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Far-Right Identities in Italy

An analysis of contemporary Italian Far-Right Parties

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Abstract

The (re)appearance of different Far-Right parties in Italy during the last decades brought me to the decision to write my Master's thesis about this topic. Due to the fact that in this country, together with a long tradition of support for Far-Right ideologies, more than one typology of Far-Right party exists, an interesting scenario is open for the analysis. I will study the cases of Lega Nord and Forza Nuova-Alternativa Sociale. As a first step, I will explain the differences that exist between different ideologies in order to classify these political groups, representing the two cases of analysis in the Italian Far-Right spectrum. I will then build a theory for the formation of Far-Right identities departing from a social constructivist approach. This theory will be tested in the empirical analysis applied to the two study cases. Finally, I will concentrate on the symbolic resources and the discursive strategies that these political actors use in order to construct shared collective identities and to persuade their audience. The results that I will obtain show that while Lega Nord is a Neo-Populist party, Forza Nuova-Alternativa Sociale can be considered as Neo-Fascist. Both the two study cases confirm the theory used to describe the process of Far-Right identity formation in Italy. Regarding the symbolic resources and the discursive strategies of the two political actors, the interesting result is that Lega Nord has shown the tendency to modify its rhetoric, as well as the way it communicates its political messages in order to take advantage of the political situation and increase consensus.

Key words: Far-Right identities, Social Constructivism, collective identities, Lega Nord, Forza Nuova-Alternativa Sociale, Italy.

Abbreviations

LN	Lega Nord
FN	Forza Nuova
AS	Alternativa Sociale
FN-AS	Forza Nuova-Alternativa Sociale
AN	Alleanza Nazionale
MSI	Movimento Sociale Italiano
FRP	Far-Right Parties
FI	Forza Italia

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1 Introduction

1.1 The subject of the study

In this thesis, the subject of the study is the analysis of far-right parties (FRP) in Italy. Due to its recent past and history, this State can be considered one of the native countries of far-right movements, and what in my opinion results interesting is the continuous and spontaneous naissance of political groups that in some ways can be related to the old ancestor that was the 'National Fascist Party' created by Benito Mussolini, collapsed officially the 8th September of 1943, but that effectively continued to exist in the North of Italy with the establishment of the 'Repubblica di Salo'. The former was a fascist regime directly under the supervision of the Nazis Germany and survived until the 1945, when the Partisan troupes of the Comitato di Liberazione (CLI) set again freedom through the defeat of the Italian Republican and German armies.

As I was saying before, despite the hard heritage linked to the history of oppression and violence of the fascism, what we have assisted in Italy, especially since the last fifteen years, is the appearance of a multitude of parties that more or less can be correlated with the 'old' ancestor that characterized the history of Italy from 1922 to the end of WWII. Chronologically, after the war, due to the formation of the Movimento Sociale Italiano (MSI), born in 1946 and led by Giorgio Almirante, a former fascist, the condition of the extreme right in Italy has been quite stable and united thanks to the strength of this party.

The MSI has been present in the Italian political scene until 1991, when the party had a moderate turning point thanks to the work of the new president, Gian Franco Fini. Alleanza Nazionale (AN) is the name of the new group born from MSI. Fini has been the founder of the centre-right coalition 'Polo della liberta' with Silvio Berlusconi (Forza Italia) and Umberto Bossi (Lega Nord) (Zaslove A.2004: 71)

After this short historical introduction, needed for underline the process that brought to the dissolution of a unitary extreme right coalition as the MSI in the first half of the last decade, I can now start to introduce the purpose of this study. My first intention is in fact to classify ideologically the new parties oriented on the far right and explain the ideologies of Fascism, Radical Right Populism, Populism and Neo-Fascism. Secondly, my aim is to explain the formation of far-right 'identities' in Italy, and discover the differences between far-right parties, focusing especially on their approach to the construction of a 'collective identity' and of the boundaries of the 'community'. I will try also to explain the different

discursive strategies used by these political actors in the attempt to increase popularity and audience.

1.2 The purpose of the study and research questions

The Italian far-right parties that I intend to study are Lega Nord (LN) and Forza Nuova-Alternativa Sociale (FN-AS). They show both differences and similarities. First, they are more popular in the north than in the south of the country. If for LN the motivations of the popularity in the north are quite obvious, as I will try to demonstrate later in the thesis, for Forza Nuova the reasons are different: the founders of this party, Roberto Fiore and Massimo Morsello (died few years ago) were both from the south and initiated the basis of their political creature in London, where they were living due to their impossibility to stay in Italy for being suspected of political terrorism in the 60s-70s (*Umanita' Nova*, 2000: 1-2). The reasons why FN especially at the beginning of its political activity has been mostly popular in the north are to be found in the more suitable environment, thanks to the huge presence and popularity, especially in some specific regions like Veneto and Lombardy, of some 'older' rightist political movements like '*Base autonoma*' for example, that all merged in Forza Nuova at the end of the 90s, when the party born (*Umanita' Nova*, 2000: 4). Both LN and FN are associated with xenophobia and racism, but just for the latter we can introduce the concept of violence (really seldom in fact LN has been involved in violent episodes). The two groups also differ in the fact that while LN mostly has proposed the naissance of a northern Italian identity, FN-AS more generally has focused its political thought on the emphasis of an Italian identity and also on the need for the emergence of a European identity.

The purpose of this thesis will be to analyze the formation of far-right identities and the social conditions under which they are shaped in Italy. I will study these issues departing from a social constructivist approach. Thus the question that I will try to answer will be: what cause far-right identities to form in Italy? And through which symbolic resources LN and FN-AS propose to construct shared collective Identities and the boundaries of the 'community'? Subsequently, what are the discursive strategies through which these social actors have attempted to mobilize their audience?

1.3 The plan of the study

Both the two study cases, Lega Nord and Forza Nuova, are nowadays strongly established in the national political arena. Many progresses have been achieved since the beginning of their political activities

Regarding the case of FN, recently, thanks to the involvement of Alessandra Mussolini after that she has abandoned AN, more prestige have been reached through the formation of a new list in 2004. With this list, composed by A. Mussolini, FN and another small extreme right party called Fronte Nazionale, we have assisted to the attempt to rebuild again a new extreme right block without any division. 'Alternativa Sociale' is the name of this new coalition that for the first time, stood at the last European elections in 2004. I specify here that when Alessandra Mussolini became the leader of the coalition AS, the political programs of FN, the main contributor of the new list in terms of voters, remained the same. So, what we have seen was an attempt to build a stronger far-right coalition, and not a political reorientation of FN¹. In the analysis I will study FN and AS as a unified case, consequently I will use the abbreviation FN-AS.

This thesis will begin with a theoretical introduction, followed by an empirical analysis. I will basically analyse the ideologies of contemporary Far Right parties and I will built then the spectrum for the future empirical research through the formulation of a social constructivist theory of identity formation.

The second part of the thesis will continue with the presentation of two different cases: the first study will examine Lega Nord, the second study will be centred in Forza Nuova – Alternativa Sociale. This investigation will focus on two different stages: firstly, an introduction to the history of these parties is needed. Secondly, the developed theory of Far-Right identity formation will be tested empirically against the two cases. As a last step, through the discourse analysis about their conception of 'collective identity' and boundaries of the 'community', I will prove their Far-Right identities in a regional (LN) and national perspective (LN and FN-AS).

1.4 Methodology

The theory that in my opinion fits the best to explain the formation of far-right identities is social constructivism, due to the importance that it gives to ideational factors.

The theory will be used to explain the two cases (LN and FN-AS), and I should mention here that using the theoretical approach and the discourse analysis, departing from the social constructivist assumption that the society influence the individuals and social groups through the feeling of belonging to a community, one of my aims is to explain the behaviour of LN and FN-AS in the process of creating shared collective identities. In the LN's case I will mention the attempt to construct a regional collective identity² before and a national (secessionist) collective identity later. I specify here that due to the loss of the initial consensus

¹ http://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/alternativa_sociale

² The North of Italy as a region: a region distinguished from the rest of th Nation mostly in a economic sense.

after the proposition of a 'national' identity, LN re-oriented its programme again through a moderation of their political intentions. While for LN is correct to speak about both regional and also 'national' collective identities, due to the attempt to create a new state called 'Padania', on the other hand I will analyze the construction of a shared collective identity in terms of Italian identity proposed by FN-AS.

1.5 Sources

The materials that I intend to use in support of the empirical studies are journals, media sources, articles and books in English, together with media sources written in Italian. Most of the material in Italian that I intend to use has been kindly suggested by the components of the FN section in the city of Verona, one of the oldest and more organized in the country. This material consists of political programs and will constitute the major source of my analysis, together with other articles and magazines. Much of this literature constitutes a vast theoretical enrichment for my research.

Due to the fact that proper academic studies centred specifically on FN-AS don't exist, for the fact of its recent appearance in the political scene, I will probably be the first person that will try to build an analysis on this specific case.

