quella-separazione-consumata-in-tv.aspx>> accessed 11 August 2024.

Another instrumental symbol that has been mobilized by the Far Right over the years is the fantasy saga of *The Lord of the Rings* (LOTR hereafter). LOTR can be seen as a symbol of subjectivity, since its vagueness and explicit emotional nature are first and foremost a sentimental catalyst. Giorgia Meloni has always spoken fondly of LOTR. From an early age, when she was a militant in the MSI, she organized and attended Hobbit Camps in Italy.²³⁶ She has often quoted LOTR, and she holds the book as “sacred”.²³⁷ Tolkien’s saga is a symbol in its own right now, since the far-right uses it to vehiculate a message that doesn’t necessarily overlap with the author’s. The interpretations around LOTR are many and diverse: some hold that the books are inextricably Christian and traditionalist,²³⁸ and underplay any racial subtext that one may find;²³⁹ some others hold instead the opposite, i.e. that the racial and supremacist views are central themes in Tolkien’s work.²⁴⁰ However, it is more than fair to say that the appropriation conducted by the far-right over the years, whether or not based on the latter interpretation, does not match the author’s ideas. Whereas Tolkien himself confirmed in his private letters the significant role of Christianity in LOTR,²⁴¹ he also categorically excluded any racial motivation behind the choice of depicting certain characters with specific aesthetics. So much so that in 1938, when he was asked by the Nazi Government to prove his Aryan ancestry to proceed with the publication of LOTR in Germany – Letter 30, directed to Ruetten and Loening Verlag²⁴² – Tolkien blatantly refused to show any of such proof, adding that he regretted not having any relation with that gifted

²³⁶ Giorgia Meloni, *Io sono Giorgia. Le mie radici le mie idee* (Rizzoli 2021).

²³⁷ Philip Oltermann and Philip Oltermann European culture editor, ‘Italy’s Far Right Embraces Middle-Earth as PM Opens Tolkien Show’ *The Guardian* (14 November 2023) <<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/nov/14/italian-pm-giorgia-meloni-to-open-jrr-tolkien-exhibition>> accessed 24 January 2024.

²³⁸ Devin Brown, ‘Is “Lord of the Rings” Christian? Searching Middle-Earth for God’ (*Desiring God*) <<https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/is-lord-of-the-rings-christian>> accessed 21 January 2024; Peter Kreeft, *The Philosophy of Tolkien: The Worldview Behind The Lord of the Rings* (Ignatius Press 2009); *The Christian Worldview in the Writings of J.R.R. Tolkien with Dr. Donald Williams* (Directed by C. S. Lewis Institute, 2022) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OV9YEuvXDoY>> accessed 21 January 2024; Patrick Curry, *Defending Middle-Earth: Tolkien: Myth and Modernity* (Reprint edition, Mariner Books 2004).

²³⁹ Curry (n 237).

²⁴⁰ Anderson Rearick, ‘Why Is the Only Good Orc a Dead Orc? The Dark Face of Racism Examined in Tolkien’s World’ (2004) A Collection of Essays Presented at the Fourth Frances White Ewbank Colloquium on C.S. Lewis&Friends MFS Modern Fiction Studies 861.

²⁴¹ Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien: A Selection* (1995), see for instance Letter 131.

²⁴² *ibid*, Letter 30.

people (referring to the Jewish community) and that, even if it were so, such an instance did not have anything to do with the work under discussion. But why is LOTR a symbol for Meloni? LOTR pre-rural life is the first coordinate to follow. The harmony of the Hobbit Shire is built upon homogeneity. Hobbits live with Hobbits, in the same way as Elves and Humans do. The Shire sees Hobbits live in harmony because their values are shared, and their values are shared because they do not ask themselves why that is the case. Meloni's use of Hobbits as a positive model may be more related to a critique of Europe's enlightened self-criticism and constant change, than racially fabricated. The Shire may be interpreted as the locus of the self-reproduction of the same, the ultimate Traditionalist and Conservative dream. Furthermore, Hobbits are independent from everybody, since they self-sustain, and, precisely because of that, their heritage remains intact and not controversial. Here, Meloni's love for national independence and preservation could find an avenue, rather than resorting to Fascist Autarchy. By institutionalizing this worldview, Meloni could claim to restore Italy's allure after the Left tainted it with its xenophilia. Harmony would be reached, and the mythical past she thinks of would be recreated, halting time and progress. Further proof of Hobbits being the perfect "men for the Right" is their hidden heroism, as Frodo and Sam's adventure would testify: they defeated Sauron because they were ready to sacrifice themselves for the Good, exactly as a Patriotic Country would ask its citizens. Finally, Hobbits do not have a strong individual sense and are communitarian, which resembles the archetype that the Right has in mind. Love for traditions and community is thus a relatively strong match, even though it would be unfair to forget about the overall nationalistic politics that Meloni carries on, which barely resonates at all with LOTR's world. This information provides a clear picture as to why LOTR is often mentioned by Meloni: the books are a case in point of the utopistic community they would like to create, a homogenous world of shared values, held together by brave people who would not betray their gents for anything.

Finally, it is worthy to investigate a symbol of signification, i.e. the motto "Dio, Patria, Famiglia" (*God, Fatherland, Family*), that well summarizes all the themes discussed above. This motto, like every other, is a non-discursive linguistic symbol,²⁴³ used by the

²⁴³ Manuel García-Pelayo, *Mitos y símbolos políticos* (Taurus 1964), pg. 151.

