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The political uses of identity an enthnography of the northern league

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The Political Uses of Identity:
An Ethnography of the Northern
League

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Abstract

This is a thesis about the Northern League (*Lega Nord*), a regionalist and nationalist party that rose to prominence during the last three decades in the north of Italy Throughout this period the Northern League developed from a peripheral and protest movement, into an important government force. In the last political elections (April 2008) the Northern League gained more than 20% of the votes in the North, guaranteeing in this a way an important role in the new conservative coalition guided by Silvio Berlusconi. In particular, I set out to explore the ways in which the *Lega* press for the construction of a northern national identity and offer this as a case study through which we might further our understanding of the social and political uses of identity in the context of modern Europe.

The success of the Northern League has been largely explained, up until now, in terms of its capacity to represent, politically, the material conflicts between the industrialized but politically peripheral North and the central state. For this reason, the League's attempts to reconstruct a local ethnic identity and later on the creation and imagination of a northern nation (Padania) has been mainly analysed as a rational and pragmatic invention, used as part of the struggle for political power. Such an approach, however, can overlook the extent to which non-material circumstances (habits, beliefs, social practices, and moral ideas) influence individuals' political choices. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork among Northern League activists in the region of Veneto, and more precisely in the provinces of Belluno and Treviso, these aspects were analysed in the following way. After establishing the historical and methodological context, I go on to consider the disaffection of the Northern League with the Italian state, its history and its institutions. I then investigate the Northern League's model of identity construction through the study of public ceremonies, political speeches, and ritual practices. I continue to draw on ethnographic fieldwork in order to make visible the relationship between the imagination of the Northern Identity and local social practices. I then go on to examine, at the micro level, a number of local economic practices and their connections with the League's ideology. The last chapter focuses on the role of gender, linking the self-representation of local men with the League's concept of authority.

I conclude that in order to understand the economy of identity, its production, exchange and circulation, identity has to be seen in the light of social actors' practices and direct experiences of everyday life. For this reason, I argue that *leghismo* ought to be understood not just as a subject of political representation, but also as a strategy through which local actors try to make sense of, and adapt to -- or more importantly *transform* -- their own social world.

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Introduction, Historical Background and Theoretical Issues

1.1 Introduction: A Traumatic Event

On 5th of July 2005 the President of Italy, Carlo Azeglio Ciampi was warmly welcomed in the European Parliament by the European Parliament President Josep Borrel. Ciampi was praised for his contribution to European construction and his "lucid passion for building Europe as a guarantor of peace, democracy and economic development." Noting the current period of disenchantment in Europe, Borrell welcomed President Ciampi's symbolic and timely presence. President Ciampi thanked the House and President Borrell for the warm and affectionate welcome in the "highest forum of European democracy." He began by saying that "Europe is not and cannot be just an economic free trade area. It is primarily a political area, a constitutional organism which links, complements and completes our own national constitutions." Ciampi warned against the temptation to question the very idea of Europe. The French and Dutch referenda were a "scapegoat for a more general disenchantment" over exclusion from the decision-making process and lack of economic growth, he said. Europe needs a Constitution, he stressed. Quoting the Spanish philosopher, Jose Ortego Y Gassett, he said "A Union needs a skeleton of cohesion policies - physical, social and economic." [Journal of the European Union 05/07/2005]

After having underlined the benefits of the Euro: "a force in the construction of the European integration", his address to the Parliament was suddenly interrupted by a group of European Parliamentarians of the Northern League. The contestation was clamorous, hard, and unexpected. Conducting the disruption was the *leghista* European parliamentarian Borghezio, who stood up and shouted: "Freedom, Stop Europe, Stop the Euro" [*libertà, basta con l'euro*]. Behind him a large flag of Padania was displayed by Matteo Salvini (see image below). The assembly's speaker, surprised by the violence of the protest, could not hide a nervous smile. The television cameras showed the European Commissioner laughing in response to this bizarre action.

The speaker first asked the Northern League parliamentarians to put away their Padanian symbol, and exhorted them to sit down. Despite the speaker's efforts, the violence of the protest increased. In these short minutes Ciampi looked at them with irony and disdain, as if he had been expecting this interruption to his speech. The strong reaction of the Northern League European Parliamentarians obliged the speaker to expel them from the plenary session. When escorted out of the Chamber at the demand of President Borrell, they continued to shout "Freedom! Freedom! *Padania Libera*!" Ciampi then concluded by renewing his commitment to Europe and called on all not to let the period of reflection turn into a period where Europe is forgotten. "Long life Europe. Long life to the European Union". The protest continued in the Parliament corridors. A group of Northern League militants made an unexpected "sit in". Some militants with Padanian flags refused to be escorted out, screaming "Bossi, Bossi, Bossi". (Fieldwork notes)

Image 1.1 The presentation of the Self. The Northern League parliamentarian Mario Borghezio, with a Green Scarf on his hand contests the Italian president in the European Parliament. Behind him, a member of the Parlimentary security tries to follow the Speaker's order and stop Matteo Salvini from exhibiting the Padanian flag. On the right, Franscesco Speroni supports his colleagues' protest by banging with his hand on the table.[1]

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[1] Photograph taken from the Italian Daily *La Repubblica, 6 luglio 2005*)

1.1.2 The Multiple Interpretations of a Traumatic Event

The Northern League's political protest in the new European political centre made headlines in Italy. The action increased the feeling of political crisis in the country. Italian society condemned both the form and the content of the protest against its president. In the following days, the Northern League was accused of provincialism, populism, demagogy, racism, and absence of "institutional sense". Ezio Mauro, director of the centre left newspaper *La Repubblica* wrote despisingly:

> Those three *leghisti* constricted by their ideological paganism to be dressed in green, raising the flag of a non existent State, while protesting against the Euro was in itself a pathetic image. But in front of them it was the president of the Italian Republic. In the parliament of Strasbourg we assisted to a unique show. The president of a State contested by the parliamentarians of his own country. The action was not only the confirmation of our country's institutional moral decadence but also the difference between this 'right' and our State" (*La Repubblica* 06/07/2005).

Massimo D'Alema president of the main left-wing party (*Democratic di Sinistra*) commented in the following way the events the national television:

> A group of Italian parliamentarians who insulted the head of the state to the extent that the plenary session had to be suspended, the European Parliament that had to defend the Italian president from a group of Italian Parliamentarians. These *signori* that left the room shouting, and I am sorry to say this but the people need to know it, Italy, Italy fuck you. These *signori* that are at the government of our country represent an intolerable shame. (05\06\2005).

The Northern League Euro parliamentarians used media attention to further promote their political ideas. When confronted by journalists, they accused the European Union, and particularly the Euro, of destroying "northern cultural identity". They said that the Euro was putting northern society, and its socio-economic system, on "its knees". Francesco Speroni (on the right of the photograph) declared that the Ciampi speech in the Parliament was proof that he was taking one side of the political conflict, and in this way he was not representing "the interests of the North". For him, the Italian President "was not protecting the northern communities' traditional way of life from the savage globalization".

In Belluno, where my fieldwork was located, several people troubled by this event told me that "irrationality was emerging again". "The *leghisti* are just backwarded people, people with no culture" a left-wing activist told me. The local leader of the

Democratici di Sinistra (DS) said me: "what do they want, to return to tribalism, to the close and primitive communities? Modernity and the future is Europe. We cannot go back in time."

Enrico, a Catholic activist gave me a different interpretation.

> We are not a united nation. Our politicians do not have sense of the institutions, the necessary spirit of service to understand what the common good is. We are individualists. As a consequence, everyone tries to defend their small patch, their *campanile*."

A supporter of *Allianza Nazionale* (National Alliance) took this interpretation further. For him, this action was the consequence of the absence of a "strong national spirit". "These events happen because the Patria does not have values anymore, and the authority of the state was killed during May of Sixty Eight". Instead, a fervent supporter of Forza Italia told me with disenchantment: "this is our political class". I thought that Berlusconi would change something, but our politicians do not know how to behave properly, they only fight: this is Italy."

Contrasting interpretations were given by sympathizers and members of the Northern League. Despite the fact that some of them disapproved the violent and rude form of the protest, they agreed with its content. "We need to protect our territory, our community and traditions from globalization," Andrea told me. A more economical interpretation was given to me by Alberto, "Europe is threatening our social economic system and we have to defend it". Generally, in their analysis a key idea was repeated to me "our identity has to be respected". What about the nation that "does not exist" Padania? Aurelia told me with pride:

> They made Italy, but they did not make the Italians. Italy is a geographical expression, and imposed identity; we are not a "real people". Now, if some people can choose to be Italians, I can choose to be Padanian what is the difference? It is a choice. Therefore I am Padanian.

1.1.3 The Paradox of Pinocchio

A more poetical and enigmatic interpretation was given to me by a local intellectual. Commenting on my attempts to understand Italian political life, he looked at me with contempt, and said: "I have fun when foreigners try to understand Italian political life." I asked why:

> You see, you use a rational Cartesian method. This logic, however, does not work over here. This is why you are so perplexed and confused. You have to understand the irony of being Italian. If you really want to understand Italy, you ought to read Pinocchio.

Pinocchio is an allegorical narrative written in 1880 by Collodi, a short time after Italian unification was achieved (1871). The story has a clear moral and pedagogical intent. As Rebecca West (2005) pointed out, Pinocchio "represented the pedagogical fervour that had overtaken Italy as the desire to form the Italian subject and ideal citizen came to the fore." The fable tells the story of a toymaker who does not have children. He wishes on a falling star that his latest puppet is a real boy. His wish is granted and the puppet springs to life. The Blue Fairy professes to Pinocchio that if he behaves himself, he will become a "real boy". In his socialization and educative process, Pinocchio learns that every time he tells a lie, his nose will grow. In his troubled history, Pinocchio gets kidnapped, almost turns into a donkey, but at the end finally earns his humanity by saving his creator's (Geppetto's) life.

I think the association between Pinocchio and being Italian is an expression of the Italian's poetical attitude toward the idea of identity. It is also an ironic interpretation of "what it is" to be Italian and the social-historical process by which Italianess was/is formed. Applying Pinocchio's interpretation to the Northern League actions, but also to the understanding of political action, interesting connections emerge. As the interpretation of the events provided to me by the different interlocutors' suggest, much like a puppet consists of artificially linked limbs, Italy is still a "divided nation". As a community, Italy is still passing through a transition from being a wooden boy, (as my last *leghista* interlocutor suggests a "geographical expression") into a "real people". Judging from all my research participants' analysis, Italy seems to still have to gain a modern national civic identification between its citizens and the national state, and in this way overcome the rooted, and "tribal" traditional identities. Like Pinocchio the puppet, it is uncoordinated, lacks integration and a self-reflective identity. And sometimes it is both duped by cunning outsiders and makes mistakes like a donkey.

The conflict about the ideas of patria and nation as a mechanism of social solidarity is, I believe, explicit in the commentaries of the members of Catholics, DS and AN. All associate the phenomenon of *leghismo* with a specific Italian socio-political tradition that of strong localism and -as my intellectual friend would tell me later on-

of "amoral familism". The idea of irrationality and "amoral familism," is not only a reaction to the violent form of protest that for the majority of my interlocutors symbolizes a turning back on the civilizing process (Elias 1978). In fact, it could be argued that the tensions between local and national identities as phrased by my interlocutors' echoes of the passage from Durkheim's (1964) world of mechanical solidarity to the organic solidarity of the modern state.

It would be, however, be both simplistic and wrong to see the Northern League's political action as corresponding merely to an "irrational", and pre-modern way of thinking, that reacts against modernization. The same could be said of the understanding of the League in terms of the Italian state's incapacity to construct a strong and modern identity that guarantees respect for state authority, and for the necessary social cohesion. Despite the fact that, as we will see in the thesis, this is a substantial part of the truth, it does not tell the whole truth. I believe, therefore, that the picture could be a "little more complex". There are two main reasons for this. First, because the League's political strongholds are situated in one of the most developed industrialized and richest areas in both Italy and Europe. The Northern League spread in areas where the "spirit of capitalism" was welcomed, and approved as an open path to economic and social development. Between 1950 and 2005 many of these areas passed from a traditional agro-pastoral society into a modern and industrial one, from being an economic periphery (and state-dependent region) into the heart of the Italian economic system, and simultaneously an integral part of the European and World market. As a consequence, while the "return of the irrational" to some extent helps us to understand the political repulsion for the Northern League's populist and extremist rhetoric, it does not help explain its strength or persuasive power.

The understanding of the Northern League as a consequence of the Italian state's incapacity to construct a strong national identity on the other hand is more interesting as a teleological analysis of the disenchantment with Italian nationalism (as a part of a secular theodicy). Yet it does help understanding why the League' territorial appeal is so strong and welcomed by local populations. The interesting paradox lies, I believe, in the fact that northern society was able to adopt modern types of economic production, under, and within the Italian nation state, (in what one could allegorically consider as Pinocchio becoming human by being a good boy). It is now turning itself

against and rebelling against its makers (Ciampi), thus putting into question modernization theories defended among others by Weber (1977) and Gellner (1983, 1994). These authors advocated that with industrialization and urbanization, and expansion of bureaucracy and rationalization, identity models would change from mechanical into national and later into global ones. More remarkably, the Northern League rhetorically presents its political objective as the struggle for the emancipation of the modern and industrial north, from the traditional, irrational and backward Italian national state. A central question is how therefore, and in which, way did the process of modernization transformed the way people imagined their community and dream their nation (Anderson 1991, Gourgouris 1996).

In this dissertation, I argue that the Northern League's action is better understood as a movement that tries to link modern models of identity based on rationality, with pre-modern and traditional social models. The thesis deals with the importance of the formation of identity in a society in rapid social transition. It focuses on the incapacity of traditional social practices, and ideologies, to deal with the impact of social change. The aim of the thesis is to show that political identities are not just imagined, produced, exchanged, and used to "gain" and achieve other important resources such as political and economic capital, but on a more local and personal level, political identities are used to adapt to and make sense of the inchoate nature of modernity. Yet, with the purpose of contextualizing the theoretical aims of this thesis, and its possible contributions to this already wide field of study, I would like to provide a brief review on the movements' history. Before that, I will first present a brief outline of the thesis.

1.1.4 Structure of the Thesis
The relevant historical background about the Northern League political proposals, the areas and sectors of Italian society that support the movement, and the League's rhetorical and communication strategies, is given in the following section (1.2). The theoretical issues and the possible contribution of an anthropological approach to the Northern League will be discussed in the final section of this introduction (1.3). Chapter two discusses in detail the choice of Belluno to conduct fieldwork and the problems and dilemmas faced during the research process. The chapter is completed first with a section on methodology, where I describe the methods used during the

investigation, and ends with a reflection on the ethical dilemmas and questions raised during both the fieldwork and the writing-up process.

Chapter three focuses on the imagination of Belluno as part of the Italian national community. Through the study of ritual practices, and their symbolism, the chapter describes how left wing supporters and Catholics try to construct an identity paradigm that transcends local identity models. The chapter is completed with the Northern League visions of these attempts to imagine Belluno as an integral part of Italian national history. In chapter four, I turn to the analysis of the Northern League model of northern national identity. For comparative reasons I focus again on public ritual praxis. I first describe and analyse the symbolism of the ritual that the Northern League's use to institutionalize Padania. Then, through the analysis of ritual practices, I discuss the practical elaboration and representation of the Northern League's key identity concept, that of "the people".

Chapter five will take us to a village in the mountains in Belluno. The chapter deals with the local interpretation of the Northern League discourse about "the people", and the need to recover and protect local traditional identities. Through the study of art, and in particular of public murals painted by the villagers on their houses, the chapter suggests that through the artistic interpretation of the League rhetoric, local people try to link past models of village solidarity and social reproduction with modern ones. I suggest that the identification with the Northern League's political discourse is not just dependent on rational and pragmatic economic motivations, but also from the fact that the League's ideology reflects local pre-modern models of society. Chapter six further develops this argument by focusing specifically on the relation between modern industrial economic practices and traditional village patterns. The ethnographic data discussed in the chapter suggests that on the one hand models of modernization that predict that local solidarity is disrupted by industrialization, are not able to explain why local people preferred the local to the national. Finally the chapter explores the crucial tension that arises from the need that local economic productive systems have to adapt to modernization and globalization, and simultaneously the desire of keeping local community cohesion and solidarity. For that, the chapter reflects on the relation between the local practices of capitalist production with the dominant Catholic model of society.

Chapter seven expands on the role of family models to explore the relation between local values and the Northern League's political proposals. The chapter departs from the identification between the Northern discourses, and local male practices and ideologies. The second part of the chapter explores the conflict between traditional models of family authority and control over the territory and the state's bureaucratic model. After this discussion, the chapter moves on to suggest that the perception of community and political life through familiar and male metaphors provides an important contribution to understanding the League's exclusionary and often xenophobic views. This chapter will be followed by the conclusion where the thesis's ethnographic findings will be briefly synthesised and contextualized in wider anthropological theoretical debates.

1.2 Historical Background of the Northern League: Political Proposals, Support Base and Rhetorical Strategies

1.2.1 Veneto Nation! The Liga Veneta

According to Messina (1998:463-464), the League: "was the most significant new element in the Italian political scene of the 1990s". The regional parties, or the Leagues, started at the beginning of the eighties in the region of Veneto. The Leagues emerged in an important period of political transition and crisis. Italian traditional political ideologies, the Catholic and Communist that linked and mediated the different Italian regions with the central state, were slowly losing their strength. Internationally, the fall of the Berlin Wall liberated the Italian voters from the "anti-communist stigma", and unlocked Italian political system. The fall of the Wall implied a major refocusing on the internal situation (see for example Diamanti 1993, 1996, Gundle and Parker 1996). On the other hand, the European integration process that was taking more concrete dimensions offered an alternative model to the nation state as a centre of the political and economic process. Finally, new socio-economic realities characterized by industrial and capitalist development were now strongly emerging in areas traditionally associated with agricultural production.

The Liga Veneta strived for the recognition of both the distinctive Veneto historical features as a "nation", and the recognition of the regional dialect as a "language". The founder, and main ideologue of the Liga Veneta, Franco Roccheta, claimed with pride

in an interview with me that: "the Leagues were the first political-cultural phenomenon developed outside the Italian nation state tree". Thus, Roccheta argued that the Liga's political actions were conceived as outside "the root" of the Italian state, but also outside Italian national history. The League's objective "was the affirmation of the Veneto's right to auto-determination, which follows its [Veneto] historical tradition of self government".

The tradition of local "self government" was embodied in the icon chosen to represent the Liga Veneta, the former symbol of the Republic of Venice: the winged lion of Saint Marc. This historical revisionism aimed at providing an ideological support, and political legitimization, to the project of transforming the Veneto into a region with special status and autonomy (Amantia and Vendramini 1994, Diamanti 1993, 1996). This project was an attempt at providing the Veneto region with more political and administrative autonomy. Such privileges are already conceded by the nation state to the neighbouring regions of Trentino Alto Adige and Friuli Venezia Giulia.

The desire of autonomy was justified not only with the political need to address the local territory problems, but also with an historical right. A famous poster read:

> We want autonomy as Sicily and Trentino Alto Adige.
>
> Because it is our historical right
>
> Because autonomy is essential to resolve the problems that our land is going through
>
> To participate responsibly in the construction of Europe.