Regarding the material for the analysis of the LN's case, I have to say that thanks to the evolution and the importance of this party, some academic material is available in English, and the disposition of this literature facilitated my research about this topic.

1.6 Delimitations and relevance

The first intention of this study would have been to analyze another party for offer a better understanding and a more complete investigation in all the sides of the Italian 'right' spectrum. An analysis of Berlusconi's 'centre-right' party Forza Italia (FI), example of 'entrepreneurial populism' (Zaslave A. 2004, 1: 68) and most important ally of Bossi's Lega Nord would have been interesting. I just thought that due to the difficulties to apply a theory of far-right identity formation to this case, the empirical investigation would have not worked. The main scope of the thesis is the study of far-right parties, and consequently for this reason FI has been judged irrelevant by the author and not included in the case studies.

2 Political ideologies

There is notable disagreement among social scientists on the causes for the rise of new political parties oriented on the far-right of the classical political left-right spectrum. Some of these scientists refer to them as neo-fascists, extreme right and radical right parties, while others label them as populists or neo-populists. ‘Other scholars even argue that there is no common defining characteristic that allows us to group these parties in a single category or within a common family’ (Zaslave A, 2004,1: 62). It is in the opinion of the author that an appropriate ideological classification need to be done before to focus on the cases of Lega Nord and Forza Nuova – Alternativa Sociale.

An overview of the most fundamental ‘right’ ideologies will be done in this chapter, focusing especially on fascism, populism and their evolutions, neo-fascism and neo-populism, together with the larger definitions of extreme right and radical right.

This overview will be followed in the next chapter by a social constructivist theoretical approach about far-right identity formation, which will be tested on the analysis of LN and FN-AS, two far-right groups on the Italian political scenario.

2.1 Fascism

According to Roger Eatwell, ‘generic fascism is usually identified as an ideology that strives to force social rebirth based on a holistic–national radical third way. Fascism has also tended to stress a peculiar style, especially action and a charismatic leader, more than detailed programme, and to engage in a Manichean demonisation of its enemies’ (Eatweel R. 1996:1).

The first version of fascism that contemporary history presents is the Italian fascism. In the origin it was a movement composed by socialists and former soldiers. The first political steps of fascism don’t contradict this socialist origin: in the speech of San Sepolcro, the act that gave birth to the first Fascio³, Mussolini declared the distribution of the lands, the suppression of the noble titles, the participation of the workers in the administration of the firms, together with the confiscation of the goods belonging to the wealthy people. This Jacobin side is just one aspect of the fascist doctrine (Bardeche M. 1980: 12-13).

³ Fascio is an Italian word, meaning union. The term fascism, derives directly from this word. ‘Fasci da combattimento’ were the first fascist associations created by Benito Mussolini in the first period of the political institutionalization of what will become later the Fascist National Party.

Departing from this definition, we have to add that from a structural perspective, fascism arose within a specific economic, political, social and institutional context. Consequently, fascism emerged within societies that were either moving from agrarian to industrialized economies (Italy) or within newly industrialized economies (Germany) (Zaslove A.2004, 1: 63). Historians have especially pointed to major differences between what are commonly seen as the fascism's paradigmatic examples: German Nazism and Italian fascism.⁴ A first difference is 'the biological racist ideology of the Nazis instead of the cultural nationalism of the Italian fascism'. The latter was also distinct from the former regarding a 'less totalitarian, more conservative and opportunistic nature of the regime compared to the cumulative radicalization of Nazism' (Eatwell R. 1996: 1).

Furthermore, an important thing to add is that fascist movements shared common ideological and organizational traits: 'they opposed to parliamentary democracies, the liberal democratic state, liberalism and cosmopolitanism', there was a search for national unity and the 'construction and protection of an authentic and pure national culture, achieved through mobilisation of the state to fight against internal and external enemies and through the use of empire or national expansion'. Regarding the economic politics, fascist political parties supported a state regulated economy (Zaslove A. 2004, 1: 64). The key tools of the fascist mobilization, as Eatwell defines it, were to be founded in political myths, nationalism, anti-Marxism, anti-liberalism, anti-conservatism, an extensive use of symbolism, together with ideology and programme, such as a positive evaluation of war, imperialism and corporatism (Eatwell R. 1996: 6).

After having enounced the general peculiarities of fascism as an ideology, the next step to do is to investigate another ideology that is important for understand the formation of contemporary far right parties: populism.

2.2 Populism

Populism can be defined as a 'style rhetoric' that seeks to mobilize ordinary people against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society (Kazin M. in Betz H.G & Johnson C. 2004: 313). This ideology is grounded in the notion that since the people are the socio-economic and cultural foundations of democracies, they should have the supreme power (Zaslove A. 2004, 1: 68).

Compared to Fascism, populism is compatible with democracy and I would argue that it is a democratic phenomenon itself. Other particularities are that

⁴ In this paragraph I limit my self speaking about the most important historical form of fascism, I don't mention other cases such Franchism and Degaulism for example, because judged by the author irrelevant to the scope of this work. For more information about historical forms of fascism see for example: Maurice Bardeche 'Qu'est-ce que le fascisme?', 1980, ed.Volpe, Roma.

populist parties have a centralized structure but they lack sometimes core values. Typical and fundamental features of a populist thought are a call for strong authority, and the attacks on the political class. Regarding these issues it resembles the appeals of fascist parties (Karapin R. 1998: 218). The charismatic leaders, an important feature that will be central also in the description of a neo-populist ideology, as we will see later on, are essential for the formation of a successful populist mobilization, as they are responsible of the employment of the doctrine around the political, economic, cultural and societal issues. 'These leaders speak out against corruption, entrenched political parties, bureaucracies and corporate economic interests' (Zaslove A. 2004, 1: 68).

In the contemporary history of world politics we assisted to the raise of another phenomenon strictly correlated with the ideology of populism: neo-populism, and due to its importance, a section of this chapter will be entirely dedicated to it.

2.3 Neo-Fascism

According to Andrej Zaslove, it is impossible or at least difficult to categorize the majority of the contemporary far-right parties as neo-fascists (Zaslove A, 2004, 1 and 2004, 2). What he argues is that defining the French National Front for instance, the Danish People Party or the Italian Lega Nord as Neo-Fascists, is problematic in several accounts. A clarification about what we mean with Neo-Fascist parties need to be done.

For instance, Roger Griffin, regarding the Italian case, looks at the Movimento Sociale Italiano⁵ as a clear example of a neo-fascist party. Taking this example, he claims that for be considered neo-fascist, there should be an ideal link of continuation with the precedent form of regime (Griffin R. 2000: 10). While it is impossible to generalize about their ideological contents, according to Griffin the recurrent features of these kind of parties or movements are 'a right wing Gramscianism which recognize that cultural hegemony must precede political hegemony; the extensive reference to intellectuals associated with the Conservative Revolution: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Jung, Schmit; the idea of Europe as a unique cultural homeland which can still be revitalized by renewing contact with its pre-Christian mythic roots; an extreme eclecticism stemming from the belief that the dichotomy of left and right can be transcended in a new alliance

⁵ This political party (MSI) has been transformed in the 1991 by its leader, Gianfranco Fini, in a new political formation, Alleanza Nazionale (AN), more moderate and oriented on the centre-right of the political spectrum. 'Svolta di Fiuggi' literary the 'Fiuggi's change of direction' is the turning point, where Fiuggi indicate the locality, in Lazio, where during the party's national reunion has been decided to change political orientation. Consequently, Pino Rauti's MSI-Fiamma Tricolore was the unsuccessful political formation born to keep the flame of ideological purity of the old experience of fascism neglected and abandoned by Gianfranco Fini. See (Roger Griffin: 2000) for this point.

of intellectual energies opposed to the dominant system of libertarian egalitarianism, capitalist materialism and American consumerist individualism; the celebration of ethnic diversity and difference to be defended against cultural imperialism and totalitarian oneworldism, mass migration, and the liberal endorsement of a multiracial society' (Ibidem. cit: 8). Departing from these issues, the core ideology of a neo-fascist political movement or party is characterized by the rejection of the democratic rules, of individual liberty, and of the principle of individual equalities and equal right for all the members of the political community.

The main categorization is an authoritarian model and the acceptance of violence as a way to achieve goals in the national and foreign affairs (Zaslove A. 2004, 1: 65). In sum these groups are referring to traditional thought such as fascism, but also to Nazism and the 'Nouvelle Droite', and present an anti- system discourse where the categories of race, ethnicity and religion are imperative (Ignazi, in Betz and Johnson, 2004: 312).

2.4 Neo-Populism: Radical Right Populist Parties

A good introduction to this ideology and subsequently to those types of contemporary right parties known as 'neo-populist' is to analyze their main political features and doctrines. Radical Right Populist parties began to appear mostly in the European continent in the 1980s and 1990s. 'In Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, Sweden, and Switzerland a radical right party has received almost 10% of the votes in at least one election, if not more' (Zaslove A. 2004, 2: 99).