speakers to reify abstract concepts in the same way a flag, a swastika, or hammer and sickle would.²⁴⁴ As such, it can be viewed as a symbol of signification too. Meloni spoke on various occasions about her relationship with the symbol, given its controversial history. What was, in fact, a Mazzinian motto, during the Italian Risorgimento,²⁴⁵ later became a Fascist belief and propaganda tool.²⁴⁶ The symbol is thus easily connected to the Fascist ideology and politics, which is probably why Meloni felt the urge to remind everybody of Mazzini's previous use.²⁴⁷ In the same interview, where then Partito Democratico's leader Enrico Letta was present too, she also went on to express that said motto is not against modernity, rather it is just a conservative belief because it encapsulates the essence of individuals' identity.²⁴⁸ Whereas she acknowledges that the modern Italian state is cornered around the principles of secularization and freedom of belief, she also reconnects these principles around Christianity and Catholicism, explaining that the West is the way it is because of the Christian doctrine and would thus be unfair to dismiss it and forget it. She also exaggerates the importance of Christianity in shaping these "European values", stating that secularization is a Christian value itself.²⁴⁹ What must be underlined here is her nativist-essentialist approach, which clearly emerges when she states that one can know the Other only once he has known itself; this "knowledge" is clearly backward, that is it only refers to features that are found in an unspecified past which should, according to her view, inform individuals about who and what they are. What is missing here is the acknowledgment that knowing oneself and knowing another are two sides of the same coin, something that can only occur through a dialectical process in which similarities and differences naturally emerge because of the development and acknowledgment of individual idiosyncrasies. "God, fatherland, family" conceals the truth behind identity-formation processes, which are not given a priori, by structuring the discourse around three pillars that are not central or present for many who still define themselves as Italians. The exclusion operated, however, is purely symbolical even though

²⁴⁴ Fedel (n 178).

²⁴⁵ Giuseppe Mazzini, *Doveri dell'uomo* (1860).

²⁴⁶ Benito Mussolini, *La dottrina del fascismo* (U Hoepli 1936), pg. 15.

²⁴⁷ Meloni: «Dio, Patria e Famiglia? Non è Contro La Modernità, Significa Difendere Una Identità» (n 203).

²⁴⁸ *ibid.*

²⁴⁹ *ibid.*

its consequences may be concrete. It is symbolical because, as mentioned before, unless it is translated into content – like policy – it is unclear what is its normative subject. Still, it may bear consequences for people who are (mis)identified as deviants, as people who find the motto compelling – meaning that their emotional response that is triggered by the symbol calls into the subjectivity's ability to fill it with actual content – may behave adversely to them and feel legitimized in doing so. Again, the appeal to the audience's emotions is, like in the others, an easier feat than articulating the message rationally. The motto was in fact born and used instrumentally in turbulent times: Mazzini's conception must be contextualized in a time when Italy was not a Nation yet, and Mussolini's one was needed to rally the people around a revolutionary nationalist regime that needed legitimacy after having dismantled the liberal democracy that was before. This means that today the functions carried out by symbols of national integrity and unity are reduced since they have been replaced with other institutions and values. Reminding that the People should care about the nation's fate is legitimate, but what that means is hardly indisputable: Italy has signed tenths of International Agreements and Conventions, is a founder of the European Union, and sees its economy intertwined with its neighbors. A self-described patriot today is not necessarily someone who predicates about "Italians first" because rooting for an actively sustaining partner, e.g. Germany, bears more often than not more benefits than standing alone. However, articulating such content requires more effort and may not lead to political consensus, given the complexity of the message.

2.4. Symbols in Lega

When the party's trajectory was sketched out in paragraph 2.1.2., the key point was the transformation from Bossi's "regionalist populism"²⁵⁰ into Salvini's nationalist one.²⁵¹ The symbolic analysis will thus give the context of Bossi's Lega and its symbols, with a view to better appreciating the transformation carried out by Salvini, who revolutionized the imagery of the party and its supporters.

The regionalist dimension of the Lega Nord had developed thanks to the ability of its constituency to gather around different invented traditions that gave a sense of unity to various communities. The idea was to re-create around old myths and symbols a political movement for the autonomy of the Northern regions of Italy from the central state. Myths and rituals like the Dio Po ("River Po God") and the emptying of the Po water in the Veneto Region gave spiritual, ethnic, and ancestral legitimacy to people who otherwise only shared material interests, given to alike economic conditions.²⁵² Aime defined Lega's choice to dig deep into the mythological fantasies of the North as an "ethnic option" within the nation-state.²⁵³ Aime then borrows Nadel's definition of "tribe" to underline that this "option" is built upon ideological ties, so much so that the belief of belonging to the same group, trumps every other real connection they may share.²⁵⁴ In this sense, Hobsbawm's "invented traditions" are perfectly displayed in all their mobilization strength. These are the reasons why the logo chosen by Lega Nord contained Alberto da Giussano, a mythical – and historically disproven²⁵⁵ – figure who fought in the Battle of Legnano for the Lombard

²⁵⁰ McDonnell (n 161).

²⁵¹ Daniele Albertazzi, Arianna Giovannini and Antonella Seddone, "No Regionalism Please, We Are Leghisti!" The Transformation of the Italian Lega Nord under the Leadership of Matteo Salvini' (2018) 28 *Regional & Federal Studies* 645.

²⁵² Enrico Manera, 'Mitologie padane. Dall'ampolla del Po a Capitan Padania - Novecento.org' (2017) n.8 *Novecento.org* <<https://www.novecento.org/dossier/italia-didattica/mitologie-padane-dallampolla-del-po-a-capitan-padania/>> accessed 18 August 2024.

²⁵³ Marco Aime, *Verdi tribù del Nord: La Lega vista da un antropologo* (Editori Laterza 2012) <<https://www.perlego.com/it/book/3460285/verdi-trib-del-nord-la-lega-vista-da-un-antropologo-pdf>> accessed 18 August 2024, pg. 2.

²⁵⁴ *ibid*, pg. 6.

²⁵⁵ Paolo Grillo, *Legnano 1176: Una battaglia per la libertà* (GiusLaterza & Figli Spa 2012), pg. 153-163.

League against Frederick Barbarossa in 1176.²⁵⁶ The battle, as well as the warrior, is crucial for Lega's identity because it gives its people a historical pretext to claim a common heritage and distinctiveness that would otherwise be hard to obtain. In the battle, in fact, the Holy Roman Empire tried to crush once and for all the Lombard League's forces and remove its autonomy and independence; the clash concluded with Barbarossa defeated and the League as an autonomous and recognized political entity.²⁵⁷ Choosing Alberto da Giussano who did not most probably even exist is peculiar for several reasons: first of all, although no particular figure had indeed been in charge of the League's army during the battle of Legnano, Guido da Landriano – recognized by the historians Milan's consul – was probably the one who led said army in that period;²⁵⁸ secondly, and most importantly, because da Giussano's figure had already been used during the Italian Risorgimento as a symbol of national unity and resilience.²⁵⁹ for example, Italian poet Giosuè Carducci wrote a poem narrating his actions in 1879, just a few years later Italy's unification.²⁶⁰ This begs the question as to why da Giussano was selected in the first place: was he a proto-national hero who fought against the foreign empire in "Italy", or should he be considered as evidence of the exceptionality, cohesion, and bravery that bind the North as a people that is only suffering because of another empire that just happens to be the national one? Again, the theme that emerges from the symbolic use of traditions is that such traditions often betray the original intention because chances are they have already been instrumentally useful to other objectives. Moreover, it does not matter whether the rebranding works – as this was the case – because at the end of the day, the authoritativeness that traditions should entail exists only in so far as people actively bring on the images and values related to them.