In order to further ground its political claims, the Liga Veneta contested the historical process that led to the unification of the Veneto to the Italian nation state (Risorgimento). This contestation was made through attacks on the aims of the fathers of the Italian national Risorgimento such as Garibaldi and Cavour. Posters with the slogan "the truth is that the massone Garibaldi did not love the Veneti" [trans: la verità è che il mason Garibaldi non amava I Veneti] were a clear expression of this stance.[2] Another highly symbolical national historical moment that the Liga Veneta

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[2]Garibaldi was an Italian nationalist responsible for conquering Sicily and the South of Italy. Cavour was one of the most influential politicians during the birth of the Italian state. A conservative he was

put into question, was the referendum that dictated the passage of Veneto to the Italian state in 1866. The Liga Veneta activists published books and posters calling this referendum "truffa" [forged].[3]

The Liga Veneta represented the Veneti as an ethnic group colonized and dominated by the Italian nation-state. In fact, the objective of the Liga for Rochetta was to finish "this humiliating situation". The historical revisionism was used to emphasize and denounce the oppression of the Italian nation state of the Veneto ethnic identity. In the interpretative model of the movement, the absence in the national historical curriculum of a major reference to the role of a Republic of Venice, which as several Northern League activists pointed out to me with pride "lasted a thousand years"[4]. This was interpreted by activists as part of a "political strategy to dominate and make local people forget their *identità* Veneta."[5]

The symbol chosen to embody the nation state's cultural and political domination over the local ethnic identity was the public servant. Local public clerks, and school teachers, often came from the South of Italy. During fieldwork the militants often quoted to me a poster that the initial Liga published that read:

This is How the State administers the Veneto:

Prefeti	6 non veneti out of 7
Questori	7 non veneti out of 7
Procuratori della. Reppublica	8 non veneti out of 8
Pres. Tribunale	6 non Veneti out of 8
Provveditori di Studi	5 non Veneti out of 7
Dirett. Prov. Poste	5 non Veneti out of 7
Direttore Ufficio Iva	6 non Veneti out of 7

Elected prime-minister several times. For the Venetian League leaders he was the symbol of the Piedmonts ethnical domination over the other Italian regions.

[3] See for example Beggiato's book: Veneto: "a forged Referendum for Unity" [nel 1866 un Finto Plebiscito per L'unitá]).
[4] 1000 years is an important symbol since it creates an analogy with Ancient Rome.
[5] To see an excellent collection of the Liga Veneta posters see Amantia and Vendramini's (1994) pioneering work.

> On the bottom of the poster it was written: "this is just the tip of the iceberg. After centuries of self government and independence, from 1886 the Veneti were no longer considered of being capable of administering themselves. For how long?"

The ethnic factor and the claim to the right of "self government" were also used to contest the exclusion of the peripheral regions from the centralized political decision-making process (Diamanti 1993, 1996). According to Amantia and Vendramini (1994), the support for the Liga was already reflecting what in the future would be the core of the Northern League support: the dissatisfaction of new emergent economic sectors in the region, especially small business man, self employee and artisans, with the central nation state. As an ethnic and political entrepreneur (to use the term coined by Diamanti (1993, 1996), the Liga Veneta channelled the protest of the new emergent classes that although economically strong were politically and culturally marginal within the nation state.

The Liga Veneta presented the Veneto as a "productive colony" exploited by the Italian nation state. The metaphor of "productive colony" would later on be expanded by the Northern League to symbolize the "eternal" condition of the North, in relation to the Italian nation state and its capital: Rome. Commencini, a former leader of the Liga Veneta and of the Northern League, explained to me in the following words what made him support the Venetian League:

> It was a cultural revolution from the people who went from poverty to became wealthy rich and wanted to recover their cultural condition, because everyone said, you are rich but ignorant. They would mock us just because we talked in Veneto [local dialect]. But in reality we are not ignorant. This ghettoization reinforced my belonging, which is why I was seduced by the message of Rocchetta: like Polish to the Poles, Veneto to the Veneti, Speak like your mother taught you.

As a result, the Liga Veneta channelled not only new economic interests, but also explored the grievances against what was perceived and represented as Italian cultural domination (Diamanti 1993, 1996, Cento Bull and Gilbert 2001).

The emphasis on ethnicity, on local history and language, was a strategy to recover the "pride of being Veneto". Ethnicity was therefore an innovative political strategy. The innovative character of the movement also comprised other original methods. Populist strategies were used to shock and contrast a political environment

traditionally marked by compromise, and the ideological debate between Communists and Christians (Kertzer 1987, Diamanti 1993, Biorcio 1997). This ideological debate between Communists and Christians departed, however, from the same key idea: a unitarian view of Italy. Instead, the Liga Veneta used explosive and distinctive slogans against Rome and the central government. The affixation of a poster on the motorway (A4) that links the Veneto with Lombardy with the slogan: *"fuori i terroni del Veneto!"* ("Southerns out of Veneto!"), was widely debated in Italian society.

The Southerner was associated not only with the control of the state apparatus, but also with the importation of the Mafia and of the Italian state's "bad government" (*malgoverno*) into the pure, honest and civic Veneto, a theme that the Northern League would later develop and explore. Although the electoral success of the Liga Veneta was confined to the local elections where they achieved 4% of votes, its innovative character, the emphasis on ethnicity and on territory as main political concepts, opened a new political era in the traditional conservative Italian political system. To say it with the Northern League expert, the Liga Veneta was the "mother of the all Leagues" (Diamanti 1993, 1996).

1.2.2 The Lombard League

The phenomenon of the regional Leagues was not confined to the Veneto, and extended itself to the neighbouring regions. In Lombardy another political entrepreneur emerged: the Lombard League. At the beginning the Lombard League followed the same pattern of the Venetian League, stressing ethno-regionalism based on an idea of common language and culture (Diamanti 1993, Biorcio 1997). As in the case of the Veneto, also in Lombardy the first posters appealed to voters following a ethnic regional criteria: "I am Lombard, I vote Lombard." In the case of the Lombard League, however, the redefinition of a region as an ethnic identity was more complicated due to the presence of diverse dialects, and due to the lack of an historical common past as an ethno-nation.

Still, the Lombard League used history to support and symbolize its ethnic origins, and claim more political autonomy from the nation state. While the Liga Veneta "re-discovered" the history of the Republic of Venice to contest the Italian national hegemony, and symbolize the historical right of self government and independence, the Lombard League recovered another historical period that was somehow forgotten

in the Italian national imagery: the Celts and the *Longobardi* (Lombards). As Albertazzi (2006) noted, the Celts and the Lombards were ready to "be rediscovered", because they were rarely mentioned in the Italian historical paradigm. For Albertazi (2006:35), this absence was due to their being considered an integral part of the "Dark Ages" (pre and after the Roman Empire). The absence of detailed historical information regarding these tribes, and their social organization, reinforced the need for interpretation, which benefited its symbolical impact.

The most important symbol of this tradition of "autonomy" and struggle for freedom of the "Lombard people", however, was the party name. The name was inspired by the medieval Lombard League. The first Lombard League "linked" the cities of Milan, Parma, Padova, Verona, Piacenza, Bologna, Cremona, Mantova, Bergamo and Brescia. The Lombard League was formed to contest the ambition of the Emperor Frederick I (Barbarossa), who wished to re-establish the tributary rights of the Holy Empire. As suggested by the medieval historian Coleman (1996:7), the conflict revolved around the communes' responsibilities (that were previously the Empire's responsibility), such as taxation, defence and the administration of justice. The victory of the first Lombard League at the battle of Legnano (1176) led to the agreements of Constance where these privileges were rectified. As result, the original Lombard League struggle and military victory was used to symbolize both the historical desire of autonomy of the local populations and an understanding of political alliance based on a medieval system of cooperation between highly autonomous political unities (represented in the movement's rhetoric by the modern regions).

A crucial part of the success of the Lombard League was due to its leader: Umberto Bossi. Contrary to Roccheta, who was mainly concerned with the elaboration of a sophisticated idea of Veneto "as a nation", Bossi had a more pragmatic agenda, and saw ethnicity and identity as political strategies (Biorcio 1997, Albertazzi 2006). As some authors remarked, Bossi had a charismatic "anti-charismatic style" that strongly contributes to an image of difference (Biorcio 1997, Giordano 1997). This difference is embodied, for example, in the way Bossi speaks and dresses. His crude voice, the relaxed and rough discourses and a more informal dress code, contrasted with the normal formal and bourgeois Italian political universe. In other words, Bossi looked and spoke like the "normal" people.

Image 1.2 The presentation of the Leader. Front Page of the Northern League official newspaper *La Padania* announcing Bossi's return to Pontida. The headline asks: Where did we stay? [dove eravamo rimasti?] Bossi, in a green shirt is represented talking to the several northern peoples (represented in the different flags). His fist is raised is a common gesture in the Northern League leaders' performance. It is a sign of strength, courage and determination.
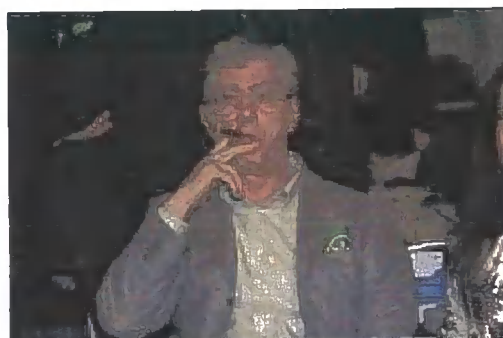
Image 1.3 The re-presentation of the self. Photographs are important political and rhetorical tools. This modern photograph of Umberto Bossi was taken from the left wing newspaper *La Repubblica* (15/04/2007). In representing Bossi smoking a cigar with a green handkerchief with the movement symbol in the jacket pocket, the photograph tries to persuade the reader of all that the Northern League "is all about". Through the representation of the Leagues leader, the newspaper emphasizes the movements' anti-intellectual, rough and popular character.

The emphasis on Lombard Identity and Lombard autonomist history (for example through the modern reinterpretation of federalist proposals made by the Lombard Italian Risorgimental intellectual Carlos Cattaneo) were used to redefine the idea of territory not just as an ethnic community, but also as a "community of interests" (Diamanti 1996, Biorcio 1997). If the Venetian League stressed the honesty of the Veneti, the Lombard League promoted the hard working, productive mentality and entrepreneurial capacity of the Lombards. These cultural characteristics were used to

ethnically distinguish Lombard identity from both the Italian state, and especially from the South (Giordano 1997, Biorcio 1997, Cento Bull and Neville 2001).

Bossi was strongly influenced by the Rousseaunesque idea that true democracy could only be achieved in small communities, due to its cultural and ethnic coherence (Bossi and Vimercati 1992). For this reason Bossi, and the League, strongly opposed the lack of values resultant of the industrial era. The movement denounced the substitution of "Lombard traditional values" by those of consumerism and the impact of industrialization in the desegregation of local communities (see for example, Cento Bull 2003 on Bossi's memories of the silk industry). As a result, the success of the Lombard League was strengthened by the creation of a threatening other: Southerners, immigrants and the state, which were accused by the movement of corrupting Lombard traditional ethnic values. The movement had an exponential development, and surprisingly the Lombard League was able to elect two national representatives in the election held in 1987: Bossi as Senator and Leone as deputy (Diamanti 1993).

1.2.3 Northern Ethnicity and the New Political Proposals: The Formation of the Northern League

In 1989 the ethno-regionalist leagues that in the meantime spread in the North of Italy decided to change and reshape their political position. They slowly moved from "pure" ethno-regionalism to an attempt of representing the "North". In order to do so they started representing the North as a "community of interests". In partnership with the leader of the Liga Veneta and other regionalist movements, Bossi formed the Allianza del Nord (Northern alliance). In 1991 the party changed its name to its current one: Lega Nord.

Since electorally the Lombard League was the strongest existing party, Bossi emerged as the uncontested leader of the new movement. Ideologically he expanded the values that had been previously been presented as particular to the pure Lombard's, as a general value of the "northern people". As Gallagher (1994) remarked, instead of the presentation of a political agenda marked by a traditional ideology (right-left), the League focused on an idea of territorial identity as a shared community of values such as hard work, honesty, civic pride, and discipline. This

elaboration of a northern identity fitted with the representation of certain segments of northern society, which were traditionally under the political domination of Catholic subculture (see also Diamanti 1993, 1996, Biorcio 1997, Messina 1998, Cento Bull and Gilbert 2001, Cento Bull 2003).

Politically, Bossi and the League demanded more independence and more participation of the Northern regions in the political decision-making process. The League brought to the centre of the Italian political debate the conflict between centre and periphery (Diamanti 1993, Woods 1995, Diani 1996). The movement assumed from the beginning a strong political polemic against the central nation state. This polemic was fed through the use of populist messages and slogans such as "Roma the thief," (Roma Ladrona), *padroni a casa nostra* (masters in our own house), and "Rome Mafia." Following an extremely pragmatic agenda, Bossi took full advantage of the discrediting of the internal political system to distance the Northern League from it.

The League's political enterprise strongly benefited from the explosion of the public scandals of corruption known as *tangentopoli* (bribesville), and of the judiciary investigation conducted by Antonio Di Pietro, known as "clean hands". In less than five years the main political actors that controlled and shaped the Italian political system saw their public image and credibility seriously damaged. It was the end of the First Republic, and its major political actors. The DC fragmented into different political movements, while from the PCI two major political actors emerged, a reformist one the *Partito dei Democratici di Sinistra* (PDS), and a more radical one *Rifondazione Communista* (PRC).

The League supported and benefited from the judiciary process that was taking place. The corruption scandals fingered the most prominent figures of the post Second World War regime. Among them was six-time Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti and leader of the major and dominant party, the Christian Democrats (DC), (-judged, and later absolved, of connections with the mafia), and the leader of the Socialist Party (PSI) and former Prime Minister, Bettino Craxi who died in exile. The corruption scandals corroborated the Northern League's perceptions of the Italian state as corrupt, *mafioso*, and a "thief". In addition, the scandals were presented as the proof

of the Italian state's incapacity of properly running the public resources collected through taxation. These unstable political environments increased the movement's political capital, and led several sectors in the north of Italy to see in the League a valuable alternative that could renew the Italian nation state (Diamanti 1993, Biorcio 1997).

The Northern League assumed itself as the representative of the North's industrial and modern mentality. By contrast to Rome's symbolism as the profligate spender of the wealth produced by the industrial and highly developed North, Milan (the capital of Lombardy) was presented as the capital of responsibility, production and hard work. The movements rhetoric about the North as a productive colony exploited by the Roman southern mentality, strongly benefited from the increase of fiscal pressure. As suggested by Diamanti (1996), the increase of public debt and of taxation, meant more fiscal pressure over parts of the northern industrial system, especially small businessman, artisans and medium companies. These sectors saw in the Northern League's defence of strong taxation cuts, and fiscal federalism, a desirable prospect.

Image 1.4 Lega Nord Poster: "During 71-73 the Christian Democrats and the Communists stole the fiscal power from the local institutions to give it all to the state. Fiscal federalism now!" The poster represents Padania as a golden chicken and Rome as the peasant collecting the golden eggs produced in the North.

Image 1.5 Lega Nord Poster: "Milan: Capital of Responsibility, Rome the capitalism of Assistenzialismo (state dependency) and public debt".

On the other hand, in order to modernize the Italian political system, the Northern League advocated a revision of the Italian constitution. Their political proposal implied the transformation of Italy into a federal republic. Strongly associated with the federal reform of the state, was the proposal of fiscal federalism. For the Northern League Fiscal federalism implied that the taxes should be collected and distributed on a regional level. The principle underlining this constitutional proposal was that "those who produce more should have more". This was supported by the fact that the Northern regions, (especially Piedmont, Veneto and Lombardy) were responsible for 40% of the Italian G.D.P (Gold 2003).

Image 1.6 Lega Nord Poster: "Less Rome, Less taxes".

The Northern League proposals strongly benefited from the impulse given by the university professor Gianfranco Miglio. Miglio's federal project comprised the division of the Italian state into three macro regions: the North, the Centre and the South. The proposal was inspired by the Swiss model, and if approved would have completely transformed the nature of the Italian state. For Bossi and Miglio, this reform would have resolved most of the contradictions provoked by the Italian

National Unity process (Woods 1995:200). As a consequence, the Northern League opened and enhanced its political horizons from "simple" ethno-regionalism. On the one hand, the Northern League aimed at changing the political principles that constituted the Italian nation state (constitution). On the other, it successfully attempted to channel the protest against the national political system. Finally, it assumes the representation of part of the "productive north", representing the values of the small and medium enteprises, mainly characterized by shopkeepers, business men in small industry, artisans and commercial agents. In this sense, the League benefited of the end of the traditional mediation role exercise by the DC (Diamanti 1993, 1996, Diani 1996, Wild 1997, Messina 1998). More importantly, in assuming the representation of social sectors that were often forgotten in the Italian state mainstream discourse, the Northern League creates *la Questione Settentrionale* (the Northern Question) in the Italian political system.

Image 1.7 Lega Nord electoral Poster Less taxes, more (economic) development

The Northern League, however, was more than just a protest movement, a "fever" to use the expression of the sociologist and expert on the Northern League Ilvo Diamanti (1996). The Northern League was able to redefine the Italian political agenda (Biorcio 1997, Cento and Gilbert 2001). With this ability the League explored themes that were latent, but that the traditional political cultures had not explored, or preferred to ignore. One of these themes was the fracture between the industrial and modern North and the undeveloped South. The development of the South was elected by the First Republic actors as the "prominent national question" (Ginsborg 1996, Biorcio 1997). *La Questione Meridionale* absorbed the efforts of the state and of the post-war political elite, to whom the southern question was seen as a question of national solidarity.

More than just contesting the Southern Question as a national priority, the Northern League proposed a new interpretation of this "eternal problem". The League advocated that southern underdevelopment was perpetuated by the southern and national political elite interests (Woods 1995, Biorcio 1997). In the movements' interpretative model, state-funded policies favoured the control of the Mafia. The *assistenzialismo* (the state economic support of the South) was represented by the Northern League as a Machiavelian expedient used by national political parties to gain and maintain their patronage networks, and in this way their political power, not only over the southern population, but also over the North. ("*Soldi dal Nord, Mafia dal Sud*"- [Money from the North, Mafia from the South], "Rome the thief, the Lega will not forgive! [*Roma ladrona la Lega non perdona*] read some of the movement's posters).

In the League's rhetoric, state economic investment prevented the development of a modern industrial and capitalist mentality in the South. The Northern League polemics against the "Roman *partitocrazia*" were not just determined by the demand of more administrative autonomy, but were also a reaction against the political and economic failure of modernizing the South, and the Italian state bureaucratic structure.[6] For the League, Federalism would correct the southern and the nation state "parasitic" and clientelistic approach, and finally promote the separation between private and public spheres of interest and bureaucratic rationality, which would determine the end of the economic "dilapidation" of the North in favour of Rome and the South.

Another important theme for the Northern League was the control of internal migration and immigration. Traditionally, internal migration was understood by the national parties as a strategy to manage labour resources. The people that came from the South mainly entered the Northern industrial triangle, or the state bureaucratic

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6 The *partitocrazia* was a consequence of the post-fascist constitution. The Italian constitution was concerned with two major issues: to negate the concentration of power and to keep national integrity through the party system (Ginsborg 2001, Nevola 2003). Still haunted by the fascist past and having to decide between a system that reinforced state power, or instead, a system that distributed power, the leaders decided to create a 'republic of parties', a *partitocrazia* (Pasquino 1995).In this political system the fundamental decisions were made by multiple and competitive political parties, that had a high control over society. *Partitocrazia* is not simple patronage, corruption or nepotism. These parties quite literally owned, or had a major influence in the major industries, government ministries, television stations of unions. This is a system that the Northern League attacked and plan to change through privatization.

apparatus. In the Northern League's interpretative model, internal migrations from the South were state sponsored as an attempt to dilute the northern ethnic identity, and to import the southern parasitic subsidization mentality to the North. Therefore, for the League, the southern migration was part of a process used by the state to politically control the North (Biorcio 1997). (This explains why in the League's rhetoric Federalism is understood as the opportunity of having a true democracy, but also explains the League's aversion to the big industry and financiers).