The success of these kinds of parties is multi-casual; their character is fundamentally shaped by the socio-economic and political environments of the post-World War II era. In this categorization are included 'those parties which reject the principle of individual and social equality by promoting socio-economic and political frameworks that foster or accentuate individual or social inequality; they are the promoters of a fundamental change of the political and the socio-economic system, without, however, calling into question the basics of the socio-constitutional order' (Swank D. and Betz H.G. 2003: 218-19). Radical right populism, in-fact, differs ideologically from fascism and neo-fascism since it is not anti-parliamentary, it is not corporatist, and its mobilization is not explicitly based upon extra-parliamentary violence. Due to the acceptance of democratic parliamentary institutions, it is clear that their discourses are radical, but not unconstitutional (Zaslove A. 2004, 1: 69-70). As we have seen in the previous definition of populism, these far-right groups present very often the leadership of a charismatic individual. Andrej Zaslove argues, 'the leaders of these radical right parties represent an almost perfect incarnation of Max Weber's ideal type of the charismatic leader', that is to say: 'from the outside the leader may not be viewed as charismatic, but according to his followers, he possess charisma and speaks to their interests' (Weber M. in Zaslove A. 2004, 1: 71).

The success of radical right populist parties depends also in what Hans-Georg Betz refers to as the politics of resentment, disillusionment and anxiety. Those issues are represented for example by the condition of power in the liberal capitalist democracies that have been usurped by a 'self-serving political and cultural elite that pursued its own agenda in the creation of a democratic and welfare-state system, without concern of the interests of the citizens' (Betz H. J. and Johnson C. 2004: 313).

Another very important neo-populist issue is the protection of the national identity and culture: due to the high presence of immigrants in the countries where these parties have raised success, they have been scapegoated as the cause of crimes and violence, for steal the jobs and for undermine the national welfare situation (Zaslove A. 2004, 2: 106-09), thus there is the need to protect the national society through the use of a 'differential racism' (Betz H. J. and Johnson C. 2004: 316). The last things to add for complete this brief summary that deals with the description of a neo-populist ideology it is to mention the vision about economic policies: neo-populist parties generally support free-market economic platforms, although this support to liberal economy is tempered by anti-globalization rhetoric. They connect liberalism with autonomy, freedom, economic prosperity and a productivistic culture (Zaslove A. 2004, 1: 75-77). Linking these political concepts all together we have a first explanation of the success that these parties have obtained in attracting reputation among various classes of the population in the last decades.

2.5 Conclusive remarks. The classification of the far right: extreme and radical

In this introduction to political ideologies I wanted to show that in order to classify political parties or movements oriented on the far right of the traditional political 'left-right spectrum' in Italy or more generally in Europe, we have to operate some differentiations. There are parties oriented on the far-right that can be considered radicals and others that can be considered extremists. I mention this classification because, even if apparently these two definitions can be easily confused within each others, my aim before to start the investigation on the Italian contemporary far-right situation is to underline that not all the groups composing the far-right scenario depart from the same ideological basis. 'Pronouncedly populist parties such as the Freedom Party of Austria (FPO) or the Italian Lega Nord are significantly different in terms of the composition and attitudes of their constituencies from radical right-wing parties such as the French Front National, the Vlaams Block or the Scandinavian progress parties and from traditional right wing extremists such as the former Italian Social Movement' (MSI) (Betz H.J. 1999:303).

As I said before, we can classify some far-right parties as extreme if results clear an attempt to use violence for achieve their goals; if there is a clear

ideological link with previous fascist regimes and if the standards of contemporary democracies are refused and a return to a totalitarian system is auspicated.

On the reverse, radical right parties can be considered in a different way. ‘There are authoritarian and extremist elements within these parties, but anti-liberal democratic and anti-constitutional policies do not represent the core of their platforms. Anti-liberal democratic sentiments are not the central reason why the majority of the voters support the radical right. New radical right-wing parties even if somewhat reluctantly, respect representative democracy and the constitutional order’ (Zaslave A. 2004, 1: 65).

In the next part of this thesis I will focus on the Italian contemporary far-right situation, in the attempt to explain the motivations that brought to the success of Lega Nord and to the relative success of Forza Nuova - Alternativa Sociale.

3 A theoretical approach for the formation of Far-Right identities in Italy

Collective identity and nationalism (the movement that develops either to generate or to protect and revitalize national identity) are social phenomena of primary importance in contemporary societies and politics (Triandafyllidou A. 2001).

In Europe, in particular, many national states have assisted to the formation of 'different kinds of peripheral nationalism, to the revival of ethnic allegiances, religion communities and the creation of social movements and political parties active in the reformulation of a national identity that has been menaced by the trend toward economic globalization, the prevalence of a neo-liberal market model, the rise of immigration from eastern Europe and the Third World towards countries of the European Union. The emergence of the European Union as a trans-national polity as well has put the concept of nationhood under further strain in Europe' (Ibidem. cit: 1). Today we are assisting to the fermentation of collective identities in which a big role is played by racism and xenophobia, in the process of redrawing the boundaries of the In-groups in relation to internal or external Others, that threaten or are perceived to threaten the autonomy or 'authenticity' of a community (Ibidem: 1-2). According to Billig, at the core of an approach to the study of identity, the concept of nationalism, intended as the formation of a 'In- society' can be described as 'a discourse that constantly shapes our consciousness and the way we constitute the meaning of the world. It determines our collective identity by producing and reproducing us as nationals. It is a form of seeing and interpreting that conditions our daily speeches, behaviours and attitudes' (Billig M. in Ozkirimli U. 2000: 4). So, due to the importance that this issue has in our contemporary international situation, the main possible questions that can come up for the formulation of a theoretical debate are: In which way a far-right identity referring to collective and national issues has born? And what are the different types of far-right movements that have manifested themselves in the last years or decades?

As Oliver Zimmer notes, explaining the conception of identity expressed by the French historian Fernand Braudel, that argued that a nation can have its being only at the price of being forever in search of itself, 'the dynamic nature of nationhood is valid and indeed important. Appreciating this dynamism involves more than the recognition that the communities referred to as nations are socially constructed' (Zimmer O. 2003: 173). Saying that the concepts of nation are socially constructed means that the term collective 'identity' relates to the process whereby the nation is constructed over time. 'Identity, thus understood, is a public project rather than a fixed state of mind' (Ibidem: 174).

I have used this preceding discussion for introduce an interesting research question for my thesis, that is related on how this concept of ‘collective identity’ is constructed discursively by far right parties and spread into the community. So, as a first step, what in my opinion results interesting and needs to be analyzed is the construction of Far-Right identities in Italy. Which else, if not the Italian, represents one of the most interesting case, due to the fact that in this country we can find, first, a long tradition of Far Right experience as the history of this nation tell us, and second, because we can find different contemporary far-right parties, that departing from similar ideologies arrive to propose different kinds of identities forged for the community.

Two questions arise consequently, underlying the focus of this thesis: ‘through which symbolic resources LN and FN-AS propose to construct collective Identities and the boundaries of the community? And subsequently, what are the discursive strategies through which these political actors attempt to mobilize the individuals?’

In the next sections of this chapter I will try to create a model of analysis based on a social constructivist approach for the formation of Far-Right Identities in Italy, which will be tested in chapter five through the analysis of LN and FN-AS cases. I will than build a discursive theoretical scheme, in the attempt to demonstrate that the construction of collective identities defined in the discourses of these political actors, results differentiated, depending on what kind of ideational conception, civic or organic, and which symbolic resources are used by the parties for the construction of the ‘Own’ against the ‘Other’ community. This scheme will turn useful for the study of the empirical analysis of the two cases: Lega Nord and FN-AS, in the fifth chapter.

3.1 A theory for identity building through a social constructivist approach

Constructivists often focus on the causal and constitutive role of norms and identities in the study of politics. Thus, ‘many constructivists assume that if they can demonstrate (a) that norms and identities explain outcomes in national and international relations and (b) that, in turn, the behaviour of actors alters norms and identities’, then we can plausibly conclude that national and international politics are in some significant respects, socially constructed (Jackson P.T. and Nexon D. 2002: 97).

Departing from these assumptions, D. Green claims that social ideas mobilize social groups and create actors, their interests and their goals, but actors also shape their institutional and ideational environment. ‘Structures (societies) result as multifaceted, covering almost any environmental or contextual feature that might shape, enable or constrain collective action’ (Green D.M. 2002: 18-22). This mutual process between the individuals and the society can be defined as a continuous cycle of interactions.

It is in the societal arena that the role of political parties and movements increases in importance, as we will see, due to their attempts to influence the individuals and the social groups' identity.