It does not matter, however, which interpretation of da Giussano's story one prefers, since Lega Nord radically changed course under Salvini's leadership, dropped the "Nord" in

²⁵⁶ Tommaso Carpegna Falconieri, 'Barbarossa E La Lega Nord: A Proposito Di Un Film, Delle Storie E Della Storia' (2009) 44 Quaderni storici 859.

²⁵⁷ D'Ilario-Gianazza- Marinoni, *LEGNANO E LA BATTAGLIA*. (Landoni 1976).

²⁵⁸ Grillo (n 243), pg. 157-158.

²⁵⁹ *ibid.*

²⁶⁰ Marinoni (n 245), pg. 247.

the name, and eventually became “Lega – Salvini Premier”,²⁶¹ while maintaining nonetheless da Giussano in the logo. The nationalist turn – Salvini had opened partnerships with the likes of Le Pen (2014) and Italian neo-fascist party Casapound (2014), and endorsed Donald Trump in the 2016 Presidential election – did not result in a symbolic change. Of course this should not be overexaggerated: the logo does not only reflect the political identity of the party, since it is also a communication tool, a “brand” that conveys a message but matters also just in terms of recognizability and distinctiveness. It is clear that the new leadership did not want to revolutionize its electoral basis entirely, something that could not be maintained through a total rebranding. This case can be an example of how the political elites can indeed be a guide for their constituencies and lead without falling into the demand-offer scheme that sees them follow religiously the demands of the electorate for political gain. In fact, this case deserves to be considered – exactly as the twofold interpretation of its symbol suggests – on two different levels: one aimed at the historical basis composed by the regions of the North of Italy, and another one at national level. Salvini’s goal was to gain the latter without losing the former. This could only have been possible if the regionalist-federalist constituency of the party agreed to such change. Even though tensions between the two souls remained,²⁶² this maneuver paid off and in 2018 Lega obtained a sound national 17.4% at the general election,²⁶³ reaching unprecedented numbers in the south.²⁶⁴ The best had yet to come, and in 2019 Lega boomed with an exceptional 34.26% nationally.²⁶⁵ Albertazzi et al. underlined that this record did not come through a complete restructuring of the party’s organization, which meant that Lega’s presence – and electoral share – in the southern regions was not the result of a newborn capillary movement, but rather of Salvini’s rhetorical ability.²⁶⁶

²⁶¹ Lega per Salvini Premier, ‘Statuto della Lega per Salvini Premier’ <[https://dait.interno.gov.it/documenti/trasparenza/EUROPEE_20190526/Documenti/11/\[11_Man_CENTEMERO_GIULIO_3_955\]-Lega_per_Salvini_Premier.Statuti.pdf](https://dait.interno.gov.it/documenti/trasparenza/EUROPEE_20190526/Documenti/11/[11_Man_CENTEMERO_GIULIO_3_955]-Lega_per_Salvini_Premier.Statuti.pdf)> accessed 19 August 2024.

²⁶² Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone (n 250).

²⁶³ Davide Vampa, ‘Il centrodestra a guida leghista’, *Il vicolo cieco: Le elezioni politiche del 4 marzo 2018* (Il Mulino 2018) <<https://www.research.ed.ac.uk/en/publications/il-centrodestra-a-guida-leghista>> accessed 19 August 2024.

²⁶⁴ *ibid.*

²⁶⁵ ‘Eligendo Archivio - Ministero dell’Interno DAIT - Europee 2019’ (*Eligendo*) <<https://elezionistorico.interno.gov.it>> accessed 19 August 2024.

²⁶⁶ Albertazzi, Giovannini and Seddone (n 239), pg. 650.

The symbols adopted by Salvini that led him to eventually become Italy's first party are often traditional, recalling national unity through the identification of the true Italian identity against foreign forces. It must be noted that the structure adopted by Lega has remained unchanged: if the enemy of the North was the South, now the Italian enemy are its foreign neighbors and the EU. It is for this reason that the three main concepts utilized for FdI remain the same for Lega, namely the thin ideology, nostalgia, and re-enchantment. However, as it will be shown, the symbols used by Lega and its leader are different from FdI's and have demonstrated, so far, to be weaker in the long run. For the sake of the analysis below, this dissertation will treat various symbols that Lega recurred to in different phases without discrimination, because the evolution of Lega suggests that, as soon as Salvini got his leadership settled, its trajectory remained coherent and cohesive.

The first symbol under scrutiny will be the term "invasion", used as soon as 2014 by Salvini's Lega. In a rally, Lega's new leader campaigned under the slogan "Stop the Invasion", referring to the numerous immigrants coming from North Africa that paralyzed the weak recovery centers of the country.²⁶⁷ The speech contains many symbolic messages that do not necessarily have to do with the migratory fluxes, but serve the purposes of *othering* a group of people as the sacrificial lamb for everybody's problems. Issues related to the subject at hand are weaponized to squeeze in different agenda points that remain outside migration. In the first few minutes of the speech, a newborn baby with her family is brought on stage under the pretense that fighting against unlawful immigration equals caring about future generations of Italians.²⁶⁸ The next bullet point is dedicated to Putin's Russia, described as an ally and friend against Islamic Terrorism and Islamization.²⁶⁹ It must be noted that the rally took place in October 2014, that is seven months after the Russian unlawful and unrecognized annexation of Ukraine's territories of Crimea.²⁷⁰ Salvini then veers to the sanctions imposed by the EU against Russia because of said annexation, which he criticizes

²⁶⁷ *STOP INVASIONE - INTERVENTO DI MATTEO SALVINI (MILANO, 18/10/2014)* (Directed by Matteo Salvini, 2014) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v2pfZajgeaA>> accessed 20 August 2024.