On the other hand, this "third world" immigration was the consequence of the northern industrial development, and its emphasis on non-qualified labour. During the First Republic, immigration was understood through the inclusive and solidarity interpretative models proposed by the Communist Party (PCI) and the DC (Biorcio 1997). Instead, the Northern League assumed a clear exclusivist position (Woods 1995, Tambini 2001, Cento Bull and Gilbert 2001). The rejection of immigration led some authors to classify the League as a right-wing movement (see for example Betz 1993). In the movements' rhetoric, immigrants pose a threat to the cultural authenticity of the North, and represent a danger to both the stability and order of society. For Bossi, immigrants will never be able to integrate themselves in the Italian society (Biorcio 1997). The rejection of the other was used by the movements to not only construct the notion of a northern ethnic identity, but also to blame the difficulties of the Northern economic system, and community life, to the presence of outside elements that do not share the same culture (Ginsborg 1996, Biorcio 1997).

Image 1.8- Lega Nord Poster. "No to Hordes!" This poster represents a reaction against illegal immigrants to the North.

Finally, the Northern League proposed to roll back the role of the state in the economy, demanding important liberal reforms and privatizations. These proposals

strongly benefited from European developments. The League explored the proposals that were coming out of the European Union. These proposals were profoundly embedded in the idea of "Europe of the regions" and "Europe of the peoples". The Northern League portrayed the European Union Neo-liberal model as a future and adequate structure of political representation, which should substitute the discredited idea of the nation state as locus of social and economic development (Mingione 1993, Biorcio 1997).

Despite the fact that the North was mainly presented by the Northern League as a territorial community of interests that shared a similar culture (hard work mentality, entrepreneurship, strong reference to communitarian identity models), contrary to what some authors suggested (see, in particular, Diamanti 1993, 1996), ethnicity played a vital role in the movement's rhetoric and development (Cento Bull 2003 for an important discussion). The idea of a Northern ethnic identity was particularly important due to its association with the key concept of "the people". The use of populism by the Northern League was more than just a reaction to modernization. It comprised a "redefinition of modernization away from centralized forms of bureaucratic and economic power" (Woods 1995:195).

As noted by Ernest Laclau, populism occurs "when a fraction of the dominant class seeks to establish hegemony but it is unable to do so, and so makes a direct appeal to the masses" (1979:173). In the League's case, populism was used to assume the representation of new emergent classes, and to demand the transference of the political process from the centre into the periphery (local\regional institutions) thought by these emergent elites as more adequate to the new demands of their economic system (Biorcio 1997). Yet, contrary to traditional populist and extreme right wing movements such as the one of Le Pen in France, or Georg Heider in Austria, the Northern League used local territory as its main political reference. As with other regionalist movements, the League sustains its argument on the idea that the reduction of the scale of the problem (from national to local), and the decentralization of competence, will allow political institutions to better address the specific concerns of the territory (Keating 2001, Giordano 1997, 2001). This would bring direct benefits to their territory, to "their house". In so doing, the League avoided more difficult national questions.

Nevertheless, the direct appeals to the masses, which we will study in more detail in chapter four, was part of an important effort to present the emergent Northern Question as an ethnic-communitarian one. For example, northern culture was associated with the North of Europe. Religiously, the value of hard work and the "productive mentality" were seen as similar to Protestant and Calvinistic ethics, with an emphasis on the values of individualism and accumulation (Biorcio 1997, Tambini 2001). These distinctive ethnic characteristics, however, included also history and geography, which were interpreted as crucial in the distinction between the North and the South, as is patent in the following narrative:

> The people in Varese [city in the North of Lombardy] are closer to Swiss or Germans than Southern Italians, not only in terms of history but also in terms of family structure, culture and work ethic. In the South of Italy the people have Latin origins whereas in the North the people have Celtic and central European origins and so we are different. [Interview with members of the NL (in Giordano 1997:202)]

In the construction of a new political form of representation, the League used ethnicity to challenge the Italian traditional system of central governance. On the other hand, ethnicity played a vital role in accepting the northern political proposals as "natural" and desirable. The appeal to ethno-communitarian models, as we will see later in the thesis, are not just rational "inventions", or populist desires of recovering the "authenticity" of communitarian life. Rather, they reflect deeper embedded cultural and social practices that individuals and local communities still use to make sense of their social world.

As a political and ethnic entrepreneur in the beginning of the nineties, the Northern League was able to take advantage of the climate of disenchantment towards the traditional political parties, as much as it became the spokesman of the need to reform the Italian state. The innovative character of the movements' proposals, and the decline of the traditional party system, was reflected in the electoral results obtained. In just three years (1989-1992), the League's electoral support rose from 3.7 to 17.3 in the North (Biorcio 1997 64-65). In 1993 the electoral law changed. The new law obliged political parties to make pre-electoral agreements. The Northern League incorporated a coalition called *Polo delle Libertà*. Together with the other emergent, or re-emergent, political forces in the Italian political system, Berlusconi's Forza

Italia and the redefined fascists guided by Fini (Alleanza Nazionale), the League arrived in Rome as a government party. For the first time the League was represented in a governmental effort at the national level. This participation in government was however a short one. Conflicts between Bossi and Berlusconi led to the League's withdrawal, which resulted in the end of the governmental coalition and the fall of the government after only 9 months.

1.2.4 Innovative Political Practices: Ethnic Symbolism and Language

Among the more innovative factors were the political propaganda and communication strategies. From its inception the Northern League portrayed a clear anti-politician and anti-political system imagery and language that is characteristic of populist and protest movements (Woods 1995, Biorcio 1997, Taggart 2000). Modelling itself on the previous experience of the Lombard and Venetian Leagues, the Northern League broke with the rooted tradition of the *politichese* (complex language used by politicians to keep the possibility of bargaining (Hine 1993, Croci 2001). Instead, they promoted a simple discourse that Croci (2001) called the *gentese*. The *gentese* was based on simple syntax and clear and strong slogans (that we can see, for example, in the posters). As the episode that opened this dissertation shows, the Northern League's discourses are replete with colloquial, jargonistic and often aggressive language. The *gentese* was used to represent the League as a popular movement that reflected and voiced the concerns of "the people" (Biorcio 1997). As result, this practice is a strategy to affirm a clear political distinction from the traditional mainstream Italian political actors.

Aggressive and popular language was the representation of the combative and territorial nature of the new movement. This nature is further embodied in the symbols chosen by the movement to represent its political action. The Northern League appropriated two important symbols from the first Lombard League. One was a war chariot called the *carroccio*. The second was the figure of the leader of the first Lombard League: the warrior Alberto Giussano. The *carrocio,* an ox-driven chariot, was an important symbol in the Italian medieval context. The first prototype of this war machine was built by the Archbishop of Milan in 1039 (see Image 1.9 below). Ernst Voltmer (1994:226-228), a medieval historian, wrote that the *carroccio* was built to symbolically express a political-religious community. The *carroccio*

represented an important historical change, the emergence of new classes, especially merchants and craftsmen, which could participate more actively in military campaigns. As noted by Coleman (1996), the battle of Legnano symbolized the first victory of an infantry and therefore a popular\citizen army over one with a larger component of cavalry representative of military hereditary elite. Thus, the *carroccio* helped to create and symbolize a new sentiment of communitarian citizenship (Voltner 1994).

Image 1.9 The *carroccio* Symbol of the Northern League

Il popolo era, intorno al suo Carroccio
La città era, che possente, augusta,
usciva con la Chiesa e con L'Arengo
E col suo Santo e col suo Dio; com tutto
Giunta al nemico ella dicea col bronzo
della sua squilla: - é presso te Milano,
Che mutò luogo: al modo delle stelle.
Giovanni Pascoli (Italian poet)

The *carroccio* was an important popular symbol in the Italian medieval context. It represented strength, power and courage on the battlefield. In the armed conflicts between the Italian city states, allowing the *carroccio* be captured an adversary was considered symbolically a defeat (Voltmer 1994). Later on, the *carroccio* became also an important Italian national symbol. During the Italian national Risorgimento, it was used by important Italian intellectuals and poets such as Massimo D'Azeglio, Cesare Balbo and Giovanni Pascoli (see the poem above) to symbolize the historical nature of the North of Italy's historical Italianess. In the Italian Risorgimental

rhetoric, the *carroccio* symbolized Italian mobilization against Austrian-Hungarian political control over the Lombardo-Veneto Kingdom (that now roughly correspond to the region of Lombardy and Veneto).

More specifically, in the Lombard and Milanese tradition, the *carroccio* was related to the defence of the territory against outsiders (Voltmer 1994:165-167). Indeed, both the *carroccio* and the Lombard League were used by a Risorgimental Lombard federalist, Carlos Cattaneo to support his federalist proposals. Cattaneo's political program was inspired by the model imposed by the Austrian Queen Maria Teresa in Swissland (Gatterer 1994). In Cattaneo's political design, a large measure of autonomy should be conceded to local institutions, territorial parliaments and to universal referenda (see Gatterer 1994:42-44). Catteneo's political inspiration was grounded on the idea that "to be friends it is necessary that each one remains master in their house." [*Per essere amici bisogna che ognuno resti padrone a casa sua*]. Catteneo's federal model was sharply in contrast with the Piedmontese model inspired by the French model of national unity based on a centralized state management. Gramsci (1996) noted that Cattaneo's political positions reflected the Lombard industrial class concerns with the incorporation of the undeveloped South, and with the power of the southern conservative agrarian classes. These themes as we have seen, were later recovered by the Northern League to legitimize the historical character of the northern struggle for autonomy, from both the central State and the South.

In short, in the Northern League contest, the *carroccio* has been used in three ways. First, it recalls the history of the struggle for independence and autonomy of the North. Secondly, it embodies the union of the northern peoples against a common enemy. This representation of the people's union in the *carroccio* is also used by the Italian national press. When talking about the Northern League action and political positions it is common to listen, or read, that the "*carroccio* was stopped", or that the "*carroccio* keeps moving", "or the *carroccio* threatens". As result, the *carroccio* symbolizes and represents the political action of the Northern League, and its defence of the territory.

If the *carroccio* symbolizes the union of "the people" with their territorial local communities, the other League key icon, Alberto da Giussano, embodies the

combative, and revolutionary, nature of the movement. Alberto Da Giussano was the warrior responsible for leading the first Lombard League into battle against the Holy Roman Emperor Frederick I (Barbarosa). Before the battle, the different communes gathered in the northern city of Pontida and swore loyalty to their leader. This historical oath of Pontida was immortalised by a famous romantic poem by the Italian nationalist poet Carducci.[7] In Carducci's poem, the Lombard League was the expression of the historical Italian struggle to have an independent state, and was used to support the war of independence against the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

As in the case of the *carroccio*, the Northern League took advantage of an already popular national symbol, providing it with a different meaning. The League transformed these historical facts into a mythical foundation story of the northern political and ethnic question. The use of medieval symbolism, with its emphasis on local autonomies and segmentation, reflect in part local models of identity. Indeed, in the League's rhetoric, the German Emperor is conflated with the Italian state, which wants to stifle northern communes' administrative autonomy, and to reduce their prosperity through the imposition of taxes. As result, Alberto Da Giussano is used to symbolize the need of fighting and protecting the North territory, its economic resources, political autonomy and ethnic identity.[8]

Image 1.10 Poster Lega Nord: "Pontida -Against Rome the Thief". This poster advertises the meeting in Pontida. The photograph reproduces the statue of Alberto Da Giussano erected by Italian nationalists in the place where the Battle of Legnano took place.

The symbolism of the historical meeting in Pontida was reinvented by the Northern League. The movement organizes mass rituals in Pontida. As described by Biorcio

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[7]Carducci was one of the most important Italian poets. He advocated a return to the pagan spirit in religion and a renewal of the classical spirit and forms in literature.
Chapter seven will deal in more detail with the relation between the celtic and warrior imagry and local male ideas of masculinity.

(1997:198), Pontida is described by the activists as the "soul place of the party". In Pontida, Bossi celebrates "the sacrifice of their *avi* (ancestors) that in this place swore to defend their freedom". Mass rituals, and public parades, as noted by Tambini (2001) were used by the Northern League to create a strong identification between the movements' symbols and their followers, contributing in this way to sediment the new northern identity. Although, I will study these ceremonies in detail in chapter four, I am to presenting here a short ethnographic description of the ceremony of Pontida that I had the opportunity of witnessing during fieldwork, in order to explain the innovative practices of the movement.

This year's (2005) ceremony was a particularly important one. Pontida is strongly associated with the Northern League's leader "cult of personality". Bossi was returning to the political scene after being affected by a heart attack, which almost cost him his life. Due to his illness in the previous year, Pontida was not celebrated. In front of the stage they patiently waited for the return of the loved leader and *condottiere*.

Image 1.11 Photograph of the crowd in Pontida. Note the presence of the Green, the flags with different regional symbols, and the symbol of Padania. The militants are waiting for Bossi's speech.

I stayed right in front of the stage. After several political speeches the spokesman finally announced the event that everyone had been waiting for:

> Padanian people! With Fear and Hope, with anxiety and prayer, we have waited for him for more than one year. He is our guide, our hope and freedom, our hero, our boss (capo), our federal secretary. The man who is descended from Alberto da Giussano and woke up the Padanian People's pride. Together let's show our affection, our passion, our heat. Everyone, everyone, 80.000, Umberto! Umberto!

Balandier (1987) and Kertzer (1989) suggested that charismatic authority is precisely grounded in trusting the virtue of those who guide.[9] Bossi is "like a prophet, he sees ahead of others" League supporters told me. Bossi's figure is also related with other parallel role models of power and masculinity such as the military system, Bossi is "our *condottiero*" [the one that conducts]. *The condottiero,* however, also represents the understanding of politics and authority based on a model of status, strength, self sacrifice and honour. The imaginary warrior is epitomized by the Celtic warrior Alberto Da Giussano, but also on the image of Mel Gibson's interpretation of William Wallace in the famous blockbuster film "Brave Heart" displayed close to the stage in Pontida.
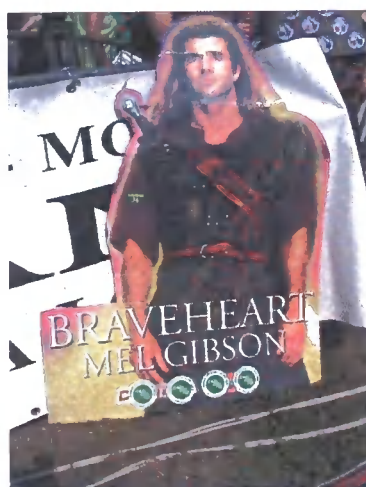
Image 1.12 Mel Gibson's image close to the stage in Pontida. Below on the picture are the words: "Vote for Us".

Umberto Bossi is introduced to the crowd by the speaker as the "heir" of the leader of the first Lombard League, Alberto da Giussano. This association plays a crucial role in the legitimization of Bossi as "our Boss" [capo] and legitimizes his bureaucratic and normative

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[9] Let us recall Weber's definition of charisma: "as a certain quality of an individual personality, by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men".

power as the League's federal secretary. Bossi enters the stage with the help of his wife. To celebrate this moment the speakers play celtic songs, a representation of the Leagues "northern ethnic origins". All around me people weep for joy. The crowd is silent when Bossi starts to speak:

> Today we came back to Pontida to renovate the Padanian peoples' unity pact. Today we confirm the alliance of our peoples (popoli). To confirm the Lega [NL] free from any compromise and in direction of federalism. Things take time to change. But the Lega is always the same combatant that believes. That has faith in the family, faith in the young people, faith in the country's future. They think that we will stop [he raises his hand and says with conviction] we will grow up! [applauses] That also means that my faith was not defeated by the disease.

> [He then has to rest. The crowd participates by waving their flags, and screaming in unison: Bossi! Bossi! Bossi! Libertà, Libertà, Liberta (freedom)]

> He proclaims: I still hold the sword passed down to me from Alberto Giussano. The sword of freedom of all the people (popoli)...

Bourdieu (1991) suggested that the power and legitimacy of the speaker is not just related with what it is said, but also with the practical manipulation of the symbols of power. Alberto Da Giussano linked the free communes against the German Emperor's attempt to overcome the autonomy of the Italian communes. Bossi links the different northern regions (peoples) into their struggle to re-gain their political autonomy, and protect their territorial boundaries and economic resources. The sword is, therefore, not only the symbol of the combative nature of the movement, but also the key symbol that allows a transcendence of the different regions, by making them merge into a single conscience. Into a people that has a precise goal. The one, who symbolically holds the sword, has, therefore, the power to conduct "the people".

Ritual, public performance, mass parades, popular and vernacular language and the recovery of medieval symbolism were used by the Northern League to not only protest against the central state, but also to propose a new understanding of the nation state, and of the political struggle. On the other hand, such new political practices were a crucial strategy to attract large attention by the media. The violence and desecrating content of the discourses and the inflammatory rhetoric were critical to disseminate the movements' ideals, and voice the *malumore* of part of the northern society with the Italian political system. The "anti-league discourse" used by its political antagonists and mainstream journalists, on the other hand, helped the

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movement to further institutionalise its position as a renewal movement. This image of renewal was further strengthened by the fact that a large majority of the League members were newcomers to the Italian political scene (Diamanti 1993:83, Biorcio 1997).

1.2.5 The Nationalization of the Northern Question: the Birth of Padania

Thus far I have described the Northern League as a promoter of the North as a geopolitical community of interest. The post-governmental period was marked by the essentialization of this idea. The Northern League moved from federal reform to the political secession of the North from the rest of Italy. This new political project was called Padania.

After leaving the first Berlusconi government in 1994, Bossi supported a transition government ran by the former member of Italian Central Bank, and Berlusconi's minister of the treasury, Lamberto Dini. Dini's government was formed of technicians and not politicians, but was supported in parliament by a left-wing coalition and centre. Bossi's support for Dini's institutional government confirmed his fear of losing a substantial part of his electorate to a new and powerful political entrepreneur (Biorcio 1997). Politically, Forza Italy appealed to the same political proposals as the League: for example, the need to liberalize the state and proceed with privatizations. Berlusconi's metaphor of "run the State as if a private company" was the perfect example of Forza Italia's political stance.

Leaving the first Berluconi's government damaged the League's cohesion. Many did not forgive what was perceived as Bossi's double treason: leaving the government and supporting the Left. This action associated the Northern League with past Italian political practices of political bargaining and parliamentary *trasformismo* (Hine 1993, Pasquino 1995).[10] The Northern League reacted to this difficult period with an innovative campaign. The Northern League tried to distinguish itself from both the left and the right. The attacks to the left and right were made under the premise that

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[10] *Trasformismo* is a current practice in the Italian political system. In order to maintain their power, or to access government, politicians had to make parliamentary agreements with each other. These parliamentary practices of bargaining and agreements prevented the Italian political system from developing a system of governance based on a political dialectic based on a political doctrine, for example: competition between right and left. In 1993, the change in the electoral law from proportional into majority, and the obligation of making clear coalitions that expressed on individuals as the future prime minister was an attempt of stopping this permanent obscure and Machiavellian system of parliamentary political power.

both coalitions were part of the *partitocrazia*. Left and right were accused of representing the "Southern and Roman interests", against the North. The provocative slogans of North *Nazione subito!* (North Nation now!) and *Indipendenza Nord* (North Independent) symbolized this new political strategy, and marked the beginning of the nationalization of the Northern Question. This change in the Northern League's political strategy was accelerated by the electoral results obtained in the 1996 political elections. In the North, the League alone achieved 20% of the votes (nationally 10%). This second electoral support obtained by the Northern League, again took the country by surprise (Biorcio 1997:89-90).