Integral to this argument are the interactions among social forces that operate between societies, as well within societies (Hall R.B. 2002: 121). The result, following these social constructivist assumptions in order to study the formation of identities, is a 'society-centric' rather than 'state-centric' analysis. So, answering the question about what is the issue that make an identity-driven argument constructivist is the assertion that we cannot impute a structure of interests and motivations of social actors exogenously (Ibidem: 121). These structures are social rather than material, and this means that structural properties are not fixed and external to the interactions of actors: 'interests and identities of actors have not a fixed nature and depend on the context in which they are situated' (Rosamond B.2000: 171-72). The fundamental insight of the structure-agency debate is the 'mutual constitutiveness of social structures and agents: the social environment in which we find our self, defines our self, our identities as social beings' (Risse T. 2004: 160-61). Such an emphasis on ideational and cultural discourses complements rather than substitutes an agency-based rationalist account. Social groups in-fact tend to define themselves on the basis of a set of ideas to which members can relate, and that can be expressed directly in their discourses, in their ways of interacting and communicating as we will see later, and indirectly through the application of common symbols, codes or signs (Marcussen M., Risse T., et All, 2001: 102).

According to Martin Marcussen, the function of these ideas is to define the social groups as an entity which is distinct from other social groups and the members thereby feel that they have something in common on the basis of which they form a community' (ex: the national community). Social identity is so defined as a set of shared ideas and as the subject that put together a sense of community among the members of a same social group or collectivity. In other words, a social sense of distinctiveness is created, and that is the fact that distinguishes the In-group from the Out-group, in regard with the 'others' (Ibidem: 102-03). As I will show in chapter five, the idea of 'belonging to a community' and the formation of boundaries against the 'others', are important to analyze, in order to understand the role and the motivation that brought to the raise of contemporary far-right identities and far-right parties in Italy.

The way in which individuals shape their identity in shared collective identities is called social learning (Chekel J. T. 2001,1: 53-54). Social learning in our case can be defined as the process through which interests and identities are shaped once there is the knowledge that what is relevant for the fixation of the identity is a differentiation from the relevant Other.

According to Hall, another important thing to add is that when we are in front of a radical change within the society and new self-images are developed, diverging from the dominant forms of the collective sharing, it is in this moment that we can assist to a change and subsequently to a legitimization crisis that can result in a social transformation. Thus the institutional forms of collective actions

change with the prevailing historically contingent conceptions of collective identity (Hall R.B. 2002: 122-23).

Before we have defined social learning as the way through which individuals shape their identity in collective identities. This social learning can be operated through persuasive methods (Checkel J.T 2001,2: 222). This assertion, as we will see, is very important for the formation of a far-right identity and for the success of FRP.

Before to test these social constructivist issues against the case studies, in the next section of this chapter I will focus on the construction of ‘collective identities’ proposed by Far-Right parties. The perspective forwarded in this thesis is that the dynamics of identity and boundaries formation of the community are intrinsically intertwined. Indeed, I agree with Eric Clark and Bo Petersson when they argue that ‘the identity dynamics of the communities, regardless of scale, and regardless also of whether they are territorial or non-territorial in character, have to be seen as inseparable from boundary issues’ (Clark E. and Pettersson Bo, 2003: 9-10). So, an essential importance will be given in chapter five to the discourses through which political actors and specifically the ‘party elites’ of LN and FN-AS express their vision about collective identities and boundaries, intended as a special metaphor for the actor’s categorization of the line between who is In and who is Out of the community.

3.2 Boundaries and symbolic resources in the process of construction of collective identities⁶

Identity is increasingly challenged in an age of globalization. According to Eric Clark and Bo Petereson ‘increased flows over national borders, accelerating tempos of exchange, increased mobility and the potentials of new technologies contribute to leaving nation states in limbo, squeezed between globalization and supra-national regionalization (e.g. EU) from above, and sub-national and trans-national regionalization and strengthened local identities from below’. (Clark E. and Peterson Bo, 2003: 8). This accentuates the need to study different kinds of collective identity formations.

As I was saying before, communities referred to as ‘nations’ are socially constructed. An interesting line of inquiry, as Oliver Zimmer defines it, concerns the mechanisms and the discursive cultural patterns that have conditioned the definition of collective identities and more generally national identities (Zimmer O. 2003: 173). In the attempt to discover how far-right parties interpret and use

⁶ The structure and the ideas of the scheme representing boundary mechanisms and symbolic resources that I will use for the analysis of the construction of collective identities proposed by the two far right parties object of my thesis are taken mostly from a work of Oliver Zimmer: ‘Boundary mechanisms and symbolic resources: towards a process-oriented approach to national identity’, in ‘Nations and Nationalism’ 9(2), 2003, 173-193.

these notions of identity based on communitarian and national issues, a good starting point is to build a scheme through which is possible to classify these constructed identities on the base of boundary mechanisms and symbolic resources.

A dichotomy operated by Zimmer that will help me to define my analysis is between the concepts of ‘civic’ and ‘ethnic’ nationhood. The civic conception derives its legitimacy and internal cohesion from a voluntary subscription to a set of political principles and institutions. In sharp contrast, ethnic nationhood is founded in a self-identity determined by ‘natural’ factors such as language or ethnic descent (Ibidem: 174). Consequently, while civic nationhood is the idea of a deliberate human commitment, the ethnic one results from long-term cultural and historical evolution, where the ‘myth’ represent an important component.

Based on these assumptions, a framework where it is possible to associate the construction of collective identities defined in the discourses of the political parties with some specific variables is needed, in the attempt to discover which dynamic processes are involved in the definition of the construction of a far-right identity. On this level of analysis we have to distinguish between the mechanisms which political actors use to reconstruct the collective identity’s boundaries and on the other hand, the symbolic resources on which they draw when they reconstruct these boundaries. So, two boundary mechanisms result, differentiated in: voluntarist (civic) boundary mechanism, meaning that boundaries are built within a vision of collective identity that combines an emphasis on political values and institutions, and where not a particular emphasis is given to deterministic issues like history and ethnicity. The second one is an organic (ethnic) boundary mechanism, where organic stand for the opposite of a voluntarist conception of identity. Here a preoccupation for ethnic descent or geography reflects the conviction that a ‘purely constructed identity would be hopelessly underdetermined’ (Ibidem: 178-81).

Table 1. *Conceptions of nationhood*

<i>Mechanism</i>	<i>Logic</i>	<i>Focus</i>
Voluntarist	Constructivist	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • community of law • state institutions • modernity • political culture • community of native culture
Organic	Deterministic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pre-modernity • ethnic descent • geography

Source: Zimmer O. 2003

At the same time a distinction between four symbolic resources is done: political values/institutions, culture, history and geography. ‘These cultural resources provide the symbolic raw material which the political parties use as they define their political issues in public discourses’ (Ibidem: 180).

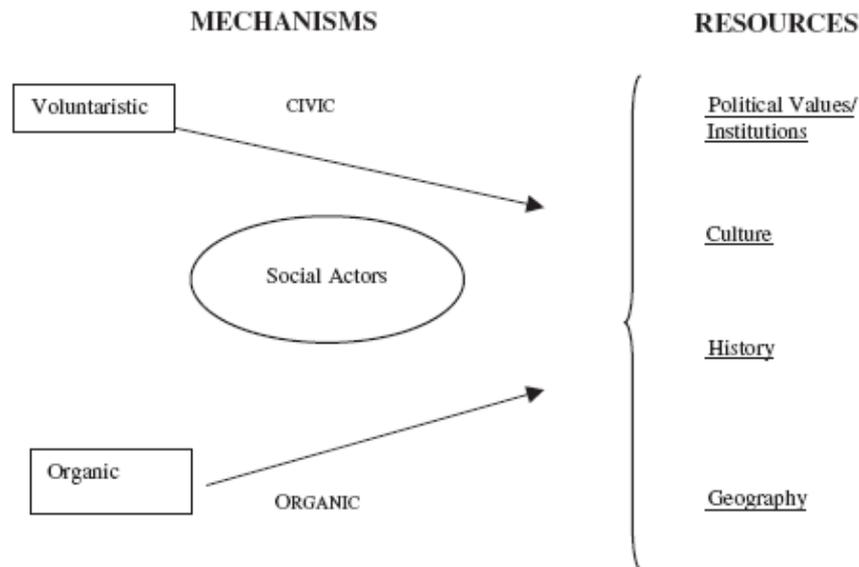


Figure 1. Boundary mechanisms and symbolic resources

Source: Zimmer O. 2003

The evidence that I want to focus on applying this mechanism of identity formation for the construction of far-right identities is that what matters with regard to the construction of collective and national identities is ‘less what resources political actors draw upon than how they put these resources to practical use’ (Ibidem: 181). An investigation of what I have stated now will be given in the 5th chapter of this thesis through the empirical analysis of LN and FN-AS’s discourses and political programmes.

4 Contemporary Far-Right parties in Italy: the cases of Lega Nord and Forza Nuova-Alternativa Sociale

Before to analyze empirically the two cases in order to focus on the ‘collective identities’ constructed through discourses and programmes, I will here start with an historical introduction of Lega Nord and Forza Nuova-Alternativa Sociale, needed to create the basis for the future analysis. I will focus on some chronological important steps that have been accomplished by these political actors in order to gain visibility at the national and international (European) level.