²⁶⁸ *ibid*, min. 2:10.

²⁶⁹ *ibid*, min. 3:05.

²⁷⁰ 'Seven Years since Russia's Illegal Annexation of Crimea | EEAS' <https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/seven-years-russia%E2%80%99s-illegal-annexation-crimea_en> accessed 20 August 2024.

for letting Italian products rot because unsold.²⁷¹ After a few minutes – and after having claimed that lawful immigrants should be able to come under the necessary condition that they must respect and comply with the Italian culture, after quoting the famous Italian writer Oriana Fallaci²⁷² – the term “invasion” is used again and connected explicitly to religion. By doing that, he opens to the apparent contradictions he claims exist in the system – by which Italian people with disabilities receive inferior subsidies compared to the ones received by migrants²⁷³ – to affirm that the government should care first about its citizens and that foreigners should only be helped if funds are still available.²⁷⁴ What he brands as “true solidarity” and “common sense” is an example of tribalism driven by what Francis Fukuyama – in describing the identitarian appeal that Trump had in the white men demographic – named “right-wing identity politics”.²⁷⁵ Whereas claiming that helping one country’s citizens first may indeed appear to be common sense, the underlying implications of such reasoning are in reality revolutionary within Western values – and laws²⁷⁶ – that predicate equality among men of every religion, sex, ethnicity, race, and country. In fact, whilst it is true that non-citizens do not enjoy specific sets of rights, usually political ones such as the right to vote or be elected, it should not come as obvious that non-citizens should also not enjoy rights such as the right to education, health care or poverty subsidies, since these latter do not relate to their status as members of the society that know the culture and modes of behavior, but rather

²⁷¹ stop invasione - intervento di matteo salvini (milano, 18/10/2014) (n 255), min. 4:16.

²⁷² ibid, min. 11:10-13:00.

²⁷³ This is false: migrants don’t receive money from the state personally and, when they do, it’s “pocket money” for minor expenses; rather this money Salvini speaks about is given to the recovery centers to pay for their expenses, labor etc., and are given by the Ministry of the Interior through ordinary expenses channels. For further reference see ‘Quanti soldi ricevono davvero i rifugiati?’ (*Internazionale*, 15 November 2014) <<https://www.internazionale.it/notizie/2014/11/15/quant-soldi-ricevono-davvero-i-rifugiati>> accessed 20 August 2024.

With regards to subsidies directed to people with disabilities, the Italian state differentiates the amount based on the type of disability, salary of the person, family income etc. For further reference, see 2014 pensions at ‘Invalidità Civile: Da INPS Gli Importi 2014 | AISM | Associazione Italiana Sclerosi Multipla’ <https://aism.it/2014_01_diritti_importi_invalidita_civile> accessed 20 August 2024.

²⁷⁴ *STOP INVASIONE - INTERVENTO DI MATTEO SALVINI (MILANO, 18/10/2014)* (n 255), min. 13:30.

²⁷⁵ Francis Fukuyama, ‘Against Identity Politics: The New Tribalism and the Crisis of Democracy’ (2018) 97 *Foreign Affairs* 90, pg. 102.

²⁷⁶ See for instance Assemblea Costituente, ‘Constitution of the Italian Republic - Costituzione Della Repubblica Italiana’, art. 32 <https://www.senato.it/sites/default/files/repository/Costituzione_INGLESE_2023.pdf> accessed 20 August 2024.

exist to alleviate difficulties of the human condition. This belief aligns itself with what Inglehart and Baker described as “survival values”, linked to “traditional ones”, which champion proximity and familism over an open-society worldview.²⁷⁷

In a similar fashion to Meloni’s rhetoric, Salvini’s traditionalism finds “roots” to be one of its avenues. In his book “Secondo Matteo” (“According to Matteo”, 2016) – which explicitly recalls the name of the Gospel According to Matthew – Chapter 4 is entirely dedicated to the origins of Salvini’s political activism, as well as his traditional family, his favorite team, the Sundays’ mass and so on.²⁷⁸ It’s a story of simpler – and coincidentally better – times. The same theme is then proposed again in Chapter 6, even though it is named differently. The chapter’s title is “Sono Lombardo, voto Lombardo” (“I am a Lombard, I vote [for] Lombard”). Here, “roots” is paired with “identity”, a theme that has always been central to Lega’s political offer – though, as it has been shown before, “which” identity is to be preserved can and does change.²⁷⁹ In this chapter, in fact, Salvini does not hide the federalist stances he embraced when he decided to join Lega Nord at the beginning of the 90s.²⁸⁰ Roots and identity are explicitly paired together as synonyms since they are necessary – he explains – for an individual to appreciate his past and feel like he belongs to a community of alike people. He opposes identity to anonymity, a risk he believes everybody runs into because of the forces of globalization and the market economy.²⁸¹ Again, these symbols do not correspond to the reality of the time. As demonstrated before, Lega Nord initially ran as a strong pro-European political force, using mottos like “Più lontani da Roma, più vicini all’Europa”²⁸² (“Farther from Rome, closer to Europe”), thus linking the North’s identity as European instead of Italian, in what could be defined as a cosmopolitan twist where ethos trumps ethnicity, language, and nationality.

²⁷⁷ Inglehart and Baker (n 185), pg. 27, Table 3.

²⁷⁸ Matteo Salvini and Rodolfo Sala, *Secondo Matteo* (Rizzoli 2016), Chapter 4.

²⁷⁹ *ibid*, Chapter 6.

²⁸⁰ *ibid*.

²⁸¹ *ibid*.

²⁸² Elisa Serafini, ‘Quando la Lega era europeista e anti-sovraniista’ (*TPI*, 8 February 2020) <<https://www.tpi.it/politica/lega-quando-era-pro-europa-20200208543438/>> accessed 29 August 2024.