The Northern League's second electoral wave was different from the first one in the early nineties. During *tangentopoli* and the clean hands process the Northern League was also able to gain votes in the major urban centres, as well in the more rural and peripheral regions of Lombardy and Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia. The success of the League in urban areas was translated, for example, in the election of the mayor of Milano, the "productive capital of the North". In 1996 the League lost ground in the major urban centres, to the modern appeal of Forza Italia. Nevertheless, the League reinforced its political strength in the peripheral areas, in particular in industrial districts situated in the pre-alpine areas, which in the past were the heart of the Catholic subculture (Diamanti 1996, Biorcio 1997).

Wild (1997:97) convincingly argued that these industrial districts saw in the emergence of the Northern League, and the emphasis on regionalization, a solution to the new economic challenges such as technological investment, the development of a more effective tertiary sector that could provide adequate support to the new industrial realities (Diamanti 1996, See also Cento and Gilbert 2001). For these industrial sectors, the appeal to more institutional autonomy, taxation cuts, and infra-structural development as much as the importance of the defence of the local bounded territory, was crucial. In her words:

> The regional nature of the Northern League has often been seen as evidence of a parochial and backward-looking political project. Yet regionalization is precisely the way forward for industrial districts (1997:99).

The Northern League, therefore, assumes the political, but also cultural self representation of the economic model based on small and medium companies situated

in the peripheral areas of the Italian Nord East, what is commonly known as the "third Italy" (Biorcio 1997).

The political elections resulted in the victory of a left-wing coalition guided by the future European commissioner, Romano Prodi. Encouraged by the excellent electoral results, and by the attention of the media, the League pursued, and publicly formalized, its secessionist claim. The party again occupied the central stage in the Italian political debate. In September 1996, the League organized a ritual ceremony with the aim of declaring the "Independence of Padania." There are very interesting features about this new political stance. The first was the fact that this represented a shock to the frail idea of Italian nationality. The second is that there is no trace of an historical Padanian nation (Coleman 1996, Biorcio 1997, Giordano 2001). Moreover, the Northern League never clarified what were the borders of this new nation. These questions will be however analysed in depth in chapter four.

Image 1.13 Poster Lega Nord "Padania manages itself. NO! To the parties of Rome the thief"
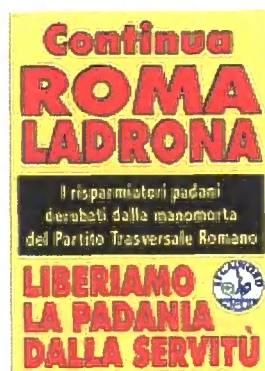
Image 1.14 Lega Nord Poster "Rome the Thief continues. Padania savers robbed by the "deadhand" of the transversal Roman Party. Let's free Padania from subservience".

Gellner (1994:35) suggested that "ethnicity becomes 'political' and gives rise to 'nationalism', when the 'ethnic' group (...) is not merely acutely conscious of its own existence, but also imbued with the conviction that the ethnic boundary ought also to be a political one." After the launch of the secessionist political project, Bossi declared in an interview to the Italian national newspaper *Corriere Della Sera* that:

> Federalism is not enough. Padania does not have anything to do with the South. The terroni (southerns) chose to live under the oppression of a political class and of the mafia. They chose this, now they should live with it, Padania here, the South and the Mafia there. (Quoted in Biorcio 1997:6)

It seems, therefore, that the launch of Padania was justified with the need of imbuing northern ethnicity with a clear political boundary. The construction of a northern national identity was made in a strong and radical contraposition to the stereotypical idea of the South. For the League, the Italian state was linked to the southern cultural mentality. The same happens with the Italian national model:

> People think that Italy is spaghetti, singing and mafia. These are characteristics of the South. The North is different, we are hard workers, we produce, we are Europeans (Firmino, 60, entrepreneur and League militant).

As Herzfeld (1993) pointed out, stereotypes are "the currency of social life". Stereotypes are rhetorically effective since they often reproduce rooted cultural models of understanding. The Northern League construction of the South, took advantage of these stereotypes to create dissociation between two imaginary groups, and in this way claim political reforms from the state. In imagining the North as a geopolitical category and cultural identity, the League *orientalised* the South, to use a famous concept from Edward Said (1978). As we will see in chapter four, this imagination is further emphasised through a complex elaboration of the concept of "the people". To better understand the rhetorical use of stereotypes, and discourse categories, I present a table with how the League constructs the North as radically different from the South.

Table 1.1- Related oppositions in the NL discourse.

The North – Padania	The South and Rome
Rich	Poor,
Rational	Irrational
Modern and efficient	Backward and inefficient
Austria-Germany, North Europe	Africa, Mediterranean
Honest and civic	Corrupt, criminal, Mafia, lack of civic sense
Hard working and productive work ethic	Lazy and unproductive
Protestant and competitive	Catholics and fatalists.
Independent and entrepreneurs	State dependent and bureaucrats
Concrete practical language *gentese*	Italian, *politichese*
Strong communitarian traditions	Amoral familism, patronage, Rome
North- Milan	
Padania, First World	Italy, Third World

Cento Bull and Gilbert (2001) argued that Bossi launched the Padania project in 1996, because the Northern League's leadership was expecting that the Italy State, and its left wing government, would not fulfil the Maastricht criteria. Not accomplishing the Maastricht criteria would leave Italy, and the northern industrial system that they represented, out of the modern Euro zone.[11] This exclusion would be the final demonstration of the Roman politicians' incapacity to modernize the country, and to address the desires of the productive sectors that operate in the North. As result, it would confirm that integration with the underdeveloped South was damaging the northern industrial system.

The launch of Padania, on the other hand, was also an attempt to address the transformations that northern society was going through. At the beginning of the nineties support for the Northern League was partly a vote of protest and party reaction to new political proposals, such as lower taxes. The secessionist claim emerged at time where national governments were having difficulties in dealing with globalization. The industrial economic system was moving toward a post-fordist form

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[11] This interpretation was confirmed to me by several Northern League leaders during the fieldwork. They argued that the League was planning to use this argument strategically to push for a radical state reform.

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of production. Politically, the emergence of post-national political structures such as the European Union was being consolidated (Biorcio 1997, Cento Bull and Gilbert 2001). Indeed, the secession proposal was rhetorically promoted by the League as a strategy to address the Italian State's massive public debt, to support the economy, and to address the problems of the welfare state. In order to attenuate the disruptive character of the reform, the Northern League ideologues argued that Padania's acceptance of the Euro would help the South. The South would be able to use the weakest currency to promote its own industrial development through exports. This seems to have been a successful argument, since it was often repeated to me during fieldwork by League militants.

There is a final, but important point, regarding the launch of Padania. Many Northern League militants described it to me as just a "provocation", or even a "joke". As Giordano (1997) noted, the Northern League was obliged to search for a new form of political distinction. According to this author, Padania was proposed because the League lost its capacity to innovate politically. The majority of the movements' political proposals were now being adopted by other political contenders.[12] Therefore the relation between the League and the media played a decisive role (see also Tambini (2001). As previously noted, the movement attracted public attention through its constant use of shocking statements (Razzua and Schmidtke 1993, Biorcio 1997). This communicative strategy kept the Northern League in the national headlines. The secessionist claim was at the time the unavoidable further step to gaining public notoriety.[13] Finally, Padania emerges as the essentialization of the Northern question (Cento Bull and Gilbert 2001). The country's attention, normally devoted to *La Questione Meridionale* [Southern Question], changed direction. Italian politicians, and the state, had now to start addressing la *Questione Settentrionale* (the Northern Question).

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[12] A brief research in the 1996 newspapers confirm this interpretation since even the Left talked about Federalism. On the other hand, Forza Italia used the traditional tax-cut arguments.

[13] Again during the newspapers review it was clear that the NL activity was followed actively by the several Italian press.

1.2.6 The Suspension of the Secessionist Claim and the Re-entrance in the Nation State Government

The Northern League pursued their peaceful and "Ghandian" request for political independence. In 1997, a referendum was organized by the League to ask "the people" to pronounce themselves on the prospects of political secession. The overall and real lack of support to their secessionist agenda, however, led the League to "suspend" its secessionist rhetoric. This was a consequence of the radical character of the proposal inside and outside the movement. According to Tambini (2001:147), the difficulty of the Padanian paradigm was that although many militants supported their claims to autonomy, the majority did not agree with outright secession. On the other hand, the controversial and provocative proposal drove an important part of the Northern League political class to abandon the party in dissent with the new line (see for example Biorcio 1997:96-97).

The League also suffered some electoral set-backs. Part of the reason was the energies invested by the movement in the constitution and elaboration of feeling national identity. During fieldwork, former members of the Liga Veneta showed some confusion regarding the creation of this supra-national identity, which to some extent questioned the strong symbolic investment in discovering the region as an ethnic reality. More importantly, this strategy questioned the relation of the movement with its traditional base of reference, the small entrepreneurs. Fabrizio Comencini, a former president of the Liga Veneta, expressed this dissent to me:

> To some extent we lost contact with reality. For example, in an important meeting to approve the law that would give to Veneto more autonomy, Bossi did not support us. He argued that with this law, the Padanian dream would not be possible. Important entrepreneurs that were in the meeting and supported us, left the meeting saying that we became like the others. In fact, if you see the *Gazzetino* (a newspaper widely read in Veneto that voiced similar positions to the Northern League), the League lost a substantial part of the initial attention and promotion.[14]

It seems, therefore, that the investment in the construction of a northern national identity, to some extent stopped the Northern League from intercepting, and representing the problems of some of the entrepreneurial classes, that traditionally supported the movement, due to its practical, and pragmatic political agenda.

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[14] A research in the Gazzetino confirmed Comencini remarks.

The Northern League soon corrected its political positions. In the 2001 political elections the movement realigned with their former coalition partners. Instead of the secessionist proposal, the Northern League argued for a softer constitutional reform called devolution. Inspired by the Scottish model, this constitutional reform consisted in the delegation of important aspects of governance from the state to the regions. Although this reform passed both the Camera and the Senate at the end of the centre-right legislature, it failed to pass a widely debated national referendum, where the League was accused of wanting to "destroy Italian national unity".

Image 1.15 Electoral Poster Lega Nord Bossi points to the new direction. The posters reads: "Agreement between Lega and the Pole. From the state to the regions. Devolution of school, health, local police. Coordination of the Padanian regions. Grand public works in the North. Stop uncontrolled immigration".

The 2001 political elections marked another significant change in Italy. The victory of a renewed *Casa delle Libertá* (House of Freedoms) guided by Berlusconi meant that for the first time in the Post Second World War period there was an alternation between two coalitions. Conversely, this coalition also showed traits from the previous Italian political culture: the habit of bargaining. Distinct political convictions transformed the governance practice into a difficult process where the prime minister assumed the role of mediator between the different components of the government coalition. Still, for the first time in the Italian Post War history, a government lasted a whole legislature (five years). For the Northern League, this political election had a contradictory flavour. On the one hand, due to pre-electoral agreements they obtained a strong political representation both in the government and in parliament. In fact, during the legislature they had three ministers: Justice, Welfare and Constitutional Reform. In this sense, the League re-entered the Italian political institutional system as a responsible and government political force.

The League's votes, however, dropped in the elections by almost 6%. This fall confirmed its electoral decline (in local elections in 1997 it fell 40% and in the European elections in 1999 it only got 4.5% of the votes). With only 3.9% of votes, this meant that without the previous electoral agreement the League would have few representatives in the parliament. Notwithstanding, without the League, the coalition led by Berlusconi would not have won the election. In brief, although important, the League, as the political scientist Gianfranco Pasquino (2001) noted, lost its "power to blackmail".

The post-secessionist phase, however, and the re-entrance into the nation state political system also brought important changes in the movements' discourse. In the struggle for political difference, the League's 2001 campaign recovered old jargons, such as emphasising immigration control and the power of the regions. A new attitude, however, was adopted towards the European Union (Giordano 2001). What initially was considered to be a successful and desirable structure was now portrayed as extremely centralized, bureaucratised and corrupt. (Bossi often called the European Union: the Soviet Union of Europe.)

Why this change in relation to the European Union? The success of the Italian left-wing government in joining the Euro zone was one of the reasons. The absence of control by the State when the Euro was introduced brought about a strong inflation in prices. On the other hand, local productive sectors that traditionally took economic advantage of the weak Italian currency to export their products, and to be competitive in the world markets, were now exposed to new forms of economic competition. Simultaneously, the acceleration of the globalization process was partly the consequence of the expansion of the EU versus Eastern Europe which, combined with the emergence of a World market for cheap labour resources such as China, India, Turkey, increased the pressure over the traditional sectors in the Italian districts, such as the textile and shoe industries. These structural changes in the European and World economy posed new challenges to part of the northern productive sectors, which found themselves unprepared. The Northern League clearly interpreted these needs, and stated to voice its deep concerns, by claiming from both the nation-state and the European Union the right to impose *dazi* (import taxes) on Chinese and Indian products. What follows next, is the explanation of a Northern League regional counsellor of this important paradigmatic shift:

Power is going in the direction of Brussels. We do not contest globalisation, but this extreme globalisation. We cannot stop history, or stop the world, but we have to take care of territory. The territory speaks about economy. Our small and medium companies that suddenly had to confront a world economy where there are economic situations different from ours, where labour market legislation is totally different, where environmental rules are completely different. We call this Illegal competition. It is not that we have anything against the Chinese (...) but they work in a way that does not allow our small companies to adapt. Now we say this: if we leave things going like they want in Europe, here the small and medium companies will die and the Italian people are left without work. This creates problems for China too. China needs a market to sell to since they are still poor. We need to make the passage in a gradual way. We have to protect our companies for a while so that they can elevate their economic level, because also to them there is interest that they raise their economic level. I am a liberal, but we have to make sure that it is not a wild liberalism. We want Europe to take into account the needs of the territory not just the ones of the market.

This U-turn on Europe was consequently the expression of popular dissatisfaction with introduction of the Euro, and also the reflex of the nation state's loss of power to control the economic process and its internal market. As result, the Northern League presents itself as the defender of the territory from the modernization model advocated by European Union technocrats. I think the following posters provide an important illustration of this new political position.

Image 1.16 Poster Lega Nord. "Super State Europe. No to Gallowland" Padania (composed by the regions of Liguria, Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto and Friuli Venezia Giulia) is lunged through a noose composed of the EU starts. "People of Europe for the Europe of the peoples.

Image 1.17 Poster Lega Nord "Padanian Pride. Exalt our work, food, our tradition and history, against the monopoly of globalization". The key idea is the protection of Padanian traditions, from the globalization threat. The League is presented as the embodiment of tradition against modern political institutions.

Image 1.18- Poster Lega Nord "We are turning the ship around". The League is represented by a tugboat that attempts to change the direction of the larger one that represents the Italian state.

1.2.7 Intercepting and Interpreting the Changes in the Northern Question

During my fieldwork the Northern League was part of the government. This period confirmed the significant shift in their political priorities. The initial neo-liberal and modernization impulses were now substituted by an anti-globalization and anti-modernization discourse. Today, the Northern League places strong emphasis on the need to protect the northern spiritual and communitarian roots, and the northern traditional way of life which, as we have seen in the initial protest in the European parliament, is considered threatened by this "savage globalization" and by the expansion of the European Union market oriented policies - which as several militants noted want the "homologation of the peoples."- On several occasions when I heard Bossi speaking after various No referenda to the European constitution treaty, I heard him claim with satisfaction that "European peoples were waking up, nationalism is coming back".

Image 1.19- Poster Lega Nord "Let us protect our work and our products. Stop the importation from countries without rights. Their low cost products destroy our companies".

The change in the Northern League's political discourse seems to be a reaction to an important turn in the League's support base. The Northern League became the vehicle of expression of not only small and medium companies that were unable to innovate, and adapt their production to the new market laws and competition. More importantly, the movement also seemed to have become the territorial representative of many industrial workers, who seen their labour positions threatened by industrial outsourcing. This turn to the representation of the workers protests echoes Zizek's (2006) reflections that populism is becoming an important political mechanism through which workers protest against new forms of capitalist exploitation.

> They tell us you are racist, because you defend your people, because you are against the extra-communitarians and Europe. I remember that three years ago when Umberto Bossi told me "*Dazi* (import taxes) we need to protect our country, to save work positions". They told us, it was demagogy, and today they are giving us reason. Europe is dead! Work first for our workers, then for the others. I am proud of saying it! I do not feel racist in saying it. They are the racist ones who want to enslave the North. They have destroyed the economy of this country, the grand entrepreneurs that for their own dirty interests, for their profits, took the factories out of this country creating unemployment. Thanks to these entrepreneurs that did not believe in our country. And still today the grand professors make everything to substitute the peoples (popoli) of this country, with the extra-communitarian, with the clandestine, and now with the Chinese. [applause and loud cheering, Rosie! Rosie! Rosie!] (Leader of the Padanian Union, discourse made in Pontida 2005)

Curiously, this effort of the *carroccio* to represent the northern working classes was seen with disdain, and sometimes indifference, by sectors that traditionally defended the workers. A good example of the depreciation of the workers' problems is presented in the left-wing progressive newspaper *La Repubblica*. In an article where

the alliance between the Lega and extremist right-wing forces is denounced, the journalist highlights the similarity between the two political ideologies:

> Autonomous workers with lack of instruction, non-qualified workers, and classes that risk to lose economic power. Subjects that are more exposed to the contradictions of the multiethnic society and to the simplification of the world *leghista'* (*La Repubblica* 18\06\2005).

The incapacity of the left to mobilize the workers electorate in Veneto was admitted by the local leader of *Rifondazione Comunista* (PRC). In spite of the fact that many workers were members of left-wing trade unions, he told me that they voted for the Lega in the political elections. Also elements linked with the Catholic union and associations voiced similar concerns. It seems, therefore, that the Northern League is able again to collect the concerns of territory. In this way the movement is able to transversely occupy a space in the political field that was traditionally represented by the left, and in Veneto by social Catholicism. This metamorphosis of the League confirms the movements' extraordinary ability in not only identifying the problems of the territory, but more importantly to assume their political representation.

The government period also dictated other important transformations in the Northern League's political discourse. A significant one was the turn toward the defence of European Christian roots and culture. In the party interpretative model, European Christian roots are being threatened by Muslim immigration, terrorism, clandestine immigration, but also by post-modern conceptions of family, such as homosexual marriage, or the possibility of children being adopted by homosexual couples. Also important was the role played by bioethical themes such as, for example, artificial insemination. Some League exponents seem to have been influenced by the ultra-conservative Catholic movement of the French Cardinal Lefevre. The following posters express the League's public concern with Europe, and with the protection of the territory's symbolic boundaries.

Image 1.20 Poster Lega Nord "Milan Demonstration against Turkey in Europe. Yes to European Christian roots"

Image 1.21 *La Padania* front page. The Journal titles: "The Slavic slaughter house". It shows a man pushing an Italian woman against a wall, and another approaching with a knife in his hand. The newspaper also announces the manifestation of Pontida against the Euro.