4.1 The naissance of Lega Nord

This party was created in 1991, out of the amalgamation of several regional leagues in the North of Italy: the main two were the Lombard League (Lega Lombarda) and the Venetian League (Lega Veneta); Umberto Bossi is the historical leader of LN (Giordano B. 2002: 170). The naissance of LN coincided with the resurgence of political regionalism in Europe, during the first years of the 1990s (Giordano B. 2000: 445).

For various reasons, between 1948 and 1994 the Christian Democrats⁷ (CD) had always won the elections in Italy, they earned a relative majority and maintained a strong position in every government. ‘During this period the only geographical term that has been constantly present in the Italian political vocabulary since Unification was ‘*Mezzogiorno*’ (Eva F. 1999: 103), that represents the south of Italy, an area in which social problems and economic backwardness are more diffused than in the central and northern parts of the country. Using the words of Fabrizio Eva, ‘the end of the ideological confrontation between the East and the West, the corruption trials of 1992-1993⁸, the economic and social changes of the 80s, and the presence of a political alternative in the autonomous northern leagues were the main causes of the unprecedented and massive shift in voters’ affection’ (Ibidem: 103).

⁷ Democrazia Cristiana (DC) is the name of this party in Italian

⁸ ‘Scandalo Mani Pulite’ (clean hands) is the Italian term referring to the corruption trials of 1992-1993, which destroyed the credibility of the government parties at the national and local level.

With the fact that the credibility of the major parties, mostly the DC, involved in the political scenario for more than forty years has disappeared, many voters started to look for alternatives: in 1989 the Lega Nord had one senator and one deputy. In 1992 the members of the parliament in the low and in the high chamber were a dozen (Ibidem: 103). As a result, with Lega Nord 'also in areas without ethnic or linguistic minorities, voters have been given choices more directly linked to individual and/or local interests, in other words, choices which can be more readily understood by a large portion of Italian voters, who in general are ill-prepared and uninterested in the political process' (Eva F. 1997: 62). Two were the main beliefs under which LN build its political concerns: the first was the focus on the criticism on the Italian central state and political institutions, the second was about the economic situation of the country. That is to say: while the North was productive, the rest of the country, especially the South, were taking advantage of the Northern Italian workers (Huyseune M. 2000: 591-94). Another important issue that has always distinguished LN together with the resentment against southern Italians and the central institutions of the country has been the aversion against immigrants fro outside the EU (Giordano B: 2002).

Facts like the inefficiency of a bureaucratic state, together with the corruption scandals mentioned before 'have encouraged citizens, mainly from the north of Italy, to seek a means whereby they will feel more represented, while at the same time protesting against the present powers' (Eva F.1997:62).

At the beginning of its political involvement, LN proposed a federal politic project for Italy, based on the assumption that there were three different 'societies': the North, the Centre, and the South, which were defined largely by socio-economic differences. 'The LN used the territorial reference to the North as an effective way of representing and integrating the problems and protests of the diverse social sectors within the North of Italy: this allowed the north to be played of against Rome, the central institutions and the traditional political parties' (Giordano B. 2002: 172).

LN became part of the centre-right government coalition, which gained a majority in the 1994 Italian election. The name of this coalition was 'the Freedom Pole'⁹, and was led by Silvio Berlusconi's FI as well as Gianfranco Fini's AN parties (Giordano B. 2000: 455). After few months, it quickly became clear that LN suffered badly within this alliance. The clearest example of the diversity of visions was with AN, which favoured a strong central Italian State and no regional autonomy (Ibidem: 456).

Due to these problems, LN abandoned the coalition and rethought its federalist rhetoric in favour of a hard-line discourse of secession and independence of 'Padania' from the rest of Italy. The change of direction of LN political discourse became obvious in the national election of April 1996, where the party presented the vote for a hypothetical referendum in which the people should have voted for the independence of this new fictional state in the North of Italy. The result was

9 'Polo delle liberta' in Italian

greater than any prediction, over 90 parliamentarians and about 4 millions of votes (Ibidem: 456), corresponding to the 10.1% of the electorate.

4.2 The ‘Padanian’ nationalist project of LN

The so called founding of the nation ‘Padania’ has had two important major effects: greater diffusion, not only among the supporters of the LN of a sense of belonging to the North and the re-evaluation of territory as a subject that is source of policies. That is to say: the re-evaluation of a specific territory as a political subject (Eva F. 1999: 104-05). The peculiarities of LN’s nationalism, according to Damian Tambini, may rely on the context in which it has developed, ‘a context which further undermines those classical nationalist assumptions’. In fact, Tambini says: ‘because of technological changes, globalization and post-modernization, the contemporary state no longer has the same relation to culture, and this undermine some of the fundamental sources of its legitimacy’ (Tambini D. 1996: 1-2).

The main issue of the LN communication strategy, as I will try to demonstrate later, ‘has been the undermining and questioning of existing definitions of identity and interests: northern history, dialect, race, culture and, above all, its supposed work ethic have been celebrated in an attempt to raise consciousness of a Padanian identity’ (Ibidem: 2). The declaration of independence has been accompanied by a proposal for a new constitution, and the party also changed its name in ‘*Lega Nord per l’indipendenza della Padania*’¹⁰. The main thrust was the fact that Italy should have been divided into two separate states: in the North and in the Centre the party settled the creation of the ‘Padanian state which was vaguely defined and represented a common set of cultural values that distinguish it and its people from the rest of the country and from the notion of Italian Identity’. In addition the party developed a set of ‘Padanian Institutions such as a Parliament and a Government as well as its own army: the so-called Padanian National Guard’¹¹ (Giordano B. 2002: 177-78).

Anyhow, despite the initial success, support for LN has declined rapidly since the party’s choice for a more radical, secessionist stance (Ibidem: 173). Although the movement had still support especially in the areas of Lombardy and Veneto, probably many LN voters supported secession more as a strategic threat to ensure that their demands for reform¹² were met (Tambini D 1996: 1). Once the LN understood its impossibility to prosecute its political programmes through radical

10 ‘Northern League for the independence of Padania’ in English.

11 ‘Guardia Nazionale Padana’ in Italian, most commonly referred as to ‘Camicie Verdi’ (green shirts) or ‘Esercito dell Sorriso’ (Smiling Army), which, according to the party’s elite, should be responsible for the defense of Padania.

¹² Devolution of power to the regions and federalism

statements as the secessionist hypothesis, due to the loss of votes¹³ after the first spontaneous success of the idea of a nation (Padania) in the nation (Italy), a new alliance with the Berlusconi's coalition has been built again. This alliance still continues nowadays. The themes that LN is now focusing on are based on the old proposals for reforms like federalism, decentralization and devolution of power for the regions (Giordano B 2002: 174). Even the logo of the party has been modified and from 'Lega Nord per l'indipendenza della Padania' has been transformed in 'Lega Nord – Padania', stating a new moderation of the political programmes of this party.

4.3 The naissance of 'Forza Nuova' and of the recent coalition 'Alternativa Sociale'

The first years of the 90's correspond with a new phase for the extreme right in Italy. Due to the disappearance of a united 'extreme-right' block that was impersonalised by the MSI, we have assisted to the formation of a discrete number of different small extreme-right groups. This new phase was characterized by two considerable events: the reappearance in the national scene of some individuals that had important roles in the black terrorism of the 60's and 70's like Franco Freda and Stefano Delle Chiaie¹⁴ and the appearance even if a bit later than in other European countries of the political movement of the 'Bone-Heads' (*Umanita' Nova*, 2000: 1).

After the '*Svolta di Fiuggi*' mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis, despite the attempt to build the MSI again by Pino Rauti, the new party, re-called MSI-Fiamma Tricolore¹⁵, has not been able to create the stage for a new extreme right strong pole, due to the difficulties to chose between a new hard line political involvement or a political commitment with a more moderated approach (Ibidem: 2-4).

It is in this uncertainty that in 1997 Roberto Fiore and Domenico Morsello¹⁶ founded Forza Nuova after a short incubation in Fiamma Tricolore (Ibidem: 1-2).

¹³ From 40% to 15% in the local elections of 1997 and from 6% to 4.5% in the EU elections in 1999 (Giordano B 2002:173)

¹⁴The historical leaders of the terrorist movements 'Ordine Nuovo' and 'Avanguardia Nazionale'.

¹⁵ Literary in Italian: 'Social Italian Movement- Tri-coloured Flame'

¹⁶ They both have been suspected to be terrorists in the 60's and 70's and condemned. It is for this reason that they escaped in UK and came back in Italy only in 1996, Fiore for prescription, Morsello for health's problems.

4.4 FN: ‘New Force, Old Fascists’

The level of ideological and political elaboration of FN is quite elementary. This program, defined ‘for the national reconstruction’¹⁷ is articulated in a few points (Ferrari S. and Boscarello W. 2000: 1). They are in favor of the family, the catholic traditions and demographic growth; they are against abortion and immigration. They are then in favor for the formation of corporations for the defense of the workers and the national community¹⁸. It is evident from these main points the research for the support from the sectors of catholic integralism by one side, and the use of ‘easy methods such as racial intolerance and xenophobia for the conquest of political space’ (Ferrari S. and Boscarello W. 2000: 1-2).