This narrative seamlessly brings the book, some chapters later, to the role of the European Union which is said to be a “cage”.²⁸³ The EU is soon linked to the Islamization of the continent, a consequence of the “tolerance” of Western countries towards minorities which, he argues, leads to an unspecified “ghettoization” if unregulated.²⁸⁴ The EU is described as a “super-state” “worse than the USSR” for its “subtle bureaucracy”;²⁸⁵ the EU is also responsible for wrongly sanctioning Russia – again, due to the unlawful and unrecognized annexation of Crimea – and for giving money to Turkey where “Islamic fundamentalism is rampant”.²⁸⁶ Russia and the EU are once again used as symbols: the former is conceptualized as a misconceived and misunderstood Western ally, the cradle of Christianity and Christian values, in the civilizational war against Islam; the latter, instead, is pictured like a bureaucratic machine gone rogue beyond anyone’s control in its follies, that systematically undermines Western societies in a totalitarian fashion. This was, and remains, false. Even though questions and issues surrounding the so-called “democratic deficit” of the EU remain relevant and must be considered when discussing the issue,²⁸⁷ Putin’s Russia has been described as an autocracy by many scholars, both before and after the 2014 war against Ukraine.²⁸⁸ Furthermore, it can be said that waging war against a neighbor without reason does not simply contravene international law per se: rather, it means violating a body of law that has been built upon the very same values Salvini says to hold dear, that is those western values that have inspired the United Nations, the democratic principles, and the right to self-determination of peoples. Russia can be portrayed as a “Western ally”, even when it keeps on infringing those rules and values – simultaneously threatening directly or indirectly the Western order – only by resorting to symbolic formulas that empty the signifier (Russia)

²⁸³ Salvini and Sala (n 266). Chapter 10.

²⁸⁴ *ibid.*, pg. 78.

²⁸⁵ *ibid.*

²⁸⁶ *ibid.*

²⁸⁷ See for reference Andreas Follesdal and Simon Hix, ‘Why There Is a Democratic Deficit in the EU: A Response to Majone and Moravcsik’ (2006) 44 *JCMS: Journal of Common Market Studies* 533; Pippa Norris, ‘Representation and the Democratic Deficit’ (1997) 32 *European Journal of Political Research* 273; Christophe Crombez, ‘The Democratic Deficit in the European Union: Much Ado about Nothing?’ (2003) 4 *European Union Politics* 101.

²⁸⁸ See for reference Pierre Hassner, ‘Russia’s Transition to Autocracy’ (2008) 19 *Journal of Democracy* 5; Michael McFaul and Kathryn Stoner-Weiss, ‘The Myth of the Authoritarian Model - How Putin’s Crackdown Holds Russia Back’ (2008) 87 *Foreign Affairs* 68; Daniel Treisman, *The New Autocracy: Information, Politics, and Policy in Putin’s Russia* (Brookings Institution Press 2018).

from its content (violation of international law and Western values), and re-filling it carefully with other content that better suits the political goals of the party. In other words, Russia can be described as an ally if and only if the speaker does not represent Russia through a meticulous reconstruction and description of its various characteristics but chooses to disassociate Russia from its actions by employing symbols, such as “Islamization” or “invasion”. As shown before, symbols of disassociation make the construction of a parallel – or alternative – reality possible without particular efforts, thanks to the appeal to the public’s emotions.

The fact that populist parties are not built on ever-lasting beliefs, confirming once again Mudde’s description of populism as a “thin ideology”, is shown by the fact that in the wake of the second invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation, Salvini and his acolytes were ready to switch sides and condemn the aggression.²⁸⁹ But, and this probably comes to nobody’s surprise, Salvini was also ready to quickly recollect and come up with a new strategy as soon as he saw fit, affirming that the EU should have changed its approach to the new sanctions imposed on Russia because “they were not damaging Russia, but Italy”,²⁹⁰ something that reminded everybody of his past stances.

Speaking of past reminiscences, the last series of symbols worthy of mention is given by Lega’s leader’s choice of nominating former military General Roberto Vannacci for a European Parliament seat. His candidacy was an electoral success, obtaining more than 500.000 preferences nationwide.²⁹¹ Vannacci broke the scene and became a famous public figure after the publication of his controversial book “Il mondo al contrario” (“Upside-down World”). The book’s main goal «*is the triumph of wisdom and objective truths, those supported by data and not by predictions, by facts and not by feelings, by reality and not by*

²⁸⁹ Hannah Roberts, ‘Italy’s Matteo Salvini Recasts Himself as Champion of Ukraine’s Refugees’ (*POLITICO*, 11 March 2022) <<https://www.politico.eu/article/italys-matteo-salvini-recasts-himself-as-champion-of-ukraines-refugees/>> accessed 1 September 2024.

²⁹⁰ Hannah Roberts, ‘Italy’s Salvini Says West Should Rethink Sanctions for Russia’ (*POLITICO*, 4 September 2022) <<https://www.politico.eu/article/italys-salvini-says-west-should-rethink-sanctions-for-russia/>> accessed 1 September 2024.

²⁹¹ Redazione Agenzia Nova, ‘European Elections: Meloni the Most Voted, Decaro Is the Representative of the Democratic Party with the Most Preferences, Vannacci and Salis Do Well’ (*Agenzia Nova*, 10 June 2024) <<https://www.agenzianova.com/en/news/European-melons%2C-the-most-voted-Decaro-and-the-member-of-the-Democratic-Party-with-the-most-preferences-are-Vannacci-and-Salis/>> accessed 1 September 2024.

the perception of it».²⁹² The idea behind the book is that modernity has reversed common sense and atomized the processes by which individuals perceive their surroundings. For example, he writes about how transgender people *force* others to accept their gender as different from their biological sex, in an act which, he argues, contravenes normality and common sense.²⁹³ He criticizes the fact that modernity has rendered the past “antiquate” and “an obstacle”, which he parallels to a violent act toward the many – the majority, in his words – who would still like to appeal to those values. This is all “an assault against normality”.²⁹⁴ The main strategy adopted to present his facts is to resort to statistical data like he did in Chapter IV, titled “The Multicultural and Multiethnic Society”: he claims that societies that group more ethnicities or cultures within themselves experience higher rates of racially driven crimes.²⁹⁵ This should not come to anybody’s surprise, since it is harder to commit crimes motivated by racism or xenophobia in societies where there *is no* racial or cultural variance. This is important because “common sense”, “statistical facts”, and “normality” are here used as synonyms, and all of them are deployed as symbols of signification. Arguably, the main goal of using such symbols is to carefully create a passage between statistical recurrence and morality. Of course, this undue trespassing is concealed by the fact that his narrative is built upon the premise that everything that is described in the book is *simply* true: the interesting operation carried out by Vannacci is that of only apparently removing himself from the presentation of facts and data, while the author’s views are present in every word, interpretation, and conclusion. In this way, the concealment is actually two-fold: on the one hand, the symbol conceals the real content – in this case, a prescriptive argument that favors normality against deviation, – on the other hand it conceals the fact that the content is articulated and vehiculated by the author and is in no way objective. This means that statistics and common sense here are the ploy’s tools and the endgame is to present deviation from said normality as wrong, undue, or problematic. Instead of facts, the author should explain why deviancies are harmful, or why minorities’ protests for rights that others already possess are distracting or useless. In other words, it should be explained why normality is inherently

²⁹² Roberto Vannacci, *Il mondo al contrario* (Roberto Vannacci 2023), pg. IX, X.