The Northern League has been advocating the thesis of the "clash of civilizations" defended by important sectors of the conservative right, both in the United States and Europe. The "war on terror" that characterized the post nine-eleven period, and the terrorist attacks in Europe, were used to contest and reject both North African and Muslim immigration. The bomb attacks in London, and for example the murder of the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh by a muslim extremist after the production of the film "Submission" that denounced the condition of women in Islam, were used by the League as the final demonstration that inter-cultural and religious integration is just a cultural mirage. The League sees this as a product of the Western decadent, materialistic and politically correct culture. As result, the Northern League presents itself as the defender of Western traditional values. I think the next work produced by a Northern League activist clearly embodies these last points.
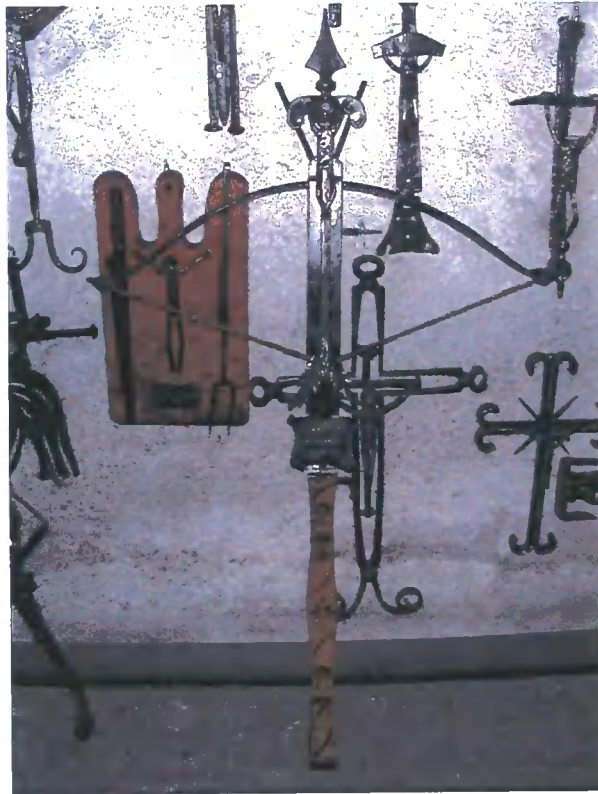
Image 1.22 Work of Orso Grigio. Crossbow with an arrow. On the tip of the arrow there is a representation of Christ. In the crossbow it is written, "hit or to be hit". [trans: *Colpire o essere Colpiti*]

During fieldwork *La Padania*, the movements' official newspaper, constantly emphasised violent crimes perpetuated by extra-communitarian immigrants such as rape, murder, and assaults. Anti-immigrant rhetoric and the emphasis on the Muslim threat were often used to achieve collective action, in the form of parades, vigilant actions, and public protests. "*Padania Cristiana non Musulmana*," "Yes to polenta, No to couscous" were slogans often used in these public parades by League militants. The parades were normally organized around the possible construction of mosques, illegal Muslin schools, or after some outrageous violent crimes. Among these actions, a particular famous one involved the use of pigs. As a sign of protest, the League activists took pigs to eat and urinate in the land where mosques were proposed to be built.

Italian newspapers linked with conservative sectors such as *Il Giornale* and *Libero* continually contributed to the increase of ethnic and religious tension. During my fieldwork, terrorist attacks in Italy were often mentioned as likely to happen, and the judiciary was accused of being too soft on potential terrorists. Italy was considered a potential target due to the Government's participation in the War in Iraq and

Afghanistan, and due to the presence of the Vatican. Moreover, the Northern League was able to take advantage of the new Pope's reserves about Islam, and the possible inclusion of Turkey in the "Christian" Europe. *La Padania* nicknamed the Pope: "*Il Papa della identità*". A good example of the use of the Pope's thought is provided by a letter from Bossi to the Italian right-wing newspaper *Libero*. Bossi's letter was put on the first page. The letter represents a political simplification of the Pope's thought, however it shows how the Northern League is able to adapt to the concerns expressed by segments of the northern society, and use it for their own political ends:

> Islam is growing up, but Catholicism is holding on, it has strong roots among our people. The Muslims can try as much as they want. The lesson history gave us is that they always did. But we started holding them at Poitiers, where the Franchi and the Longobardi allied, and in Viena where there was a monk from the people, Marco D'Aviano who understood the mortal danger that Europe was going through and led the fight back. I do not forget that the Padanian cavalry was a vital ally for the Pope in 1683. There is a historic alliance between the Pope and the Padanians. It is not a coincidence that Federico Barbarossa who fought against the Lombard League was named during his rule the Anti-pope. The same alliance between Padanian *Identità* and Christian *identità* is re-proposed -- against the Muslim invasion, and for the idea of the traditional family. (*Libero* 16-12-2006)

Each of these new elements (Anti-Muslim, xenophobic rhetoric, the opposition to the EU and globalization, the defence of the traditional family and of the northern working class) can be understood separately for analytical purposes. However, they are intertwined in the achievement of collective action. They are used to promote the mobilization of party militants against dangerous and threatening others (the threat can be either physical or cultural). Although keeping itself within the law, this populist and demagogic rhetoric enables the Lega to maintain its political momentum, and also to retain media attention. On the other hand, it allows the movement to change their activists' attentions from the political responsibilities, and political frustrations of being directly involved in government, and therefore in the acceptance of compromises. As result, the threatening others allowed the League to retain its anti-system image.

In short, in almost three decades of its political existence, the League has been able to collect and canalize protest, and disenchantment with the institutional political process, but also to propose innovative political proposals. In variant forms the League has always used the concept of territory as the basis of its political program.

The political representation of the territory is rhetorically constructed as the embodiment of an ethnic cultural question. The construction of northern ethnic identity is made by recurring to the concept of "the people". "The people" is constructed as the embodiment of local cultural models, and in the opposition of these models to dangerous and threatening others. Ethnicity and local identity have been employed by the League to not only legitimize the movements' political proposals, but also to mobilize individuals into collective political action.

In contrast with national parties that have to concentrate in mediating between extremely contradictory issues, the Northern League focused its political attention on the representation of segments of the northern territory normally situated in the peripheral areas of urban centres. The League's appeal is focused on concrete and grounded problems, which directly touch the interests of certain social sectors in the territory such as: economy, security, taxes, cultural change and modernization. Although the League uses populism to communicate its political message, throughout its history the movement has been trying to maintain two important fronts. On the one hand, a consistent anti-system and anti-power political position, normally expressed through populist, anti-conformist and often demagogic messages. On the other, it attempts to retain enough political capital to occupy government and institutional positions.

In spite of the fact that the League follows an extremely pragmatic agenda, there is also a strong utopian and ideal component. This utopian and radical political proposal is not only extremely persuasive but, I will argue, is crucial to individuals that chose to blend their social and political identity, by becoming *leghisti*. Some of these aspects have not often been explored, since political scientists and often sociologists that investigate the League have mainly based their understanding of politics on a western idea of self interest and economic rationality. I hope that the ethnographic work developed with Northern League's activists and supporters will contribute to the already vast body of literature on the League, but also on political movements, in a twofold way: on the one hand, to bring to the light the importance of rooted cultural and social models in the understanding of political action and ideology. On the other hand, to understand how individuals use, and rhetorically manipulate, political

identities with the purpose of making sense of the transformations that are taking place in their social world.

1.3 Theoretical Issues: An anthropological Perspective of a Political Movement

> We must disclose the hidden agendas and instrumentalities behind the fictions of interpretative and explanatory totalization, and relate forms of knowledge to the existential contents which foreshadow them. (Jackson, 1996:37)

Joan Vincent (2004:2) asserts that the goal of a political anthropologist "is to understand, interpret, and transmit the ideologies and circumstances of political structure, political organization, and political action". Political parties and political movements link several sections of society. They are responsible for connecting individuals and the state, and mediating between different levels of society: local and regional, regional and national, national and supra-national. As Andrew Knapp (2004:1) notes, political parties should be seen as overlapping different social functions. On the one hand, they are players competing for power. On the other hand, they not only represent social distinctions and cleavages, but also create and give voice to different ideologies of how a society should be organized. In addition, political parties in a democratic system are important in the organization and structuring of the political field, acting as mediators between individuals and society. One could therefore argue that they are vital to the understanding of not only how political facts are created and then integrated in a certain order to form a social world coherent vision, but also how these *visions* inform political actions and proposals. The creation, integration and connections that emerge from the top therefore reveal a complex epistemological and methodological challenge.

Since its inception the innovative and creative nature of the Northern League phenomenon has been scrutinized by the academic world. There is today a large body of knowledge covering the history of the Northern League, its impact within the Italian political system and agenda, its populist and nationalistic tendencies, the political and social reasons of its appearance. I am therefore entering a relatively well ploughed field. Nevertheless, if we start from the premise that the Northern League phenomenon should be understood not only as part of a political plan, but also as a cultural and social one, then I believe, there is still some scope for a contribution to

the understanding of the Northern League, and especially *leghismo* as a social identity.

According to the Northern League expert Professor Cento Bull (2003:41), the theoretical understanding of the Northern League identity construction falls into two major categories: the essentialist and the constructivist. The essentialist approach has focused on the construction of a local and national identity as an attempt to explore the deeper grievances, sometimes even rage, with the functioning of the Italian nation state. By mainly looking at the movement's political proposals, this perspective has linked the rise of the Northern League with lower taxes, federalism, privatizations regionalization, and more security. For these scholars, the Northern League was able to represent and transform these deep grievances and social-political demands into a collective identity. Overall, for these authors the Northern question is not a consequence of an ethnic problem, but it is voiced and constructed as one. Indeed, for these authors, ethnicity is often linked with the historical emergence of the first regional leagues, which led Diamanti to call them ethnic entrepreneurs (see also Woods 1995). In other words, in the essentialist approach *leghismo* is primarily the outcome of a pragmatic material struggle for economic and political resources.

The constructivist approach has been concerned with the explanation of the Northern League primarily as a nationalist\populist movement. For these authors, the League has been able to construct a new collective identity that found correspondence with important parts of the northern electorate (Biorcio 1997, Tambini 2001, Albertazzi 2006). Tambini (2001) exemplifies this stance. For this author "the case of the League illustrates how identity constructions are indeed crucial to mobilizing successful protest and that that these identity constructions use existing and latent resources" (2001:127). The identification between the new collective identity, the political movements and individuals, subscribed to traditional nationalist theories reaffirmed through the invention of mass rituals where common symbols were adored. As a result, the constructivist approach echoes the ground-breaking theoretical insights proposed by the influential book of Hobsbawn and Ranger (1983) *The Invention of Tradition*.

These two theoretical approaches have made strong and extremely important contributions to both the understanding of the relation between identity, material conflicts and political struggle, and the reasons that led such a marginal movement to become central in the Italian political system. Yet, they share the same fundamental premise. Social life, political action and mobilization, are explained and understood through rational and pragmatical premises. Both theories subscribe to the rather questionable idea that modern capitalist societies are based on pragmatic motivated relationships (see Heady (1999) for a critique). Indeed, both approaches describe the creation, and imagination, of a common identity following the above mentioned work of Hobsbawn and Ranger (1983) with its strong emphasis as understanding identity has the basis of rational and manipulative action.

There is a risk in understanding social life and political action just in terms of economic and rational circumstances. This is that it neglects to understand the extent to which values, ideas and practices are correlated with individuals' logic of practice and experiences, and the significance of emotions. Throughout the thesis I will refer to *leghismo* not just as a mechanism of political representation, but also as a kind of spiritual ideology. I argue that understanding why individuals identify with this spiritual ideology is fundamental to understanding the Northern League's success. In other words, I am suggesting that what makes a political ideology and social identity meaningful can overcome conscious and pragmatic association. In fact, strict understanding in terms of "rationality," can prevent us from understanding other forms of "rationality" embedded in, for example, social practice. In this sense, I follow the line proposed by authors such as Bourdieu (1977), Fernandez (1982) and Lakoff (1980, 1996), Herzfeld (1993). Their works showed that people think through various frames of references. In calling attention to the importance of understanding the role of cognitive processes, as well as the metaphoric frameworks in the way people make sense of their social worlds, they also provide us with important possibilities of understanding how individuals make sense of political action. I augur that the ethnographic material discussed in this thesis will contribute to further this understanding.

The relation between pragmatic rationality and other models of thinking and understanding raises another important theoretical tension that to explore in this

thesis. I analyse the role played by pre-modern patterns and models of social life, and its relation with pragmatic action, in the understanding of the social identity proposed by the Northern League. In this sense, Pierre Bourdieu's work provides us with important set of conceptual tools - in particular the concept of *habitus-*. Bourdieu criticizes anthropologists' obsession with both rules and roles, and with the need of making sense of individuals' practice through both 'cultural maps' and 'decoding operations' (Bourdieu 1977). In his words:

> To eliminate the need to resort to "rules", it would be necessary to establish in each case a complete description (...) of the relation between the habitus, as a socially constituted system of cognitive and motivating structures, and the socially structured situation in which the agents' interests are defined, and with them the objective functions and subjective motivations of their practices. (Bourdieu 1977: 76)

The *habitus* is an interesting epistemological mechanism because it goes beyond a group of rules, or abstract visions of the world. Instead, it corresponds to a structure of pre-dispositions that organize social and cultural practices, without determining it.

In combining agents' cognitive processes, the way in which agents understand and respond to both the physical and social world with structural ones such as political systems, kinship, religion and economy - the *habitus* as principle that "generates strategies" is deeply embedded in the relationship between the subjective and the objective, between individual agency and social structure:

> The habitus could be considered as a subjective but not individual system of internalised structures, schemes of perception, conception, and action common to all members of the same group or class and constituting the precondition for all objectification and apperception. (Bourdieu 1977:86)

As result, the *habitus* is an interesting conceptual, and especially a methodological instrument, which allows the identification of strategies by which individuals reflexively, and rhetorically, construct and imagine their social identity.

In his theoretical proposal, Bourdieu innovatively links economy and political power with the field of cultural production. Identity, (as, for example, a person's aesthetic taste (1984)) reproduces itself in the individual practices, and on the influence of the socialization process. As Paul Roscoe (1993:111) argues, practice theory:

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insists on incorporating nonmaterial, as well as material, circumstances into social process, stressing the role of individuals' agents in using this conditions and contingencies to create social life.

Therefore, instead of seeing strategy and political action as a product of structural roles or rules, Bourdieu stresses the interconnected and mutable character of these strategies.

Traditionally, anthropological theory and method followed the Cartesian principle of dividing the whole, in order to understand its complexity and try to understand the structural unity that composes that whole. I think Bourdieu's work draws our attention to the importance of understanding this interconnectedness and correspondence between the different social domains (kinship, religion, economy, political structure) and individual agency. In this thesis I attempt to grasp these interconnections as a key to understand the Northern League. My aim is to understand the relations between social practices and local and personal systems of belief, and the Northern League's political proposals.

Dalton, Mc Allister, and Wattenberg (2002:20-21) argued that partisanship "provides structure and meaning for individual belief systems; it provides a perceptual screen that helps individuals to organize the complexities of politics". Yet, despite the fact that there is a vast body of knowledge that use interviews, and even fieldwork with Northern League members, these accounts often represent them as passive and willing recipients of the Northern League's political messages (see, for example, Biorcio 1997). As a result, little has been written on what it means to be a *leghista*, how this political identity has been culturally impacting on local society (more than just mirroring), and how individuals incorporate it in their own life worlds. As authors such as Herzfeld (1993) note, people find ways to live with national and political ideologies and their contradictions by often turning them into their own advantage. The recent works of Heady (1999) in Carnia, and Stacul (2003) in two Trentine villages shows how local people rhetorically use past models of community life, and national political ideologies, to defend their own political interests and the coherence of their social world. My work will follow these authors, in claiming that while the Northern League is a mechanism of political representation, on the local and often more personal levels to be a *leghista* is a political act through which individuals not only contest the dominant models of political and cultural authority,

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but also try to make sense of the transformations that are taking place in their own society.

To the phenomenologist Alfred Schutz (1962:100) understanding the social world, "means understanding the way in which men define their situations". A revealing observation gained from fieldwork, and corroborated by interviews and participant observation, was that for a large number of individuals to be a *leghista* clearly distinguishes them from the rest of the society. Typically, those who joined the League, and assume their social identity as being a *leghista*, more than mere supporters and voters, see themselves as in some way different from the rest of the society. They described themselves as more straightforward, practical, honest and direct. Indeed, often becoming a *leghista* was described to me as an "enlightening rite of passage" (in the terms of Van Gennep), "as gaining consciousness of who I was", or even as embracing a "new faith".

> Being *leghista* is to be a lover of the truth. It is being proud of being Veneto. It is to be proud of the territory of agriculture. *Leghista* is one who never arrives to compromises. It implies defending the truth that belongs to everyone, a shared truth.
>
> The true *leghista* is different from the Christian democrats, communists or fascists who only intervene when they touch some important themes.
>
> My behaviour changed. I learned not to overestimate people with degrees, and I am happy to say that normal people like me can engage in political arguments and give political guaranties to the people.

In these brief narratives we can see how personal and local ideas and practices are interconnected with *leghismo*. In the second narrative we can see how *leghismo* is clearly represented as a distinct social identity, whilst in the third being a *leghista* is clearly associated with the empowerment of local knowledge in relation to high culture. Finally, in the first narrative we can see how being a *leghista* seems to be linked with economic practices (agriculture), but also feelings of local attachment to the region. Obviously being a *leghista* also means to be Italian or even European. As the *leghista* Orso Grigio noted wryly, "I did not want to be Italian, but unfortunately I am." This naturalistic fatalism was presented differently by other activists: "we are Italians, different ones though".

It is precisely this rhetorical use of the notion of identity, which can be ethnography's contributions to the understanding of a political movement such as the Northern League. While this thesis claims that in order to understand *leghismo* it is necessary to explore the social practices and fundamental models that individuals already use to make sense of their own social world, it also suggests that individuals adopt poetical and often ironic notions about their own selves and their identity. Throughout the thesis I will try to give an account of how political activists's interpretations of the *leghismo* are used to create social life. It is precisely the understanding of this act of creation that an anthropological perspective can offer: the attempt to understand cultural and social process from the viewpoint of the participants, and the meaning that they give those processes. As Marcus (1997:61) noted:

> If there is anything to be discovered by ethnography it is the relationships, connections, and indeed cultures of connection, association, circulation that are completely missed through the use and naming of the object of study in term of "natural" to subjects' pre-existing discourses about them.

1.3.2 The Art of Reason or the Reason of Art? For a Humanist account of the *Leghismo*

Kertzer (1987) and Shore's (1990) ethnographies among communist activists in Italy showed that parties provide a comprehensive system of belief and behaviour that can transform an individual's social identity. In this thesis I suggest that the Northern League's ideology is often used by individuals as a mediator between past models of social organization and modern ones. The movements' emphasis on political autonomy and local traditions is often perceived by the militants as an attempt to reconstruct a feeling of wholeness that was lost due to the deep transformations that took place in their society. Indeed, I suggest that in order to have a better understanding of the persuasive power of the League's proposal, one should try to see it as a part of mythopoetical activity (Levi Strauss 1972).

With the purpose of understanding the dialectic relationship between local ideologies and the League, and how individuals poetically incorporate, and adapt, the movements' ideology to their life world, I will focus on the study of art and artefacts' made by *leghista*. Through the presentation and analysis of artefacts, and works of art such as paintings and photographs, I hope to provide the reader with a deeper understanding of how the *leghista* imagine their social world. Before I define, and

develop, the theoretical implications of this argument, I will present and discuss a work of a well-known *leghista* in Belluno: Orso Grigio.

Image 1.23 Work of Orso Grigio displayed outside his house in the village of Sois in the province of Belluno. The statue represents Jesus Christ on the bottom of the cross in a lazy position. The cross instead is represented as a traditional maypole, with pieces of food on the top. The statue's background is a representation of heaven. Around heaven it is written in Italian: "died for everyone [morto per tutti], exploited by too many [sfruttato da troppi].

This particular piece enables us to glimpse the otherwise hidden symbolism that underlines local understandings of the Northern League's political program. *Leghisti* such as Orso Grigio shape their work, and the views of their products, by reference to questions and issues that concern them as politico-cultural activists. The work of Orso Grigio shows how politics can go beyond organic and economic needs, and help us understand how *leghismo* is an object of thought, reflection, and imagination.