FN nowadays is expanded in all the regions of the country, and several sections are continually opening also in zones where the support for the right is not very high for historical reasons, like in the Central Italy, where the communist parties and the radical left in general have always been very strong. An extended presence of FN is generally in the north of the country and specifically in the North-East, but also in Southern Region like Puglia (Nuova Alabarda, 2000: 8).

Xenophobia, racism, disrespect for the right of the minorities, defense of the traditional family and integral Catholicism, all together with anti-Semitism and a clear and open recall to the past regime are the main peculiarities of FN as a political party, connected in Europe with other far-right groups as the Austrian FPO led by Jorg Haider, the Front National Francais led by Jean Marie Le Pen and the German NPD, as the most relevant (Ibidem: 14). Also with LN, despite the diversity of their political identities there is a common vision against the same enemy: the left winged coalitions of the Italian political scene and the immigrants from outside the EU. This good relationship between FN and LN has been manifested also through meeting and manifestations with common European friends, like Jorg Haider’s FPO (Ibidem: 20).

Throughout these years, despite the presence in all the country and especially in some regions, FN has never been particularly successful during the election times. The party lacked a real political ethic and most of their efforts were focused on street levels: the hooligans that we find in the Italian stadiums and other uneducated people have been the social groups most easily recruited¹⁹ (Ferrari S. and Boscarello W. 2000: 3). Furthermore, violent acts and anti-Semitic offenses have been manifested by the components of this party through attacks against immigrants and damages to Synagogues and Mosques. Many musical groups

17 ‘Per la ricostruzione nazionale’ literary in Italian.

18 Operative program of Forza Nuova, available at FN internet site: www.forzanuova.org/punti_fermi.htm

19 This phenomenon is manifested not only among the supporters of big clubs, but also in minor leagues and in small-medium cities. In all the country is possible to see the raise of FN’s political involvement through the use of political propaganda in the nearby of the stadiums during sport events.

linked to this movement have tried to influence young cultures with racist alternative music²⁰. The Medias, anyway, have always paid attention to make these incidents known by the public opinion (Ibidem: 4).

A new important political step has been accomplished by FN at the moment of the co-foundation, with Alessandra Mussolini and another small far-right party compared to FN, called Fronte Nazionale, of a new political coalition.

Alternativa Sociale is the name of this new group, and as we will see, it acquired immediately a new importance and a new strength in the political scenario, especially in the attempt to re-build a new far-right unified block.

4.5 The naissance of Alternativa Sociale. A third Pole?

Alternativa Sociale is the political coalition born under the leadership of Alessandra Mussolini in 2004²¹. Grand-daughter of the leader of the old fascist regime, she has been member of Alleanza Nazionale, the right party led by Gianfranco Fini, born in consequence of the dissolution of the MSI.

The motivations that brought Alessandra Mussolini to break with AN are to be found on the fact that Fini, during a visit in Israel, defined the former Italian fascist experience as the ‘evil of the XX century’²². A few months after she abandoned AN, she founded Alternativa Sociale with FN, the party that brought the biggest quantity of votes and supporters together with more than seven years of political experience as an extreme right party.

The vital role that FN, the real political fulcrum of the coalition, has in the formation of this new group, that represent an attempt to build again a stable and unitary far-right block under the leadership of a charismatic leader with a recognized political experience as Alessandra Mussolini, is obvious if we look at the program of AS²³, where the focus is on issues like the defense of the national identity, a xenophobic approach against immigrants from outside the EU and the defense of the family as the basis of the society. Another important issue that is contained in the older program of FN, like the defense of Christianity, considered as one of the historical root of Italy and Europe is very important in the program of AS.

20 Some of these musical groups propose texts that are absolutely racist and anti-Semitic, their names usually are taken from the old Fascist nomenclature and from the ancient myths of the nation, like the Roman Empire or Latin in general: an example is the group ‘Gesta Bellica’ linked with the FN section of the city of Verona, in the North-East of the country. The meaning of this name is literary, in Latin: ‘Acts of War’.

21 www.alternativasociale.org

22 www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alessandra_Mussolini

23 For access to the political program of Alternativa Sociale visit the internet site: www.alternativasociale.org or go to [www.azionesociale.net:8080/index.php?option=com.content&task:view&id:16&Itemid:32](http://www.azionesociale.net:8080/index.php?option=com.content&task=view&id:16&Itemid:32)

Despite few months since its foundation, AS did its first debut in the political elections for the European Parliament in June 2004²⁴. Alessandra Mussolini has been elected in the European Parliament in the 'Non Attached parliamentary group'. The result can be considered really positive for such a young formation, and a new question mark for the future arise at this time, regarding the possibility, as it seems like, to assist to the possibility to re-build again a new strong and successful extreme-right coalition after the experience of MSI, from 1946 to 1991.

24 AS, in the European elections of 2004 gained 398.036 votes with the 1.2 of the sharing. This result gave the right for one seat at the European Parliament. Statistics and numerical data can be found at: www.it.wikipedia.org/wiki/alternativa_sociale/risultati_elettorali

5 The analysis of Far-Right identities in Italy

In the 3rd chapter of this thesis, I have proposed a social constructivist approach for the study of identity formation. The next step to do is to evaluate this model of analysis against the two case studies, in order to understand how a far-right identity is formed and what the differences among the two cases in consideration.

Particular attention will be given to the concept of the ‘relevant Other’ in order to explain the formation of collective identities as results from the discourses of the political actors. I will concentrate also on the figure of the charismatic leader as an important issue defining the spread of LN and AS Far-Right identities.

But before to consider the formation of far-right identities, another important step needs to be done: I will operate an ideological classification, using the definitions of political ideologies that I have explained in the second chapter of this thesis, in order to clarify under which particular side of the Far-Right spectrum LN and FN-AS fall.

5.1 The ideological classification of LN and FN-AS

Beginning with the classification of Lega Nord, it clearly results that this party fits entirely the definition of a Neo Populist party typology, and consequently should be categorized as radical-right and not extreme right, due to the fact that there is a clear acceptance of democracy, it is not corporatist and its political mobilization is not based upon extra parliamentary violence. The assumption mentioned in the second chapter of this thesis, that a Neo-populist party reject the principle of individual and social equality by promoting socio-economic and political frameworks that foster or accentuate individual or social inequality, is clear in LN, in the attempt to defend northern Italian people interests against the centrality of the Italian state. Even if there have been attempts to change the structure of the system, the effort to do that in a democratic way has been clear: the case of the democratic referendum for the secession of Padania and for the transformation of the ‘status quo’ of the Italian politics are best examples.

LN fits entirely in a neo-populist category also for the fact that Bossi represents the incarnation of Max Weber’s ideal type of the charismatic leader: from the outside Bossi may not be viewed as charismatic, and in-fact due to its particular use of words and expressions, based on spontaneous, sometimes rude and not conventional political vocabulary, doesn’t resemble the typical political leader, but according to his followers, he possess charisma and speaks for their

interests (Zaslave A. 2004, 1: 71). LN can be then classified as xenophobic, but not 'racist', as an article of their party statute claims²⁵.

On the other hand, the ideological position of Forza Nuova-Alternativa Sociale results more difficult to classify due to the sequent reasons: first of all this coalition has a more extreme character compared to LN, their vision of the relevant Other is more racist and based on a strict ethnic conception of identity. Their link with the past fascist regime results obvious for the fact that there is a persistent recall to fascist issues concerning the cultural nationalism and the attempt to protect an authentic and pure national culture.

Due to the fact that in Italy it is forbidden for a political party to refer to fascist principles, for the fact that an attempt to re-create the Fascist party is unconstitutional, as the Law '20 June 1952' states, there is no mention in the political program of FN- AS of a clear resurgence of a literal fascist dogma. This doesn't mean that it is impossible to un-mask the fact that they have never repudiated their fascist inheritance that is manifested in their public acts such as commemorations of the important dates of the fascist regime for instance, and public manifestations as the one for the 'Marcia su Roma'²⁶(Ferrari S. and Boscarello W. 2000: 6-7). Even the fact that Alessandra Mussolini has abandoned her former party AN after the speech of the party premier Fini in Israel, when he defined Fascism as the 'evil of the XX century', can be understood as a clear explanation of the party's recall to the precedent regime and its ideology.

As I was arguing in the second chapter of this thesis, it is difficult to categorize far-right parties' ideologies in a pre-definite and clear classification. Looking at the example of FN-AS, it clearly results a nostalgic conception of the 'old regime'²⁷, but they are also populists, as some of their political principles shows²⁸ (Nuova Alabarda 2000: 1-6). The idea to divide the Far-Right spectrum in Radical-Right and Extreme-Right in the second chapter is the solution for a more general ideological classification of LN and FN-AS. Before, I have associated pronounced neo-populist parties as radical-right parties. Lega Nord fits very well in this categorization. On the other hand, regarding the case of FN-AS, even if there is not a declared attack to the democratic aspects of the contemporary society in their statutes, as I showed, a total neglect of fascism is absent either, so I classify this party as an extreme-right one.