²⁹³ *ibid*, pg. 2.

²⁹⁴ *ibid*, pg. IX.

²⁹⁵ *ibid*, pg. 91-92.

good, beautiful, or beneficial. Normality in its statistical sense only proposes an image of recurrence. It is actually devoid of any moral meaning unless Vannacci endorses the idea that slavery was morally correct insofar as it had public support and became morally irreprehensible as soon as people changed their minds. The same discourse can be applied to his stance concerning the LGBTQIA+ community. In Chapter IX, titled “The LGBTQ+++ Planet”, the author again resorts to numbers and data to underline how tiny is the community, which would not – in his opinion – motivate the mediatic resonance it enjoys.²⁹⁶ He then proceeds to parallel this minority to other groups of people that are composed of alike or bigger numbers: people who suffer from weekly back pain, people who are older than 80, or people who earn more than 60.000€ per year; unfairly, for the author, all these groups and people do not enjoy the same media attention but share bigger participation.²⁹⁷ His only conclusion, given the numbers, is to mark as “abnormal” homosexuals and transgender people.²⁹⁸ In this way, beliefs that are inclined toward the protection of “traditional” ways of life find a haven in cold statistical evidence, while hiding their strong commitment to correlate normality with the enjoyment of the right to a family.

Vannacci, however, did not make the scene – nor was he elected – only thanks to this book. The aggressive campaigning techniques included several lures to the fascist period. The former General blatantly deployed the “X” symbol in his MEP advertisement. The “X” is the Roman number ten – in Italian is now used as the “tenth”, “decima” –, which was used by the Repubblica Sociale Italiana – the nazi puppet state in Italy after the armistice of 1943 – as the name of the marine division of the army. The X Mas has been accused of committing war crimes and was famous for its brutality.²⁹⁹ The “X” is obviously also the sign to write on the name or party symbol in the voting booth, which was the perfect assist for General Vannacci: in this commercial, he exhorted his voters to “sign a *decima*”.³⁰⁰ Accused of fascist

²⁹⁶ *ibid*, pg. 237-238.

²⁹⁷ *ibid*, pg. 238-239.

²⁹⁸ *ibid*, pg. 243.

²⁹⁹ Giorgio Bocca, *Storia dell'Italia partigiana* (Feltrinelli Editore 2012); ‘Che cosa fu la X Mas’ (*Il Post*, 14 November 2022) <<https://www.ilpost.it/2022/11/14/x-mas-cosa-fu/>> accessed 3 September 2024.

³⁰⁰ *Europee, Il Video Choc Di Vannacci Che Evoca La X Mas: «Fate Una ‘Decima’ Sul Simbolo»* (Directed by Corriere della Sera, 2024) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbRdFS54icc>> accessed 3 September 2024.

apology, he later explained that he referred to previous times before the X Mas started collaborating with Nazi Germany under Mussolini.³⁰¹ In a similar fashion to Meloni's careful usage of the Fiamma Tricolore, Vannacci here employs a symbol that can be excluded from the fascist imagery, even though it is clear that the first association, both rational and emotional, is inevitably linked to fascist times. This explanation also suggests that the X is used in this context as a symbol of dissociation: the intent and the content differ, which suggests that the viewer is either being lied to or lacks context to properly assess the nature of the communication.

³⁰¹ *Decima Mas, Vannacci al Giornalista Inglese: 'Ve Li Ricordate Bene, Affondarono Le Vostre Navi'* (Directed by Il Fatto Quotidiano, 2024) <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=csmY-01AsIg>> accessed 3 September 2024.

2.5. Conclusions

The objective of this thesis was to demonstrate that anomie can be considered an important issue in modern life and that far-right, traditionalist parties often resort to the past, especially through symbols that relate to tradition, to challenge modernity's shortcomings. Collectivities are built upon similar values, and the picture that emerges from the analysis contained in Chapter 1 is a testimony of that. Modernity may be considered as a break from the past as various scholars have suggested over the years, but the evidence suggests that it may be true in some sectors – it is undeniable, for example, that scientific advancement are not to be put on hold in the foreseeable future, or that rational economic calculations dictate important portions of everyday life – but it is far from being completed. It could not be any different: identity construction processes, based on the premises as laid down by Giddens, Weber, and Durkheim hint to the fact that disenchantment cannot but be followed by re-enchantment processes that are communicated and instrumentalized by the far-right. Giddens, in particular, carefully demonstrates that rationality cannot be the cornerstone of everyone's identity, because it comes with strings attached. Some in fact argue that the result of these processes has conducted us in a period defined as post-Modernity. Their idea is that modernity has failed its goal and, for that reason, the entire idea that truth is discoverable has been progressively abandoned by individuals who resort instead to relativistic ways of searching for it. This has to do with the debacle of grand narratives, the “great isms”, which failed, too, in managing to create meaningful overarching theories that would satisfy people's need for meaning and purpose. Far-righters appeal to these people because they can restore some of the grand narratives that crumbled under the weight of the evolution of the social contract. The COVID-19 pandemic can be considered as an emblematic piece of evidence of how volatile and unreliable rationality and scientific inquiry can be. This is especially true if one compares the cold, incommunicative facts that rely on data to the power that emotions have on individuals. It cannot be a surprise that many people find scientific answers short of solving existential problems that concern their identity. Weber's hypothesis, that is that humans are sense-creating subjects, find confirmation in this fact: sense is created out of thin air where no actual answers are given. In a globalized world, one can argue that the potentially infinite number of possible choices one can make that relate to values – which are