What is most striking about this piece is its construction process, and how in its structure we can see the interconnection between material culture, religious, economic, political concerns and history. These different dimensions are poetically woven into this work. To make sense of these pieces and works of Orso Grigio, but also other Northern League members, I will borrow Levi-Strauss's concept of *bricolage*. In the *Savage Mind* he presents the idea of *bricolage* as an expression of the "science of the concrete" (1972:16). The *bricoleur* is "someone who works with

his hands and used devious means compared to those of the craftsman." His universe of instruments is closed and the rules of his game are always to make do with whatever is at hand" (ibid:17).[15]

The *bricoleur's* work, and the practice of *bricolage* for the French author, is similar to mythical thinking. The *bricoleur* permanently plays with the pre-constitutive units of myth in order to recreate social order. Indeed, what is more promising for our understanding of the tension between individual, local ideologies, political identity, and society, is the fact that the *bricoleur* work:

> Derives his poetry from the fact that he does not confine himself to accomplishment and execution, he 'speaks' not only with things, (...), but also through the medium of things: giving an account of his personality and life by the choices he makes between limited possibilities. The bricoleur may not ever complete his purpose but he always puts something of himself into it (Levi Strauss:1972:21)

The practice of *bricolage* derives its poetry from the interconnection between different cultural materials. Throughout the thesis I use Orso Grigio's pieces to study these interconnections. I argue that they can help us understanding how the *leghisti* see, perceive, and situate themselves in their social world. On the other hand, they provide an account of political agency, since they represent the individuals' ability to play and try to change their social world.

In *Writing and Difference* Derrida (2001:292-294) notes that the free play of the *bricoleur* "is always an interplay between absence and presence", but in order to be radically understood as a critical and creative process Derrida notes that: "free play must be conceived before the alternative of presence and absence". In other words, the free play starts precisely with the possibility of free playing. In order to support and better understand the critical value of the idea of *bricolage* and free play as epistemological tools, I will provide some empirical evidence by deconstructing the work of Orso Grigio presented above. I will do so in several brief points in order to be clear.

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[15] At this point, I could say that Orso Grigio is a local artisan. Like many other *leghisti* he is a gifted craftsman that puts strong emphasizes on the need to "do-it-yourself." More importantly to the argument in the context of the local society, the *fai-da-te* (do-it-yourself) is an idiom that local people use to talk about themselves, and to explain both the reasons of their modern economic success, and why they chose to join or support the Northern League

1. If, as Levi Strauss (1972:10) noted, "sacred objects contribute to the maintenance of order in the universe by occupying the places allocated to them", the first striking point in this work is the dislocation of the place of Christ from the centre of the cross. This implies moving the crucial notion of sacrifice to arrive to heaven. Indeed, playing with metaphorical idioms of up and down, the author of the piece represents Jesus as a man that refuses to move up into a higher and transcendental sphere. As we will find in this thesis, the idea of sacrifice plays a vital role in how people perceive themselves, but also how they imagine their community. A possible political interpretation for this dislocation would be that Jesus is a metaphorical representation of the relation between the hard working North and both the South and the Italian national state. It symbolizes the resistance of the North to what is perceived as the Roman state exploitation. In this sense, the commentary by the artist "died for everyone, exploited by too many" is, in this case, as significant as the symbols and signs used in the work.

2. The metaphoric representation of the North as Christ means a dispute over the control, mediation and interpretation of the powerful symbol of Christ in itself. Indeed, this work can be seen as a "desecration" (both aesthetically and religiously).Yet, although representing defiance to institutions of power that use and interpret the figure of Christ, its use of Christ also shows an important identification between the artist and the figure of Jesus. As we will see in the thesis, this corresponds to ingrained ideas that local people have of themselves as self-sacrifiers (see also Heady 1999). The idiom of self-sacrifice was often used by *leghisti* to explain to me what was to be *leghisti*. In this way, the work implies the affirmation of the artist's identity and beliefs in public. The piece operates as a strong and courageous political act. It is, for example, the affirmation of the control over his home and property boundaries and the prevalence of private property, in relation to public and institutional bureaucratic domains. The public exposition of the work could therefore be interpreted as a metaphor of the expression so dear to the *leghisti* of "master in our own house".

3. The representation of the cross as a Maypole is a highly suggestive one. E.Weber (1977:392) noted that in traditional European peasant societies Maypoles were important symbols of the village authority and autonomy. In the *Golden Bough*,

Frazer (1993:119-120) linked the Maypole tradition with Celtic fertility cults. Indeed, at the centre of the traditional ritual of the Maypole is the food. The objective of having food on the top of the Maypole was the performance of a village ritual where men would try to climb the Maypole in order to get to food. To make the task difficult, the Maypole was smeared with fat. The sacrifice, ability and perseverance needed to get to the food, mirrored the traditional values of peasant societies, with it strong emphasis on sacrifice, physical strength and hard work. As we will see in the thesis, these ideas are linked by many *leghisti* with pre-modern models of village work; economic solidarity, and autonomy, ideas that I will show "survived", and were adapted to local modern industrial practices. The piece can be seen therefore as a claim for more autonomy, and as a reflex of the passage from a traditional subsistence economy, to a modern and richer one.

4. The practice of *bricolage* and free play with symbols and signs is embodied in the materials used to make Christ and the cross. The statue is made from old nails [*chiodi*] from the Zoldano Valley in Belluno, which were thrown away or simply lost their material function in modern society. The use of old materials shows a relationship with pre-modern peasant society, and reflects, to some extent, the exclusion of these fragments of culture from contemporary society. As a consequence, the *bricoleur* used past materials to cultivate and relate the past and present, with a vision of the future. In so doing, the past gained a new meaning, but also a new dignity, emerging as tradition and heritage. The piece also reflects local artisans' social values. The recovery of past materials can be seen as an interpretation of the Northern League's emphasis on the protection of local cultures, identities and traditional way of life. Finally as many *leghisti,* Orso Girgio is both an artisan and a small entrepreneur. The recovery of old materials represents the valorisation of the importance of working with one's the hands, of learning through practice, but also of the need of being entrepreneurs.

5. The statue seems, therefore, to express the desire to link pre-modern symbols and practices such as the Maypole and religion with modernity. Yet, this recreation does not comprise and reflect a nostalgic understanding of the past. In order to be understood, and symbolically operate as a political act, the piece has to be situated and contextualized in modern time and space. In fact, the possibility of free play with these symbols and signs reflects a modern interpretation. In other words, the

transformations that took place in the local society provide the *bricoleur* with an important set of tools to think about the past. It is this relationship, this unresolved tension, between living in the present and thinking and re-interpreting the past, which provides this work with meaning and aesthetic value. As a result, the artwork's meaning cannot be taken out of its historical and social context in which it was produced, since time space and history are necessarily incorporated and reflected in the artist's work. This free play with all these different dimensions shows how political ideologies are then modulated on the local and personal level. If the reason of art is related with being a *leghista*, the art of reason makes the artist compose them in a certain way, and using certain symbols. As result, the study of these pieces and art shows how *bricolage,* as a social practice, can be a critical method to understand the interconnection between local ideologies and the ones proposed by Northern League.

6. Finally, the meaning of this object would not be complete without the presence of the audience. The process of artistic creation consists not only in the act of transformation, but also in the attempt to communicate something. As result, in being confronted with a work of art, we become part of it. As I was surprised and challenged by these works and their skilful composition, I hope the same will happen with the reader. Art here is not just about the beauty or sophistication of the object in itself. It is an important epistemological tool which serves to understand the relation of social process and practice, pre-modern and modern, rational and irrational. More importantly, it is the tool through which these binary oppositions can be used and simultaneously criticized. Therefore, as also suggested by Derrida (2001), *bricolage* is a critical device in itself. It attempts to understand and make sense of the complexities and laws of the whole, by putting together limited pieces, fragments, objects, symbols and practices.

In this piece, therefore, we can see how objects are used as powerful visual metaphors of events in order to tell a story. In the plot of this story, the different objects express the interconnections that make modern ideas of identity so problematic at the mythical, but also at practical level. If I am to add something to the argument further proposed in this thesis, the statue reflects a mythopoetical concern with the reconstruction of an idea of social wholeness, of a search for a coherent symbolic

system that bypasses the domain of reason in linking current social practices with a myth that can explain those practices. The aim of using art objects is not therefore to understand if they are objects of art or not, but how these objects, their aesthetics, the symbols used, reflect the social understanding and visions of their makers. Yet, this should not be seen as an attempt to explain the *leghismo* by describing local people's "savage mind". I use the pieces of activists such as Orso Grigio because they provide us with important clues about how people feel and what concerns them. Ultimately, I hope they allow an opening of the path for an account of the *leghismo* that does not just comprise the inherent and Machiavellian game of politics and power, but also a more existential reflection about living in modern society, a perspective that I consider central in a humanist discipline such as anthropology.

Chapter 2

Fieldwork, Methodological Strategies and Ethical Questions

2.1 Introduction: Searching for a Fieldwork Place

Anthropology is about places as well as theoretical problems. In this chapter, I reflect on the reasons why I chose Belluno to conduct my fieldwork. I then provide a discussion of my fieldwork experience. This discussion will be followed by a critical analysis of the methods used to collect information. I will then conclude the chapter with a short ethical section.

Why conduct an enquiry work in Veneto to study the Northern League? The choice of Veneto as a place to do fieldwork came after a review of the works published so far on the Leagues. I noted that a substantial number of these works, at least the ones that involved fieldwork, took place mainly in Lombardy. I assume this happened because Lombardy is the League's operative centre and the majority of their national political class comes from there. More recently, two interesting ethnographic inquires that focus on the Italian Nord East were published. Heady's ethnography in village in Carnia was published in 1999, and already touches and underlines some of the issues I wish to discuss on this thesis. Recently, Jaro Stacul (2003) published an interesting ethnography on the problematic of localism. Stacul chose to conduct fieldwork in two remote villages, in the region of Trentino Alto Adige. Both researchers provide an important contribution to our understanding of the League phenomena.

However, both fieldworks took place in regions which already possessed an important political, administrative and financial autonomy. This is an important aspect. The relation between localist feelings and power strongly contributes to make local identity and ethnicity a powerful economic and political resource. For this reason I decided to focus on the region of Veneto and more specifically in Belluno.

Image 2.1 Italian map divided by regions. The Veneto is in Yellow.

In the Italian cultural context Veneto is linked with strong localism, political rebellion against the state and, today, a strong materialistic culture. The historian Paul Ginsborg (1996) describes the Veneto society as follows:

> This is a society characterized by strong localisms, scarce respect for regulations governing working conditions, contributions and taxation, growing intolerance of the inefficiencies and arbitrariness of central government; a society with more than a vein of racism (towards southerners and immigrants), and a culture of hard work, self-enrichment and the ostentation of new-found opulence.

In Ginsborg's description we see expressed some of the key tensions I would like to explore in this thesis, the passage from tradition to modernity, local identities, opposition to the national state, the presence of racism, and the presence of a strong capitalist mentality. Interestingly, all these process are happening in a society that in the past was one of the poorest in Italy. A region that after the historical decline of the patriarchal structure and of the agricultural mode of production, integrated the world economic system as an important labour reserve, first during the American expansion, then after the Post Second World War European industrial development. (See D'Alberto 1985 and 1988 for the case of Belluno)

Today, the Veneto is a region characterized by its modern industrial districts. The Veneto industrial system is characterized by small and medium production units. Several factories contribute and produce to a major industrial unit. After the Second World War, politically, the Veneto was also part of the famous white subculture (Diamanti 1993, 1996, Biorcio

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1997) Historically, besides Belluno, the area of Rovigo, and some places close to Venice where the expansion of communism was more consistent, until the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Veneto political representation was almost totally controlled by the Christians Democratics (DC). This political domain was epitomized in the regional characterization as the "the sacristy of Italy".

According to, Messina (1998) and Cento Bull (2003) the success on the League in this region is partly linked with this connection with the Catholic subculture. While on the one hand the League represents the desire of modernization and rationalization of state institutions, on the other Northern political ideology mirrors traditional catholic ideology, with its diffidence toward the individualization of social relations and the predominance of state over the community and the family. I believe Ginsborg (2001) caught this permanent tension and contradictions when classifying the areas where Northern League strongholds are situated as the "urbanized countryside". This expression highlights the tensions and contradiction between modern capitalism, past rural areas, and religious values.

In searching for a fieldwork site I tried to escape the isolated villages in the mountains, as much as the places where the DC was the strongest and uncontested force. My interest was to find a place where traditional community practices live and cohabit with modern industrial ones, therefore in deep transformation, where the local, national, and global re-defined and constructed each other. I also wanted a place where the League was strong but not uncontested. I decided to choose Belluno after a series of preliminary research contacts with several Northern League offices. Belluno in the beginning of the nineties was the one of the provinces where the Leagues had a higher success (Diamanti 1993, Amantia and Vendramini 1994). The phenomenon lasted until the middle of the nineties, and then entered in decadence. However, after end of fieldwork the League regained political influence.

But maybe the reason that led me to choose Belluno was its societal contradictions and tensions between the past and the present. I think we can have a glimpse of these contradictions and tension, in the following paragraph from a photographic book about Belluno.

> Belluno a mountain city? The definition is so obvious as to have become almost banal, to have lost any real meaning for those who live in this small

capital of the Dolomites. The question of how to define the place should perhaps be posed in a different way: how is one to describe the characteristics of those who habit the uninhabitable? Because that is what the mountains were for centuries: uninhabitable, a place of mystery, fear, and the unknown, a land where one ventured into the heart of an unpredictable Nature, where one encountered the 'Other'. The challenges this alien world posed might come from real animals (wolves, bears, eagles and vipers), from those invented by human imagination, or from any of the various groups of 'foreigners' who spoke an incomprehensible language. In this area, one single ridge could mark the boundary between worlds and cultures that bordered on each other and yet were miles apart. It was this very inaccessibility of the mountains- that fact that it was supposed to be uninhabitable- that would for centuries make it a place of refuge for all those defeated by the great tidal changes of history, each one of which seems to have left behind in lost valley or other the fragments of a culture, language and tradition that here would manage to survive. Perale (2005:9)

Belluno is located 80 km north of Veneto Capital's Venice, on a terrace along the eastern bank of the important River Piave. Administratively, Belluno is one of the eight provinces of Veneto. Despite the fact that Belluno only has 200.000 inhabitants, it comprises an area of 3,678 km2. This is due to the province being composed almost entirely of mountain areas. The province is divided into the valleys (*valate*) of Cadore, Feltrino, Alpago, Val di Zoldo, Agordino, Comelico and Ampezzano. The eastern part of the province features the famous and majestic alpine mountains: the Dolomites. To the South is the Valbelluna, the widest and most populated valley of the province, which is bordered by the Venetian Prealps, an area where the League is particular strong. Belluno occupies a strategic geographical position. Its northern border separates Italy from Austria, the Eastern border with the region of Friuli Venezia Giulia, and to the West, with the region of Trentino Alto Adige, and in the south by the rich and industrial province of Treviso, the main stronghold of the League in the region.
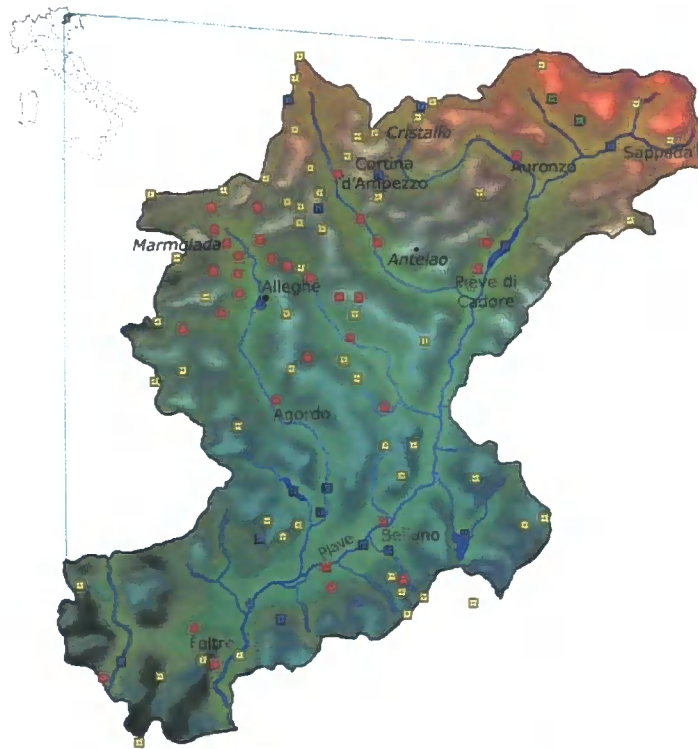
Image 2.2 Map of the Province of Belluno.

The bulk of the ethnographic material used in this thesis was collected in, and around, the city of Belluno. Politically, during fieldwork, Belluno was governed by a centre-left coalition (now a right-wing one). However, when the League "exploded" in the early nineties, it had a major impact in Belluno (Amantia and Vendrami 1994). Indeed, both in the 1992 and 1996 national elections all national representatives of the province were members of the new party. Most remarkable in 1996 the League's candidate defeated one the Italy's current Italian political superstars, the former minister of finance and vice president of Forza Italia, Giulio Tremonti. Activists of the Northern League recalled that victory as the time when "the Lega was the Lega".

In spite of the fact that I lived in Belluno throughout the fieldwork I had the opportunity to travel through the province. I generally travelled with the aim of both conducting interviews and knowing the territory. In addition, in the final part of my fieldwork my contacts took me into the heart of the neighbouring province of Treviso, where the *carrocio* is still very strong. In Treviso I conducted several interviews and focus groups with *leghisti*. In addition, I participated at several party meetings, which constituted an important comparative experience.

The province of Belluno has two major urban centres: Belluno and Feltre. Belluno is the provincial capital and with a population of around 35.000 inhabitants, it concentrates the majority of the bureaucratic and administrative apparatus. The city rises above a cliff near the touching point of the River Ardo with the Piave River. Belluno's rival, Feltre (20,000 inhabitants) is a beautiful and proud small city, and the main stronghold of the Lega in the province. Between these two cities other urban centres are growing up as a consequence of economic development. On the highlands of the province, and on the periphery of these major centres, the pattern of settlement is concentrated in nucleated villages. In the mountains, the villages are situated on the valleys floor or more frequently in the mountain lower slopes. These villages are small. Although old, they are well-kept and have a surprisingly modern appearance.

The symbol that epitomizes modernity is the beautiful and extremely well kept house. The house is one of the most important symbols of local culture, and the Bellunese are extremely proud of them. In my exploratory trips with Valter, my landlord, he passionately used to explain to me the period and architectural styles of the different houses together with their functions. It is impossible not to note the red flowers exposed on the balconies, or the symbioses between the houses and the environment. Valter talked about the house with fierce pride. "In the winter the house, the fire and a family, that is all a man needs to live". Enrico jokingly used to tell me: "over here everyone invests in bricks (*nel mattone*). It is a motive of great pride". The urban expansion and the beautiful villages in the mountains have a common denominator. They are the consequence of the important industrialization process that took place first in the region of Veneto, then later on in Belluno in the beginning of the seventies.

2.2 The Historical Tragedy of Poverty and the Industrialization Process

In fixing our attention on the examples of modernity presented in the landscape, we might fall for the temptation of forgetting the province's tragic history of poverty. The poor and isolated villages did not always have the opportunity of sharing the wealth and benefits of modern and capitalist economy. In the mountains the precarious agro-pastoral system was not enough to economically support the population, and the absence of flat fields and economic support never allowed a decisive passage to agricultural mechanization (Roverato 1988). The agro-pastoral system, however, was not the only economic resource. Belluno's mountains were always related with the world economic system. The mountains

had mining activities since the province was controlled by the Romans, and timber was a crucial economic resource. When Belluno was politically controlled by the Republic of Venice, timber was transported from the mountains through the Piave River by the skilful Zattieri (timber rafters) to Venice for ship building and house construction.