25 For the statute of LN go to: www.leganord.org/ilmovimento/lega_nord_statuto.pdf (In Italian)

26 Marcia su Roma, in English literary: 'The march on Rome' is the definition through which Mussolini and the members of the 'Fasci da combattimento' took the power the 28 ottobre 1922'

27 Even their economic issues are based on corporative and protectionist assumptions (Nuova Alabarda 2000: 1-6)

28 Some of their campaigns, for example (in Italian): 'La befana tricolore; Compra Italiano; Associazione Italica' are all populist policies proposed for the protection of the community.

5.2 The analysis of Far-Right Identities' social construction in Italy

At the beginning of section 2 of the third chapter of this thesis, I mentioned that social ideas mobilize social groups and create actors, their interests their goals, but actors also shape their institutional and ideational environment: structures (societies) result as multifaceted, covering almost any environmental or contextual feature that might shape, enable or constrain collective action (Green D.M. 2002: 18-22).

The fundamental insight is the mutual constitutiveness of social structures and agents: the social environment in which we find our self, defines our self, our identities as social beings (Risse T. 2004: 160-61). Individuals and society result thus mutually co-constituted, in a continuous cycle of interactions. The individual's identity can influence the society; consequently the society shapes the identity of the individuals.

Departing from the individual as the starting point on which identity is created, in the attempt to apply the developed theory for identity formation to Far Right identities in Italy, we can assume that an individual's far-right identity is shaped 'a priori' by the fact that the he or she lives in an environment in which there is a long tradition for the support of far-right ideologies. Applying this assumption to our case, the history of this country (Italy) says that a long tradition of supporting far-right ideologies exists since the naissance of the nation: in the case of the north of Italy this assumption can be even more felt, if we think about the fact that in this area we have assisted to the resistance of Fascism after 1943 through the construction of the Fascist Social Republic of Salo' mentioned in the introduction of this thesis. Consequently Far-Right identities in Italy have an historical foundation. The individuals, combining their social (Far-Right) identities in the community, at the society level, form social groups on the basis of shared ideas and interests, like culture, history or political identity in our case, influencing the society.

FN-AS and LN being Italian FRP confirm this point. The spread of LN's Far-Right identity can be defined as a total success, while for FN-AS the success, despite relative for the motivation that I will explain later, it has been the ability to coagulate the part of the Italian population that still recognize itself in a Far-Right identity that can be co-related to a nostalgia for the former fascist experience, embedded in the individuals' family tradition and local tradition of supporting fascism. The fact that AS represents an attempt to re-build a strong and unitary coalition as the one experienced before with the MSI with a charismatic guide as Mussolini is one of the factors that has brought this coalition to raise even more consensus.

I spoke about a relative success for the fact that in Italy, since the end of WWII, a party that explicitly refer to fascism, even if in indirect ways as I explained before, in any case is less likely to be accepted as legitimate by the general public opinion, consequently FN-AS is followed by less people compared

to a party like LN where this 'extreme' nostalgic connotation is less felt and its identity has always been characterized by 'softer' issues like the insistence on economic interests.

I have analyzed until now the process through which the individuals can affect the society. On the other side, the society influences the individuals and social groups' identities through the feeling of belonging to a specific community (the national community for example).

The communitarian identity tend to define itself on the basis of a set of ideas to which members can relate, and that can be expressed directly in their discourses, in the ways of interacting and communicating and indirectly through the application of common symbols, codes or signs. The function of these ideas is to define the social groups as an entity which is distinct from other social groups and the members thereby perceive that they have something in common on the basis of which they form a community (Marcussen M., Risse T., et All, 2001: 102-103). The presence of the 'other' shapes the identity of a specific collectivity. Applying this issue to the role Far-Right Parties, the 'Other' in their discourses results new and negative for the society: immigrants are considered the 'other' in their vision. They do not share the same culture, religion, history and race: they consequently represent the Out-group. The immigrants from outside the EU for FN-AS but also southern Italians for LN are the 'relevant Other'. The process of 'othering' is important in the study of FRP, because is the topic that defines the idea of a shared collective identity in this framework.

Before I argued, using the words of Hall, that when we are in front of a radical change within the society and new self-images are developed, diverging from the dominant forms of the collective sharing, it is in this moment that we can assist to a change and subsequently to a legitimization crisis that can result in a social transformation (Hall R.B. 2002). Looking at the Italian case, it clearly results that both FN-AS and LN have been able to raise consensus due to the fact that they insisted on issues like the change of the society where the presence of the 'other' has put the community in a new inconvenient situation. According to Chekel, when the individuals found themselves in a new environment, where the new environment represents the society that has changed, they are more open to new information (Chekel J.T 2001: 222). Both LN and FN-AS have insisted on the fact that the society has changed. This issue has brought to the spread of LN and FN-AS Far-Right identities. For LN there is another fact to underline. Together with the problem of the presence of the 'other' from outside the EU and the differences that distinguish Northern from Southern Italians, another fact has changed the society and consequently brought new people to follow LN: the earth-quake that hit the Italian political scene with the corruption trials of 1992-1993. This political crisis brought to the raise of a political alternative detected in the autonomous Lega Nord²⁹.

29 In Italy this political scandal brought to the definition of: 'Fine della prima repubblica', literary in English: 'End of the first republic'. This definition is used in order to explain the conclusion of a political Era.

The last thing to add is the condition under which identity changes can occur: social learning is the process where interests and identities are shaped through interaction. Social learning occurs better when a persuasive method is operated by a communicator in the attempt to convince the audience (Chekel J.T 2001, 2: 222). The leaders of the two parties confirm this point: Umberto Bossi can be considered the typical neo-populist leader, charismatic and persuasive. His ability to appear as an ordinary person, differentiating him-self from the rest of the politicians in Italy has helped him to persuade voters. Regarding the FN case, until the creation of a stronger coalition (AS), Roberto Fiore, one of the founders of the movement, didn't possess the personality of a charismatic leader. The situation has changed when Alessandra Mussolini took the leadership of Alternativa-Sociale: she has always been considered to be an intelligent woman with political experience and she has demonstrated to be able to communicate in front of the audience³⁰. Secondly, she has a charismatic surname: this detail has been probably one of the factors that have concurred to raise votes for AS. When the people assisted to the attempt of re-building a new strong Far-right coalition under the leadership of a charismatic name like the one of A. Mussolini, consensus has increased. Both Bossi and Mussolini, possess the necessary charisma and ability to operate a social change and to bring electors within a Far-Right identity through a FRP.

Applying these social constructivist issues in the attempt to create a model of analysis, regarding the formation of Far Right identities, I have explained the motivations that brought to the appearance of two FRP as LN and FN-AS in Italy. Both the two study cases, as we have seen, confirm the (social-constructivist) theory used to explain the process of Far-Right identity's formation in Italy.

The analysis of LN and FN-AS political discourses about the establishment of the boundaries of the community is the instrument that will help me to understand their conceptions and differences on the construction of a 'shared collective identity', where the concept of the 'Relevant Other' has an essential importance.

5.3 Discourse analysis and the establishment of boundaries between the 'Own community' and the 'relevant other'

As Christiansen argues, 'if the study of identity formation is accepted as a key component of constructivist research, the role of language and discourses becomes crucial' (Christiansen et al, 2001: 15). Departing from the social constructivist assumption that the society influence the individuals and social groups through the feeling of belonging to a community and using the scheme

³⁰ See: www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alessandra_Mussolini , for more information about A. Mussolini

proposed by Zimmer and described in the 3rd chapter of this thesis, my aim is to focus on the discursive strategies of the two Italian far-right groups regarding the formation of collective identities. I will do that distinguishing between the mechanisms which political actors use to define the community through boundaries and on the other hand, the symbolic resources on which they formulate the idea of collective identity³¹.

The two boundary mechanisms result differentiated in: voluntarist (civic) boundary mechanism, meaning that boundaries are built within a vision of community that combines an emphasis on political values and political institutions, and where not a particular emphasis is given to deterministic issues like history and ethnicity. The second one is an organic (ethnic) boundary mechanism, where organic stand for the opposite of a voluntarist conception, in-fact a preoccupation for ethnic descent or geography reflects the conviction that a 'purely constructed identity would be hopelessly underdetermined' (Zimmer O. 2003).

The result that I want to show analyzing the political discourses of FN-AS and LN is that while the former has always proposed an organic (ethnic) approach regarding the construction of a collective identity, based on symbolic resources such as ethnic descent, geography, history and national culture³², for LN the situation is different. The first political experience of LN is in-fact characterized by a clear voluntarist or civic mechanism, based on political values and institutions such as federalism and regional devolution. Something has changed with the attempt to create a 'Padanian community'. After 1995 LN changed its political assumptions and consequently the political discourses about the construction of a new 'national' communitarian identity based on invented historical, geographical, linguistic and cultural issues. My aim here is to highlight a clear contradiction which is at the very core of LN's political propaganda.