the very cornerstone upon which humans' identity is built – does not provide relief from the caging burden of choosing; quite the opposite, values are the object of a never-ending struggle between essentialist and constructivist approaches, the former actively fighting for the “right” to *not* choose. Essentialist's backwards thought in this way provides solace to all the people who are increasingly weary of choosing. The issues surrounding choice are many and often contradictory with each other: on the one hand, as said before, the models available are simply too many and overlapping to carry out a real, conscious choice; on the other, the Western Universalism that emerged in Chapter 1 seems to be too tight for Westerners. In other words, people are convinced that the direction undertook after the Enlightenment is necessarily the appropriate one. Liberal democracy is under scrutiny because the alternative models depicted by the far-right – which vary along different versions of illiberal democracy if not authoritarian forms of government – can, at least at superficial level, propose identities that have been left aside in the Western World. These identities, often explicitly molded around those needs that they claim to satisfy, escape the centrifugal force of modernity. Traditional worldviews appeal to people exactly because they do not merely offer modes of behaviors: more importantly, they propose simple, non-reflexive reasons to abide them. The importance of Giddens' intuition, i.e. putting reflexivity and the four existential questions at the center of the identity-construction process, rests here. By saying the modernity is reflexive, serious questions about one's moral inescapably haunt people if they are not given authoritative sources to draw answers, i.e. values, from. Reflexivity in this sense puts at risk the linearity of values diffusion: if traditional orders, by virtue of their pronounced vertical and horizontal boundaries, were inherently stable in their values construction, modernity has torn such boundaries down. The consequence of this disruption is twofold, even though each level is indeed the same occurring process. First, at individual level, people are required to embrace a degree of responsibility and agency that is unprecedented. This is a serious struggle, because the individual is also the primary source of existential fears and would gladly welcome guidance from outside. Second, at social level, this personal struggle is amplified and echoed in those institutions that, precisely due to their democratic nature, fail to provide definitive answers. Governing bodies that in pre-modern times were the ultimate source of authority and authoritativeness, that is, are now much more human than one would

admit. However, the matter is even more complicated than this. As demonstrated in paragraph 1.4.3. “Individualism and Secularism”, which concerns both individualism as a value and the progressive loss of divine authority in modern politics, those two concepts are still debated and heavily scrutinized. This means that, while the aforementioned individual and institutional “confusion” exists, social and political conflict occupies a great deal of people’s attention. The consequence of this ambivalence – on the one hand, we “suffer” from the aftermath of two of the most disruptive modern forces, on the other they are everything but final in their form and they can even be negated to a substantial level – is what Durkheim defined as anomie.

Durkheim defined anomie as a state of normlessness or breakdown in social regulation that occurs when constitutive rules – the rules that structure social behaviors and interactions – are insufficient or absent. Of course, people are still largely able to understand each other and their respective behavior, so one cannot speak of fully-fledged anomie. Still, one can raise questions about whether or not modern societies contains anomic instances within itself. The increasing commodification of information, especially if political in nature, together with the increasing number of people that are involved in civil society, means that large portions of society do not agree, nor find feasible, to live under the current arrangement. However, and this is key, they still enjoy voting rights – indeed the hallmark of liberal democracies – and, because of that, they are entitled to operate against the democratic arrangement. They can, and do, ask for less civil rights; they demand for prescribed spiritual and religious values. Their strength lies in the authoritative appeal of their demands, in the ultimate unquestionability of their beliefs. If one puts together the failure of rationality to solve every personal problem one could have, and it could not be otherwise since individuals are not rational more often than they are, then it is only natural to observe the rise of political forces that claim that some values cannot be created *ex nihilo*, out of human imperium, but should instead have authoritative roots. This authoritativeness can be either divine, like for religion, or it can be found in the repetitiveness of tradition. The current arrangement can be described at least as partially anomic because the degree of mutual values recognition is not entirely sufficient to avoid frontal social conflicts. The unique feature of modernity is this: a system that requires certain features to function properly contains in itself the possibility to

allow for values that negate its premises. Pluralism in this sense is the defining characteristic that contains the uniqueness of modernity and its instability, it is both its foundational stone and its biggest threat. In this context, the question posed by the ontological security problem is pivotal for its resolution. In a reflexive fashion, ontological security is again simultaneously cause and consequence of this instability. If the foundations of modernity do not adequately satisfy the specific need for meaning that individuals raise, the natural solution is to search for alternatives.

This brings the discourse to the next point, that is whether traditionalism is the adequate means to reach this longed for solution. The short answer, as demonstrated in this thesis, is no. Whereas traditionalist forces indeed try to depict their bases as stable and enduring, the truth lies elsewhere. As shown by Hobsbawm, traditions are often invented with the purpose of alleviating the lack of meaning that one community experiences. This means that traditions are not stable at all. Quite the opposite, the invention of tradition suggests that communities under duress can come together and single out distinctive traits that render them unique. In modernity, Hobsbawm argued that this has already occurred numerous times, which really begs the question whether the invention of tradition is not itself a byproduct of modernity and, as such, a modern solution. If the stability of tradition and the reliability of its origin are questionable, so it is people's subscription to it. Tradition in fact is not always sufficiently clear in its content to allow for meaningful participation outside from rituals. Let us take religion as an example. The Sunday mass is indeed a source of bonding, and sense-making processes within one's community. At the same time, people's participation to it has declined substantially even in the most religious community. Why? The answer lies somewhere between the undisputable answers that modern science has provided, and the loose prescriptions that people cannot always follow if they want to integrate themselves in diverse communities. Furthermore, there are serious shortcomings to tradition's communication and advertisement. Tradition is itself a loose term that renders any attempt to delineate its content hard. Different sub-communities derogate substantially from the observance of the wider community, which means that tradition, unless enforced through the imperium of the authority, cannot naturally provide the voluntary subscription that modernity fails to achieve. This can be summed up in the argument "your tradition is not

mine”, which is exactly the reason why nation-states gathered their masses around civil symbols and traditions to attract consensus. But in a globalized era of intertwined relationships, increasing global governance, and wider possibilities for people and their institutions, national particularism is not necessarily enough to cover all the questions for everybody.