Timber was an important resource until a few decades ago. Indeed, when an outsider looks at the photographs of the past, it is clear how the woods became less of an economic resource. The forestry, although extensive at the time, now spread close to the villages. For local people these changes in the landscape reflect the inchoate nature of modernity, and the transformations that local society is going through (Heady 1999 and Stacul 2003). When the subsistence agriculture used of the region entered a period of crisis, a permanent strategy to escape poverty was emigration. Where currently 200,000 people inhabit the province of Belluno, more then 400.000 Bellunese live outside Belluno. Until recently, emigration was seen by the local population as a strategy to escape the structural poverty in the area (D'Alberto 1985, 1988). Enrico used to tell me:

> when my father asked my mother to marry him, my mother's father asked her: daughter do you want to spend your entire life with your suitcase in your hands? This was what it meant to be Bellunese.

The industrialization process in the province gained a strong and decisive impulse with a dramatic tragedy. On the 9th of October 1963, on a calm night the Vajont Dam, a magnificent work of engineering, and one of the biggest in Europe, was overcome by the water. During the night a part of the mountain slowly slid into the water reserve, provoking the water to rise over the dam. The water cascaded through the city of Longarone destroying it completely and killing more than 1,900 people. The tragedy is still present in local people's memory. During fieldwork, a monument to the "un-born children" made by Franco Fiabane, a local artist, was inaugurated in Longarone in memory of this terrible event., After taking me to the place where the tragedy took place Valter told me: "The locals warned the scientists that the mountain moved, but the scientists and engineers were arrogant, and did not want to know. Then the tragedy happened". This phrase shows the difficult interaction between local populations' traditional knowledge of the territory, and modern specialists' ones. It also indicates the diffidence towards outside management of the local territory. A debate that later on would be recovered by the Northern League insistence on the capacity of local people to self-govern, because they "knew and were from the territory".

The aftermath of the incident gave rise to new state policies regarding the province. The "guilty" state provided funds not only to reconstruct the city completely destroyed by the ferocity of the water, but also to sustain the province's economic development. These funds, combined with special legislation, stimulated the local industrial boom and marked the passage from an extremely poor and depressed area, into an area of relative economic prosperity. The economic development of the province contributed to the return of many emigrants. Their industrial knowledge and economic capital acquired working abroad further contributed to the province's economic modernization. The local economic system is mainly based on industrial production and transformation of goods. Among the industrial sector there is strong predominance of the spectacles industry, with the presence of two major multinationals Luxoptica and Safilo. The presence of the spectacles industry is presented in a large and extensive social-economic network that involves several medium and small entrepreneurs who give Belluno the nickname "the district of spectacles".

2.2.2 The Rhetoric of Identity

With the economic development, and the emergence of new entrepreneurial classes, more political autonomy was claimed from the Nation State. Autonomy was perceived as a way of helping the local industrial tissue, but also of respecting and dealing with the specificity of living in the mountain (Amantia and Vendramini 1994). In this process of political struggle against the national state, identity played a key role. Valter had autonomist sympathies and explained the importance of the rediscovery of local identity in the following way:

> During those years [after the Second World War] we were concerned with working, with leaving poverty behind. I recall reading that Bellunese should work less and think more. There was nothing here and people worked very hard. In this process we forgot our identity. That is, we did not take care of it. Now we are economically better we want to recover it. It is a question of honour and pride being Bellunese again. For us, autonomy is important. For us that have to live in the mountains far away from the centre, everything is more expensive due to transport, the need to heat the houses during winter, the need to build good roads to link the different populations. Autonomy is necessary to improve our territory otherwise the mountain will become deserted.

The themes presented by Valter, local identity and the need to have more financial and economic autonomy because of the particularities of living in the mountain, was the centre

of the regional elections that took place during my fieldwork. Almost every electoral poster mentioned the word autonomy. However, Valter's narrative also helps us to understand the symbolical importance of the recovery and empowerment of local identity in terms of how local people perceived themselves.

According to the local historians Amantia and Vendramini (1994) the idea of transforming Belluno into an autonomous province, played a key role in the initial League political propaganda, and the autonomist appeal was decisive for the party's success in the province. Why is the idea of autonomy so important in a modern, but still disadvantaged province? The answer lies partly in the fact that Belluno is geographically situated between two regions of special status, Trentino alto Adige and Friuli Venezia Giulia. When one crosses the border between these two bureaucratic units the differences are clear. The political autonomy was granted due to their specific ethnic\identity. The Northern League strong investment in the idea of local identity can therefore be understood in terms of the pragmatic struggle for economic resources. Indeed, local people often complained to me about the injustice of having to work, produce and compete in such a difficult environment.

> Living in between two regions with special autonomy you can see the differences. If they have it, we have the right to have it too. We live in the the same environment: the mountain. Therefore we want the same advantages, such as funding and low taxes. If we also have these advantages then we can also support the companies that want to work here, and take care of the territory as they do. We do not want to be second class citizens. But if they do not give it to use, we have to fight for it (Aurelia, entrepreneur, and member of the Northern League).

These two regions compete with Belluno not only for industrial production, but especially in the sector of tourism. During fieldwork, I passed by tourist areas in Trentino Alto Adige, and the differences between both provinces were clear regarding, for example, infra-structures and hotels. In fact, after I left the field several villages in the borderland between the province of Belluno and that of Trentino and Friuli held referendums to change from Belluno and Veneto either to Trentino and Friuli regions. The main argument was economic, but local identity and ethnicity were used to justify the political turbulence. A second important theme in the province is economic exploitation of the province's abundant natural resources. Belluno has several important rivers that are used not only to produce energy, but also to irrigate agricultural production in neighbouring lowlands. Many Bellunese feel that their territory has been exploited by outsiders without proper

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political and economic compensation. The main symbol of this tension is the Piave. The Piave is considered a sacred river to the Italian Patria. In the past, the Piave was central in the economy of the territory because it was a navigable river that linked the Bellunese territory with the rest of the region.

Today, the Piave is a metaphor of the province's difficulties and political minority, of the lack of respect to local identity. Its energy drained in several dams, or transferred to the lowlands for agricultural explorations, has transformed its strong nature to an almost insignificant thread of water. This lack of strength of one of the province's main symbols metaphorically expresses the need to react against injustice, or to say it with the Northern League to "become masters again in their own house". "The Bellunese work hard, pay the taxes, but when having to affirm themselves are afraid. *Che voi tu fare?* (what do you want to do?), Francesco, a League supporter and local entrepreneur, told me. The Lega construction of a strong local identity seemed to be a reaction against this fatalism. "The Lega gave us pride in our local origins, in our identity, and this was important, it gave us the possibility of reacting against certain injustices" Orso Grigio told me. Even a local communist said: "at the beginning they [Liga] said important things. Even my father who was an internationalist, sometimes came home and said those *terroni* (southerners) have come here to govern us".

To a certain extent the need to reconstruct a strong local identity is the consequence of the fact that Belluno is a peripheral province, both to regional and national centres of power. The story of the Piave and Belluno's geographical situation leads us to a consideration of the problematic nature of local identity. Yet, Belluno had an important role in Italian national history. Belluno's mountains were the borderland between Italy and its natural northern enemies, the Germans, and after the Second World War, "the communists". The presence of old missile batteries attests the importance of this ideological split. Historically, Belluno was invaded twice after unification with the Italian national state. During the First World War the Austrians invaded the province after the Italian defeat at Caporetto. Important and highly symbolical battles took place in the province's sacred mountains between the Italian Alpini and the Austro Hungarian troops. These heroic battles are normally seen and represented with nationalist pride by local populations. In the Second Wold War the Germans invaded, and annexed the province to the Third Reich. The local populations suffered German domination, but also resisted the Germans. Although

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ambiguous, the memory of the Second World War is important to integrate Belluno local history into the Italian nation state. This historical connection with two major European and national historical events, make the shift toward the Northern League's desecrating representation of Italian nationalism an interesting object of study. The next chapter will be precisely devoted to this puzzling question.

The consequence of the League's ideas led to a further fragmentation of the province's identity. On the other hand, economic development made the province an integral part of the world economic system and therefore dependent on it. With the expansion of globalization, the integration in the European Union, the delocalization of local factories, and the increase of economic competition, the province is afraid of losing the economic stability that it so proudly and only just acquired. As a consequence, while the recovery of local identity was a consequence of modernity, it is being rhetorically used to combat modernity. Indeed, all these social transformations seem to increase the political discussion about who they are and where they belong. The rhetoric of identity became the symbol of the current social economic uncertainty that the province is going through, and to some extent make people look at the Northern League's proposals as an important and valid solution. All these events serve to make Belluno an interesting place to ethnographically investigate the theoretical themes I proposed to address.

2.3 Conducting Fieldwork in Belluno

2.3.1 Making Contact With the Northern League
The data for the thesis was collected during a period of 13 months of fieldwork. During my exploratory trip I had an appointment with the League provincial secretary who assured to me his full collaboration. This came as a surprise to me. Previous contacts with academic experts made me somehow apprehensive regarding the possibility of realizing traditional fieldwork with Northern League militants. After the first contact, I was invited to a party provincial meeting with the aim of been introduced to the local leaders and militants. I accepted the invitation. The impact of the meeting is still clear in my memory. The majority of the people were extremely apprehensive about my presence. Combined with my shyness and language problems, the situation was difficult to manage. After several awkward questions, the meeting started and I began to relax. I was then introduced by the provincial secretary to the militants. However, at the end, one of them took a picture of me, and called me Lawrence of Arabia. Meaning? I was an infiltrator come to spy on them!

Despite this, the openness of the provincial secretary gave me hope that Belluno was the right place to develop my fieldwork.

2.3.2 Changing Plans and the Problematic Reputation of Anthropology

The anxiety of the first contacts increased due to local people's perceptions of themselves as closed (chiusi). Local people told me that I would encounter great difficulty to integrate myself because "Bellunese are mountain people, we are chiusi". The idiom of closeness plays a vital role in local identity (See also Heady 1999). It contrasts with the self representation of southerners as aperti (open). On the one hand, it is an expression of the apprehensiveness toward the other, on the other an expression of the need of being independent. I was soon to find out the structural importance of this idea.

After several initial phone calls, I was able to find the party's office open. I entered and talked with the secretary. She contacted the provincial secretary and we booked an appointment. A few days later we met. While I was waiting for him, I met Orso Grigio. He was extremely cautious about my presence in town. Doing research at an English University increased his suspicion given the supposed contacts of the League with the Scottish Independent Party. For Orso Grigio, I was a member of the MI6 and I came to spy on the League's political actions. "Periodically students come to Belluno to ask us questions." He also told me that several activists "had their phones under surveillance." He then added "I do not doubt your good faith, I am concerned with the ones that supervise you, you are young and you can be easily manipulated".

In the meantime, the provincial secretary arrived. This time, however, he was not so open. I entered the office, we shook hands, and he coldly told me that I could not pursue my research. I asked why. "You should contact the League's office in Milan, there were some problems..." This came as a shock to me. The refusal of the provincial secretary increased my apprehension in contacting League members and trying to approach them to talk about their lives. This decision played a crucial role in my fieldwork. All the local leaders had been warned about by presence, and had advised their militants about my "intentions." This made me almost a clandestine, a "dangerous" outsider and threat to the party, which made my fieldwork a very difficult and often depressing enterprise.

Even after 10 months in the field, and several interviews with important activists, some militants refused to talk to me because "I could be a spy", and "no one knew what I would do with the information gathered." Indeed, only after six months in the field I was able to start developing a close relationship with Orso Grigio, who later on let me access his personal network. Northern League militants were afraid that what I would write could damage the party. Something like this can easily happen in a sensitive field like politics where, as Taussig (1999) pointed out, knowledge and secrecy are intimately related with power. I also found that among League militants there was anger and suspicion towards academia and intellectuals. The movement is stigmatised by intellectuals as "ignorant" and populist. Academia does not recognize, and strongly contests the movements' historicist perspective. The movements' rituals and public ceremonies are presented with extreme sarcasm and irony by journalists. What follows, is an example taken from the DS's (left democrats) political newspaper *L' Unità*.

> ...Every year thousands of tourists go to Africa to photograph peoples that maybe are extremely civilized, but are condemned by modernity to extinction, and sometimes they accept it without knowing it. If, in the next Northern League meeting in Pontida, the democratic circumscriptions (commune) of every Italian region should organize tourist buses. When the *leghisti* that we have seen on television found themselves in front of millions of Italians that come to see them live, maybe something would change. People should only look at them (even if photographs and video cameras would be allowed to show to friends and family when they returned home) in silence, with all the respect that living creatures deserve. Maybe the group of natives that last Sunday were in the public television showing their traditional customs (green shirts), and showing ethnic symbols, in seeing themselves as an anthropological object by millions of civilized Italians would think about it when coming back home. (22-05-05)

I am glad that League's members do not read L'*Unità* (the article was given to me by a communist interlocutor). Nevertheless, a number of militants made clear to me that social scientists and journalists wrote scandalous things about the League. Together with the fact that anthropologists study primitive people... A small episode epitomized the difficulties I am trying to describe. One day I was talking with a local journalist who followed local politics. We had a coffee together and discussed the political situation in the province. The next day an article came out in the *Corriere Delle Alpi*, a local newspaper that is widely read by *leghisti*. The article started with the following paragraph: "Imagine that foreign specialists in the study of humans come to study a particular Italian phenomenon, the Northern League." During the day Northern League's members with whom I established a close relationship called me and said to me that "I was becoming famous..." I began to feel

that my attempts to construct a credible persona were in vain, and the fact that the *Corriere delle Alpi* is widely read in the province made me fear the worst. But luckily it seemed that by this time my close interlocutors trusted me.

2.3.3 A Portuguese in Belluno: Reflexity and Anxiety

The reader might think that I was too unconscious and naïve. But this last episode, I believe, reveals the difficulty of studying politics in Bellunese and Italian society. Italian society is extremely politicized and ideologically split (Ginsborg 2001). Belonging to a political party is closely related with individuals' self identity and personal history, which can be considered as an heritage of the struggle between the two dominant subcultures: the communist and the catholic (Messina 1998). Normally, people feel strongly about their political convictions, even though they do not often discuss politics because it is an issue that puts in question the vision of "collective unity" and harmony so dear to them.

My willingness to listen to everyone placed me in a condition of permanent liminality. Generally, local people welcomed my efforts to study Bellunese culture and Italian politics. But they found it hard to understand why I should do this by focussing on the Lega Nord. To a degree, the fact that I was a foreigner helped me to ground my identity as a researcher. However, with time, people tried to tease out my own views on the Lega. I normally did not give a clear opinion which, inevitably, increased their suspicion that I sympathized with the movement's ideology; for example, I recall left-wing interlocutors asking me, after Borghezio's attack on Ciampi described in the thesis introduction, whether or not I still found the Northern League "interesting".

My experience has some resemblances with Murphy's (1992) experience in a Spanish village. Murphy found that local people "judged" the ethnographer by their own social and cultural rules. The village Murphy studied was split in two sections: socialist and catholic. The integration of the ethnographer in these social categories was, however, difficult. People tried to locate the ethnographer by questioning him about the cult of the virgin. Dependent on his answer they would insert him in the local typologies. Similar to Murphy's experience, when I answered questions about my views on the Lega, they drew their own conclusions regarding my position. My responses would define the social category into which I fell - either "left-wing" or "conservative."

There was not space for doubt. Even being a researcher I had to be imagined as part of the bipolar political system that characterized the modern Italian political system. However, these attempts had another possible objective. I noted that non *leghisti* were ashamed of the fact that the Northern League was an Italian phenomenon. The need to know my position was related to their fear that I would equate Bellunese culture with the League. It was one means by which people could tell me that not everyone was *leghista* and localist. "We are Europeans, we live in a big world, I do not understand these *leghisti*", the lady of the shop where I was going to check my email told me. In addition, I noted that left-wing militants saw my work as a possibility of defacing what they perceived as the League's conservative and fascist ideology. On the other hand, to right-wing militants my study was perceived as a folklorist one, but overall it was thought that "they said fair things."

To work in such a difficult, and closed environment, often made me feel isolated and lost. Some days, I would stay home close to the fire thinking about what to do next. I was frustrated because I could not develop proper participant observation among activists, and moreover my research had to be conducted through interviews, instead of just "hanging out". Why are these issues worthy of inclusion in a section given over to methodology?

Anthropologists divide themselves between those who consider personal experience an important and integral aspect of the ethnographic work, and those to whom the subjectivity of the experience should be dissolved in the objectivity of a rigorous social science. I think a middle position should be considered. This middle position, however, does not leave one incapable of taking a decision, or in Casal's terms to adopt a "mediocre position" (1997:68). While I do not have doubts in affirming that ethnography is about trying to understand the other, I believe that because we have an ethical obligation toward the other, anthropologists' personal experience merits consideration. Dissolving difficulties, doubts, feelings, frustrations and anxieties, that is the anthropologist state of mind, in a pretension of rationality or objectivity although scientifically reassuring, does not contribute to validate the data gathered through fieldwork. On the other hand, the role of personal experience does not mean essentializing subjectivities, but instead implies acknowledging the fact that the ethnographer's personality plays an important role not only in the description of reality, but also in its interpretation.

The fact that I was a young and single man, that I came from an English university and, that I had an urban look put me into a given local social position, even if it was one that I preferred not to occupy. For example, this background, together with the fact that I was sponsored by the Rotary foundation, allowed me to be well received in local bourgeois circles. Being Portuguese generated sympathy and curiosity, and the absence of stereotypes other than 'fado', the revolution of 1974 for communists' militants, Fatima for the Catholics, or Lisbon for tourists and entrepreneurs, was often the beginning of interesting conversations. By contrast, my shyness and sensibility made my contacts with hard and self reliant men difficult. In spite of the fact that, I already had similar experiences from previous fieldwork, it was still difficult for me to deal with the exuberance and tough bluntness that normally characterizes the *leghisti*. Being a man also stopped me from having more contact with women. In fact, the relationship between women and the League remains an interesting and largely unexplored area of study.

The anxiety provoked by fieldwork as George Devereux (1977) and Bourdieu (1991) suggested comes from the sensation of "being out of place." "Being out of place" is in itself an important critical method. In *Anxiety as a Method*, Devereux shows the importance of the intercultural crisis on the anthropological experience. The crisis between observers and observed, allows one to objectify the other, to see its differences. I was particularly sensitive to some issues because, for example, part of my close family comes from a Portuguese mountain and experienced times of hunger. My father and my mother are small entrepreneurs and have adopted a culture of hard work. At some point in their lives both of them lost their jobs due to the entrance of Portugal in the European Union. Although socialists and participants in the revolution that took place in Portugal in the 1970s, they are becoming increasingly nationalist and express grievances against the state bureaucracy and political apparatus. On the other hand, national identity is becoming an important issue also in Portugal with the arrival of new immigrants, and the fear of economic competition. Is this not globalization? As result, my solution to the dilemma of subjectivity is therefore to consider my personal biography an important part of my attempt to provide not an objective, but a "reliable ethnographic account" (Carrithers 1990).

2.4 A Bilingual Society. The Importance of Language in the Negotiation of Strangeness

I studied Italian before commencing fieldwork. Nevertheless, language caused some problems. As time passed I became more fluent and competent. However, what made the question of language particular sensitive was the fact that two languages are spoken in the area: the Veneto, or Bellunese (the name given to the different dialects depends on the identity of the interlocutors) and the Italian. In the province we can find several important linguistic traditions such as the Ladino, a language mostly spoken in the area of the Dolomiti. Few people do not speak both Italian and local dialect. The languages have however different social values. The dialect is considered a symbol of tradition and belonging to the close and intimate community. "It is the language of the Avi". In my trips to the villages I noted that in their daily life the dialect is almost the only language used (local people can identify the provenance of the other by the accent). Instead, Italian is considered a more modern and cosmopolitan language, and is widely spoken in Belluno (city). Since the League's emphasis on the importance of local language, much has been written regarding the need of "rediscovering the dialect (local language) as part of the local identity". However, as also noted by Heady (1999) and Stacul (2003) despite the League's attempts, the hierarchy between the two languages is normally accepted by local people.