'The ability of the party to modify its rhetoric, as well as the way it communicates its political messages in order to take advantage of the political situation, have been crucial to the success of the party' (Giordano B. 2002: 174). The fundamental project has remained upon this essential element: the hostility towards Southern Italians as the 'other' and towards the central Italian state (Ibidem: 175). Anyway, the first LN's discourses are not about ethnic but civic

31 See Chapter 3, section 2 of this thesis.

32 FN-AS has always described the notions of 'own community' in a strict ethnic way: in this case a big role in defining the collective identity has been played by history, culture and religion. The Italian society is different from the others in a racial conception; consequently immigrants don't belong to the community for ethnic reasons, because they have a different race, different religion, they don't share the same national history. As I will show in the 'future research' of the conclusion, FN-AS through a set of alliance with other European far-right parties, is very aware even on the aspect of the construction of a European Identity. The discussion about who should be included in the European collectivity and where the boundaries of Europe should be situated, represent a new important set of analysis. The entrance of Turkey in Europe is the main discussed issue nowadays by these political parties. The response is an absolute refuse to the entrance of people that don't share the same religion and history. For detailed information about these issues look at the FN's internet site: www.forzanuova.org/pag_no_turchia.htm

differentiation: southern people were not seen different from the northern for ethnic reasons or for a different culture. The motivations that brought LN to differentiate Northern Italians from the rest of the Italians were just economic. The idea was in-fact to differentiate each other (North vs. Other: the rest of the country) giving more autonomy to northern regions: a regional identity based on political values like the political and administrative devolution to the regions was the goal for the creation of a northern collective identity based on work-ethic.

After 1995, it clearly resulted that LN changed its political assumptions, and consequently its discursive strategies: from a 'voluntarist' regional collective identity based on political values like federalism and devolution to an 'organic' Padanian nationalism, where the attempt was to create a Northern collective identity differentiated from Southern-Italians on the base of ethnic, linguistic and geographic issues. (I specify here that against immigrants from outside the EU living in Italy, there has always been a clear ethnic contraposition based on cultural and religious conceptions, similarly as in the case of FN-AS).

The contradiction mentioned before is that in order to propose a common national identity, LN shaped its voluntaristic approach in an ethnic one (Fremaux I and Albertazzi D. 2002: 148), but, according to Diamanti, 'Padania is really an invention which does not have any historical roots or a common identity' (Diamanti in Giordano B 2000: 466). Clearly, Bossi's aim has been to develop a common identity around which the North of Italy could be unified, but the regions included in Padania have not the same history, culture or language. Also the geographical borders of this supposed nation are unclear, due to the uncertainty to consider some regions of the Centre of Italy (Toscana, Emilia Romagna, Marche and Umbria) sharing the same roots of the North. Consequently there has never been transparency about the fact to consider these regions to be included or excluded from the secession's project. Even between the northern regions there are many differences, the only common identity, as Giordano argues, is derived from similar socio-economic values and attitudes (Giordano B. 2000: 467). Bossi, in the attempt to form a nation departing from the assumption that a purely constructed identity with just an emphasis on political issues³³ would have been hopelessly underdetermined for the creation of 'Padania', tried to fix common historical, cultural and geographical roots³⁴ (Voutat B. 2000: 289-91). This attempt to shape (invented) historical and cultural identities for the people of the North, in my opinion increased rather than decreased the under-determination of a Northern identity based on ethnic issues³⁵.

Once it was clear that Northern people would have not followed LN's ideas of 'secession', the party started to lose the initial electoral consensus (Giordano B

33 Devolution of political power to the regions and federalism, in order to protect the economic power of the North.

³⁴ For example: a 'supposed' similarity in the dialects, and a common barbarian origin (Eva F. 1997: 63)

³⁵ In-fact not even before the creation of the Italian state in 1861 this area has shared the same history: the North –West was under the French domination for several decades, while Lombardy belonged to the Austrian Empire. The North-East (Veneto, Friuli Venezia Giulia, Trentino) has a long tradition as a national independent state: the 'Serenissima Repubblica di Venezia'

2002: 173), consequently LN re-oriented its strategies and discourses, returning to the field of the old allies and insisting on more suitable objectives like the administrative devolution for the regions of the North. In fact, many LN's voters supported secession as a 'strategic' threat in order to ensure that their demands for reform were met: the real objectives were fiscal reforms and federalism. At the end, it clearly resulted that the majority of LN's audience didn't recognize itself in the ethnic 'national' Northern identity publicized by the party, due to the lack of these supposed common history, language and cultures. As Giordano argues: Lega Nord's 'political rhetoric seemed less and less appropriate' (Ibidem:173).

The result that I wanted to achieve is to show that the discursive strategies of LN have changed in order to preserve consensus: from a regional identity based on 'civic' symbolic resources and values to a 'neo-ethnic' national identity and then again back to a 'civic' regional identity once it was clear that LN's audience didn't recognize it-self in the definition of 'national Padanian identity' but rather in the 'regional Northern identity', where the main issue was to distinguish the North through a 'civic' differentiation from the rest of the nation, focusing on political values and institutions like Regions and political decentralization, in order to protect the similar economy, work ethic and political values of the 'community' felt to belong.

6 Conclusions

6.1 Summary

In this thesis I have analyzed the formation of Far-Right identities in Italy. This country, as I said before, represents an interesting case, due to the fact that we can find, first, a long tradition of Far Right experience, and secondly, because different contemporary far-right parties, departing from similar ideologies, arrive to propose different kinds of identities forged for the community. After having operated an ideological classification of contemporary Far-Right Parties, as a first step, I have built a social constructivist model of analysis to explain the formation of far-right identities in Italy. I have then tested this model against the case studies: the Far-Right groups FN-AS and LN. As a second step I have applied a theoretical discursive scheme in order to understand which symbolic resources these two political actors use for the construction of collective identities and the boundaries of the community. The results that I have obtained need to be investigated in a specific section.

6.2 Research Findings

Briefly, regarding the ideological classification of LN and FN-AS as FRP, it has been found out that FN-AS can be considered as Neo-Fascist and consequently classified as a contemporary extreme-right group, LN on the contrary resemble the typical neo-populist party; this assumption brought me to classify LN as a contemporary Radical-Right party.

Regarding the theory, departing from the social constructivist assumption of the mutual constitutiveness of social structure (society) and agents (individuals), the application of the model has shown that Far-Right identities in Italy take place for the sequent reasons: 1) the individual's far-right identity is shaped by the fact that the individual lives in an environment in which there is a long tradition for the support of far-right ideologies. Italy and even more the North of Italy confirm this assumption. 2) The society influences the individual and social groups' identities through the feeling of belonging to a specific community: the presence of the 'other' shapes the identity of the collectivity. The 'Relevant Other' are the immigrants from outside the European Community for FN-AS but also Southern Italians for LN. 3) When there is a radical change within the society and new self-

images are developed, FRP are able to persuade better the electors: the radical change begun when new people came in the society and started to be felt as different and negative for the economy and culture of the society. The radical change is also findable in the earth-quake that hit the Italian political scene with the corruption trials of 1992-1993. This political crisis brought to the raise of a political alternative detected in the autonomous Lega Nord. 4) The last theoretical assumption is that social learning occurs better when a persuasive method is operated by a communicator in the attempt to convince the voters: the leaders of the two parties confirm this point: Umberto Bossi can be considered as the typical neo-populist leader, charismatic and persuasive; on the other side, with the appearance of AS, the consensus raised thanks to Alessandra Mussolini, a charismatic woman with a charismatic surname that took the leadership of the coalition.

Both the two case studies, as we have seen, confirm the theory used to explain and describe the process of Far-Right identity formation in Italy. While for LN we can speak of a complete success, in any case for FN-AS the success is relative, due to the fact that an extreme right (neo-fascist) party is less likely to be approved than a radical-right (neo-populist) one by the majority of Far-Right supporters, due also to the influence of the public opinion. Anyway, the creation after many years of a new united coalition like AS has raised the consensus.

Regarding the discursive scheme that I have built in order to understand which symbolic resources and discursive strategies these two political actors used to construct collective identities and the boundaries of the community, the interesting result is that while FN-AS has always defined a collective Italian identity based on ethnic conceptions, using always the same cultural resources of religion, geography, race, on the other hand LN has changed its discursive strategies in order to attract its audience. Once it clearly resulted that LN's audience didn't recognize itself in the ethnic national 'Padanian' identity proposed by the party after 1995 but felt recognized more in the regional identity of the North based on civic symbolic resources like the political and economic values of federalism and the devolution of power to the regions, LN changed its discursive strategies again in order to re-achieve consensus.

6.3 Future Research

In the future, a theory explaining the formation of Far-Right identities not only at the national but also at the European level would seem necessary. European Far-Right parties are already now starting to discuss about a European common identity, despite a real European identity is still far to be shaped. In this context, the possible future accession of Turkey (the Relevant Other) in the EU is already offering some new interesting question marks and relative discussions.

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