This is demonstrated in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, where a careful sociopolitical analysis is conducted on Fratelli d’Italia and Lega. The disputability of tradition and its lack of objectively identifiable content were manifest. The issue with tradition is that it is often communicated through symbols. It could not be otherwise, since tradition often entails relationships with the superhuman, which is hardly described with words focusing on rational, shared meaning. The traditional symbols used by Meloni and Salvini – falling within the three categorizations “symbols as subjectivity”, “symbols of signification”, and “symbols as dissociation” – are vague enough to start wondering what the immediate modes of behavior prescribed would be. Symbols in this context have revealed themselves to be concealers of truths and intents, rather than their emblems. Symbols like the Fiamma Tricolore, roots, and invasion, crumble under rational scrutiny. These symbols are at best flags that *some* social sectors still hold dear, while more often than not simply personalize the political message around the party’s leader. These symbols are systematically used to mobilize and emotionally charge the masses, and are pivotal points of their rhetoric and messages, but they do not bring any content to the broader discussion. In other words, they are useful signals for those who are already inclined to agree but repel all the others. This “preaching to the choir” is especially useful to portray the leader of the moment as a man (or woman) of the people, bypassing the need to rationally articulate the content of the proposals logically, instead of rendering them identitarian claims. This instance is probably their most identifiable feature: traditionalists and identitarians focus much attention on depicting their proposals as in line with who they are, which automatically makes their political offer *right*. Individuals’ needs cannot but be circumscribed to their identity and no derogation is possible. This means that the vast majority of people do not find those solutions as feasible, because they do not fall in the category. The attention that “traditional family” enjoys within the far-right ranks is exclusionary for homosexuals, transgenders, and other categories, which means

that these people are not secure. And, more importantly, the attention toward the “traditional family” is completely contradictory to the supposed agenda of far-right parties, that is demographic decline. Easier access for everybody to family aid would help single individuals, poorer couples etc. to access adoption for example. But again, “traditional family” is not but a symbol deployed to signal identitarian belonging to a specified group, rather than a programmatic point. The same goes towards immigration, which is probably the first instrument that, if well managed, will solve the population decline in Europe and in Italy. But immigration is itself a symbol devoid of any actual meaning, usually weaponized through terms like “invasion” or “Islamization” to signal a protected identity and an Other.

The people who are most susceptible to these rhetorical tricks are not just “simple” folks that do not possess the instruments to understand they are being manipulated. If one looks at the Italian last election’s data, one notices that FDI enjoyed a resounding success in almost all the demographics: between 28.2% and 29.1% among people aged 35-49, 50-64, and 65+.³⁰² People aged 18-34, people who have obtained a degree, students, and people who are unoccupied – thus, overlapping demographics to a great extent – are the only demographics that FDI did not win over. This suggests that the dissatisfaction with the current arrangement runs deep within big portions of the Italian society, who do not seem to accept the current affairs. Still, this must also be weighted against the possibility that, in a truly Italian fashion, people who have exhausted their options vote for those who still did not have the possibility to govern. However, the current trends in Europe, first and foremost the incredible rise of Alternative für Deutschland in Germany, also indicate that discontent is spread and established political forces are missing the mark with their solutions. Since the “grand narratives” have been mentioned before, traditionalism in this sense is a revival of them. Men especially have seen their role change substantially over the past decades; like every change, it created a new set of opportunities and threats that, so far, have not found a proper place in society.

³⁰² ‘Elezioni Politiche 25 Settembre 2022: I Risultati Elettorali e Le Analisi Post-Voto Di Ipsos | Ipsos’ <<https://www.ipsos.com/it-it/elezioni-politiche-risultati-elettorali-analisi-post-voto-ipsos>>, pg. 23, accessed 14 September 2024.

Then, what is the way forward if both traditional and modern thought are not enough to provide stability? There is no answer. During these months of research and thinking, I did not come to any definitive answer. People do not seem to appreciate the freedom that this system, though rigged and flawed, provides them, in the same exact fashion as those bears in Bulgaria did not want to be freed from their brutal oppression. Tradition and traditionalism in this sense are glorified cages, full of commodities – the most important of which, the possibility to not exercise agency – that are incommunicable unless you already value what happened in the past. There is no objective reason as to why the past should be made important for everyone, especially if, and that is always the case, there is no past. There are many pasts, the exact same numbers as there are presents, made and constructed from the memories of people who are different from us. The present cannot be a complicated issue because we lost our attachment to our past: the past is itself subject of inquiry and scrutiny, it holds no authority because it is full of contradictions just like our present. It shields us from choosing what do now only insofar as we have already chosen what past to follow. Italy from this perspective is the perfect case study: it has been a fascist country for 20+ years, it has been divided by a harsh civil war for 2, and it came out of it a republic. Italy has many pasts – like its regional minorities suggest, too – and implying that one is authoritative while the others are not intellectually dishonest. This is why the only thing that can be done to surpass the instability is to make sure that no possibility is made impossible, that dialogue remains the only way to deal with discordance and that people, should they choose so, remain free to decide for themselves. Only by allowing this it is possible to give forth to the bottom-up process Durkheim described when he tackled the issue of anomie. This “Durkheimian” solution is possible only within a properly democratic order that takes into consideration every free association of people, at every level possible. This “meeting” of different minds is necessary if we truly want to build communities that satisfy our need to feel ontologically secure.

Limitations

The most serious limitation of this research surrounds the historical precision needed to reconstruct the evolution of European societies during the last 600+ years; this knowledge is necessary to appreciate the actual features of traditional orders (plural), with a view to obtaining a good grasp on what made them different from our modern order (singular). Sociologists, both classical and contemporary, often lack the understanding of technological and scientific advancements which would render them able to really appreciate the evolution of our societies.

The second most important limitation of this thesis is caused by the vastity of the initial project, which made circumscribing the most important theories and data incredibly difficult; in other words, many more things could have and should have been included. For example, a sharper psychological outlook would have been extremely useful, since this research would have benefited from a more tailored analysis of individual needs.

The third limitation concerns the scope of the research itself. The project revealed itself to be overly ambitious. Even though extensive research was conducted, there is still much room for improvement, both from a theoretical perspective and in the analysis of the cases at hand. Modernity is still an incredibly relevant field of study and the literature is immense.

The fourth limitation interests the study of symbols. The research did not focus too much on the sociological importance of symbols, because it would have required a dissertation. Still, more research can be done on symbols and rituals, to better contextualize why symbols are so important for communities and, as such, act as catalysts of mobilization.

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