The dialect, and for example the *polenta*, a traditional poor dish made with corn flower, were often presented to me as part of the local tradition, and therefore valorised not as a sign of backwardness, but as a cultural heritage. In the case of polenta it represents the passage from poverty and hunger into a richer society. On the other hand, it became an important symbol of distinction. League members told me with the pride, "we are Veneti, hard workers, *polentoni*, they (southerm) are *terroni* (people from the land). The use of Italian symbolizes the cultural modernization. With me, a foreigner, people would speak in Italian. Curiously, they strongly discouraged my attempts to learn to speak dialect. Some said that even "if I would learn it, I would never speak like them." Sometimes, my attempts to speak in dialect were received with irony and humour. Nevertheless, they were extremely curious to know if I could understand it. My positive answer was taken with surprise and joy.

Often, when I was present, people spoke in Italian, but when I was not, they would switch into dialect. Let me give an ethnographic example. I had lunch with a local family, and

then I interviewed someone that they had presented to me as the local League leader. On both occasions Italian was used. However, when they met on the street they immediately shifted into dialect. These practices could have different interpretations. One is that it is used to keep me in the role of stranger. Yet nothing makes me believe that this was a conscious process. I think strangeness in this case, emerges as a powerful form of identity negotiation, since it involves presenting themselves as modern or as traditional. It is part of the rhetoric of identity. In this case, we can see how the *habitus* works as a strategy generator, and the importance of social practice. As in the case of polenta presented to me as a traditional dish, but a poor one, probably because I was considered to have a more cosmopolitan taste, speaking in dialect in front of me was often considered a sign of backwardness. I think a possible reason to this is that dialect sounds harsher than Italian. As Perale noted, it recalls the "unknown, the foreigner."

I would add that the dialect is the embodiment of an important local characteristic, that of being *dur* (hard) (Heady 1999, Stacul 2003). Both the dialect and the polenta are the symbols of this toughness. In contraposition with the Italian, the local language (dialect) is a hard language, and embodies the difficulties of living in the mountains. In contrast, Italian is considered a soft and urban language. The link between hard and soft, is similar to the relation between up and down, or cooked and raw as in Levy Strauss' or Bourdieu's considerations. The relationship between these idioms is important to classify and distinguish different social practices, and consequently the social groups that use them.[16]

An anecdote taken from fieldwork notes provides further insights about the poetical use of both languages by local people. An informant with autonomist ideals once told me in a conversation. "In dialect there is not much space for love. During the day I speak in dialect with my wife, but when we make love we use Italian." In this short and ironic sentence we can see the role played by both languages. As Giddens (1992) noted, love is an important expression of modernity. And in this case it is represented in moments of intimacy by the use of Italian. On the other hand, I was being threated as an intimate stranger. Another example comes from my relation with my landlord. We normally spoke in Italian. However, when we went to a bar he would speak in dialect with the bartender, and then Italian to me. Then, when we said good bye he used dialect and tried to teach me to pronounce it correctly. These episodes seem to reveal the criteria to define those who are

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[16] However, it was also made present to me that the former Venetian aristocratic classes speak in dialect as a strategy to affirm their social status. In fact, in Belluno the Italian is mainly used by the Bourgeois class.

in, and outside the community. The use of dialect was at least partly tactical then, and could therefore be seen (following Cohen, 1985) as one of the symbolical markers that define the community's boundary. Finally, one should bear in mind that for me both languages were foreign... Thus, by speaking in Italian was an important part of locals' construction of me as stranger, an important one, given the fact that ironically a key element is precisely the use of Italian.[17]

My understanding of both Italian and local dialect improved steadily during fieldwork. However, this improvement did not provide me with enough confidence to analyse the subtleties of the local language. Local people are extremely skilful in language games, and the dialect represents an important cultural heritage. The constant passage between dialect and Italian, I believed, is an important part of their poetical negotiation of identity. In addition, it is a remarkable expression of the relationship between past models and modern ones. For example, the nearby mountains, if named in Italian entirely lose the mythical stories and narratives used by local people to map and remember their landscape. As Valter told me "the name in Italian means nothing." Other investigators with greater competence might further develop these important aspects through the careful study of local discourse, and its relationship with the landscape. In my case, given my difficult and ambiguous position in the field, I decided to focus more on the relation between practice and discourse.

2.5 Linking Practices and Strategies with Political Identity: A Short Discussion on Methods

2.5.1 Participant Observation and Observation

Ethnography enables us to investigate how the social is incorporated and expressed in individuals' practices, and how those individuals act upon the social. It is through this interaction that culture is formed and reproduced. Previous ethnographic experiences with political parties (see for example Aranoff 1974, Kertzer 1987, Shore 1990) were able to use participant observation in a very effective way. Their long-term contact with party militants and their study of how political choices impacted on their common and practical life showed the relationship between political identities and individuals' logic of practice.

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[17] Heady's ethnography in Carnia (1999:21) describes a similar experience regarding his attempts to use and learn the local dialect.

My fieldwork project was in part constructed with these previous projects in mind. For the reasons given above the use of participant observation was not often possible. At the end of my fieldwork I had important opportunities of doing participant observation with League activists. Yet, in order to pursue these opportunities more concretely, I would have to have changed my fieldwork site. At that time this option was not convenient because it would mean beginning more or less from scratch. This was a choice that to some extent I now regret. Nonetheless, the possibility of a more active participation and engagement with the League's activists in the province of Treviso enabled me to collect part of the data that I drew on in chapter six to deal with the importance of economic practices, but also in chapter seven, where I deal in detail with the relation between masculine practices, embodiment and the League's political ideology and practices.

The information about Belluno, however, or about the people's opinions of the Lega, came to me in an unstructured way, through participant observation. Participation in this case included talking with people, noting their opinions and perceptions about the current political situation in the province and in Italy. An important part of these discourses were discussions about the past and the present. I discovered that talking about the past was a safe way of establishing contact because individuals felt that they were experts on their own history. The same happened when discussing what had changed in local society and the problems of adapting past models to modernity. Another fruitful strategy in trying to understand people's political views was to discuss events that were being publicly debated. A good example was the League's attack on the Italian president. In this way, I learned how individuals use ideas of identity, tradition and modernity, local and national to make sense of political discourse.

Arguing about political issues was a way of participating in everyday interactions. Politics is a field where interaction, persuasion, and interpretation play an essential part. It was by questioning and sometimes challenging the other's vision of politics that I was able to achieve a better understanding of local people's political views. Because I was a stranger my interlocutors made an effort, sometimes in a patronizing way, to link their positions to a flow of historical events. In doing so, they educated me in national, regional and local politics. This opened interesting perspectives and made me realize how political discourse was articulated, in which life experiences and practices were grounded. It was through this method, that I came to understand the *habitus* as generator of social practices. In

conclusion, entering into public debate gave me precious opportunities to comprehend agents' reflections regarding their political identities.

2.5.2 Moderate Participation and Observation

I took advantage of the fact that several people, when they understood what I was doing, invited me to come and assist with public events such as political conferences, rituals, debates and religious celebrations. This type of "moderate participation" (Dewalt and Dewalt 1998:262) became central in my work.[18] I noted that rituals and public ceremonies were an important aspect of local social-political life. The observation and description of rituals and ceremonies, on the one hand, are important strategies to help the society to make sense of the process of change (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993). On the other hand, they play an important role in sustaining social continuity and in the reproduction of identity (Connerton 1990). Furthermore, in ritual we can see how social practices are linked with discourse in and through performance. The data collected in ritual practices, and its relation with the imagination of social identity, will be central in chapter tree and four.

Moderated participation in these ceremonies enabled me to observe, with some detachment, the structuration of identity through collective practices. As Zabusky noted:

> to be inside practice... is to be situated somewhere and somewhen in particular; but to be inside practice is also the only way to come to know, ethnographically, the social system, since the system is replicated and reproduced through agents' everyday actions, evasions, and enunciations of value (in Herzfeld and Fernandez 1998:117).

My presence at public ceremonies and meetings also helped me to understand how old patterns, and "pre modern" ideas and practices were incorporated and adapted in present society. In addition, I could relate these ideas to political ideology and power. Also important was the fact that after these ceremonies I had the opportunity of debating with the participants their perceptions and interpretations. These interpretations gave me the possibility of registering how agents connect their own experiences and practices with what has been performed. Overall, the observation of rituals and practices, and the possibility of discussing political issues in an unstructured way, provide valid and

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[18] Moderate participation is when the ethnographer is present at the scene of the action but does not actively participate or interact, or only occasionally interacts with people in it.

important insights to understand the strategies and practices through which identities were negotiated, embodied and poetically represented.

2.5.3 Interviews

I used interviews to complement my effort to understand the interaction between everyday practices and Northern League political discourse. In relation to participant observation, one of the advantages of using personal interviews is that being a personal account my interlocutor could openly construct his own narrative. For that reason, interviews open the possibility to see how people use discourse categories, for example: The South, immigrants, tradition, modernity, and identity, when constructing and talking about their lives. The majority of the interviews were carried with Northern League supporters, leaders and voters.

For comparison purposes, I also conducted interviews with local political exponents of other parties. Overall, I collected fifty interviews. When the opportunity arose, and my informants expressed explicit consent, I recorded interviews using a digital recorder. I chose to use mainly semi-structured interviews. As discussed by Foddy (1993), semi-structured interviews allow the researcher to have some control over the conversation, but also grants freedom to the participants to develop their own ideas.

Technically, despite the fact that I used the same script in order to be able to proceed to comparisons, I presented the interviews to the participant as an "open dialogue", and opted to respect the flow of the conversation so that the participant could develop his own story. Providing the participants with a degree of freedom was an important strategy to empower them. This strategy revealed to be an important one especially when in contact with the movement's grass roots. As widely debated in the social science literature, the context where the interview takes place, the difference of social status, and in this case of culture between the researcher and the participant can strongly influence the answers given (Foddy 1993 Johnson and Sackett 1998, Weller 1998). Trying to grant freedom to the participants to develop their own plot was an attempt to deal with these highly sensitive issues. This strategy did not always work. Many of the participants preferred to wait for the next question rather than initiate topics for discussion. By contrast, interviews with the movement's leaders were a rather easier task. For them, being interviewed was a common practice and they were adept at remaining in control of the situation. In this case, I opted to

talk more generally about the official line of the party and the relationship of this line with local and national social and political questions.

Interviews ranged from 40 minutes to three hours in length. Only in a few cases did I interview the same participant more than once. This was a limitation. Many of the participants were sceptical about a second meeting because they did not see the purpose. In this case my inexperience, and their suspicion about my person, revealed an almost impossible barrier to the development of a closer relationship.

The impossibility of persuading some of the militants to have a second interview was part of a serious of problems regarding the use of interviews to understand a political movement such as the League. Although a common means of researching the Northern League, unfortunately there is little detailed information about the use of this method. In my case I had a similar experience to the ones described in the sociological literature regarding interviewing with "stigmatized" groups (Barton 1958, Weis 1968 Warner 1965 in Foddy 1993:117-118). All these authors underline the feeling of "unease" generated by the threatening character of certain questions and topics. During the interviews I often noted that Northern League's militants tried to avoid complicated issues such as the role of xenophobia, the perception of the *leghisti* as "ignorant," and the incoherence between the League's political discourse and its real political practices and achievements.

Furthermore, I had a similar experience to the one described by Bourdieu (1999) concerning his study with members of the French National Front. Bourdieu's work shows that discourses of people normally politically perceived as extreme right wing are not as radical as their real positions. Even though the *leghisti* often expressed sympathy for my attempt to "understand" their point of view, the people I was interviewing knew that I did not agree with them, and therefore attempted to moderate their position about topics that were not perceived as "correct" behaviour.

This leads us to consider another limitation. As the Northern League experts Giordano and Cento Bull pointed out to me, the League militants themselves use interviews as a strategy to pass their political message. More specifically in the anthropological literature, Jipsons and Litton (2000:162) noted when doing fieldwork among extremist and racist groups in North America, that these groups often see the researcher as a propaganda tool, and even

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as a means of legitimating their views. This is not a new problem in social research. As Foddy (1993:74) noted, when interviewing one also has to take into consideration that the participants can also have their own goals. Indeed, some Northern League members were very enthusiastic when talking about the themes that excited them. I noted that this enthusiasm was often a strategy to affirm their effervescent political belief to what was considered a political opponent, me. This particular point raises important ethical questions that I will deal in more detail in the final section of this chapter.

I found, however, that there are positive aspects in addressing sensitive issues during the interviews. The participants' defence of the stigmatized positions of the party enabled me to gain a better understanding of the relationship between party rhetoric and local social practices and personal experiences. When trying to persuade me, the participants therefore linked their local ideologies with the movements' ones. In this sense, this allowed to glimpse the relation between practice and political ideology.

Let me provide an example. None of the Northern League activists that I interviewed openly admitted that they were racist. I discovered that this is partly the result of themsleves having been immigrants, or had friends or kin who once were. Indeed, being the "other" and having to submit to the bureaucratic control of the native states, was an experience that was rhetorically used to support the League's exclusionary positions. Although the League's rhetoric is similar to other right-wing parties such as the National Front, or even the Austrian movement led by Jorg Haider that caused so much concern in Europe in the mid-nineties (see for example for a comparison Betz (1993), Stolke (1995)), the interviews were crucial in helping me to understand the connections between the party extremist rhetoric and local experiences.

2.5.4 Focus Group

The focus group is a popular research practice, especially among market researchers and political scientists. Regarding the study of politics, focus groups are widely organized by political advisers to collect people's concerns and investigate the level of a politician's popularity (see for example Kitzinger and Barbour 1999). I organized several focus groups with *leghisti*. I organised them not as much to investigate politicians' popularity, but mainly in the search for a method were I could collect more lively and interactive accounts, compensating in this way for the impossibility of doing more participant observation. As

described by Barbour and Kitzinger (1999:5) focus groups are epistemologically interesting because they allow the research participants to "generate their own questions, frames, and concepts."

On the other hand, when participating in focus groups individuals feel more safe and protected. At the same time, this technique downplays the interference of the researcher (though this is not always the case, see for example Barbour and Kitzinger 1999, and Clare Farquhar 1999). Unfortunately, I was only able to organize focus groups toward the end of my fieldwork, when some of my key informants already trusted me, and let me access their personal networks. Indeed, the context where these collective conversations took place -- in a participant's house, or in the case of Igne in the village community centre -- played a vital role in the success of this method. Taking place in an informal context helped the participants to feel more comfortable and therefore more willing to talk about their experiences and political visions. Often these collective conversations were followed (or preceded) by meals, which made the environment more relaxed, than during personal interviews where, as noted above, my presence often seemed to be intimidating.

As Michael Carrithers (1992:106) pointed out: "Everyone negotiates relationships in order to negotiate meaning." In the development of the focus groups a crucial advantage comes precisely from the fact that the participants engage in an interactive dialogue with each other, often about themes that they find more interesting. As Myers and Macnaghten (1999) noted what distinguishes focus groups "is its liveliness, complexity and unpredictability of the talk." Hence a crucial role is played by the process of argumentation in itself. As noted by Waterton and Wynne (1999:133) focus groups are and should be viewed as:

> A site of constant negotiation, involving elements of the participant's and researcher's activities, an iterative shifting and resettling position within the group around the issues that arise in the discussion.

Focus group generated data led me to make connections that otherwise I would not have been able to grasp. They were important, in particular, in helping me understand how people related to pre-modern models of community life and practices, and how those models influenced their own understandings of the League's political proposals and identity. Through the debate about the relationship between the past and their current

political identity, I became increasingly aware of those elements of the past that were used rhetorically by individuals to construct their identities.

Two particular cases rendered this technique particularly significant. The first one was the focus groups with *leghisti* in Treviso where we debated economic practices. Interestingly, these militants, when discussing modern industrial and economic practices, permanently associated them with past village cooperation patterns. This permanent negotiation of the relationship between past patterns and modern practices provided me with important data. Their dialogues allowed me to understand the relationship between their political demands for the rationalization of the state, and at the same time, their concerns with the need to defend community values and practices, that they perceived as embedded in local economic practices.

The second case was the focus groups organized in the village of Igne. Inspired by the League's emphasis on the need to recover and defend local tradition and identity, the inhabitants of this small Alpine village painted murals depicting the village's traditional way of life. The use of painting shows the problematic nature of oral history to link the past and the present. This happens because the discourse about the past does not find correspondence in modern practices, landscapes and forms of community social organization. In this sense, I argue that painting constitutes a visual narrative through which local villagers try to recover the village as a central core of their personal and social identity.

This deeper understanding of the murals, however, was only possible due to the organization of three focus groups in the village. It is significant that these focus groups comprised men and women belonging to several generations. The majority of them had autonomist sympathies, and the leaders of the commission that organized the murals were notable *leghisti*. They appreciated my enthusiasm for the murals, and were eager to talk to me about their history and traditions. In fact, during the focus group the murals were the backdrop through which political identities were expressed and negotiated. Through local people's narratives and discussions, I was able to develop a better understanding of how the League's discourse reflected, and also reinterpreted, through local categories and practices. As a result, these focus groups demonstrated interactions between local people

and enabled me to glimpse the ways in which art, as a social practice, expressed their political views and social concerns.

Still, focus group remains vulnerable to some criticism. During the focus group power and social status among participants was often an important issue. Not everyone feels free to talk. For example, in the case of Igne young people found it difficult to speak at all. Others were afraid to expose their ignorance by giving, what might be considered by the group, a "wrong answer." This happened mainly because they were afraid of compromising the representation of the village as a united community, which some of the participants tried so carefully to present to me. However, in contrast with interviews where despite attempts by some participants to mirror the League's rhetoric, the focus group discussions allowed me to have a better understanding of how individuals negotiate their political identity. On the other hand, the focus group also provided space for individuals to make connections with aspects of their social life that although apparently not related to politics, played a crucial role in understanding political discourse -- as I will soon show.

2.6 Ethical Concerns

Both as a member of society and as a researcher one needs to take into consideration the ethical consequences of one's anthropological practice. Ethical questions are an increasingly sensitive matter in anthropological research due to the close relationships that the fieldworker establishes with the research participants (Mauthner, Birch, Jessop, Miller 2003, Treweek and Linkogle 2000). Therefore, in this final section, I would like to consider some of the ethical questions raised during the development of my research project, and the strategies that I used to deal with them.

The Association of Social Anthropologists ethical guideline (ASA[19]) in their first line notes the responsibility of the anthropologist to "protect the physical, social and psychological well being" of their research participants. I explained to my research participants the objectives and goals of my research project and informed them of their right to withdraw from the process, as recommended in the ASA Guidelines. Before I realized the interviews and the focus groups, I asked if the conversation could be recorded digitally. I also asked participants consent to use their name on the thesis. Although permission was given by almost every informant to use his\her name, I decided to use pseudonyms.

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[19] http://www.theasa.org/ethics/discussion.htm acessed 13 May 2008

Some anthropologists have argued that the role of anonymity is part of a strategy to "privatize the research participants," and reflect the fear of seeing the anthropologist's interpretation openly contested (see for examples Bastos and Bastos 1997). Although, I understand their concerns, my research participants' privacy is of primary importance. I believe that the official party opposition to my presence made what is normally a simple ethical question more pertinent, since some of the research participants could have problems had they co-operated with me in my research.. This makes their protection a matter of courtesy. Similar reasons apply to participants from other political forces. Some of them now occupy places of responsibility, and I would not want possible misinterpretations of their words to damage their public image. As we have seen previously in the case of the journalist there is the danger of unprofessional use of the material gathered and presented, and even the image of the anthropologist, can be easily used in the context of local political struggle.

There are two obvious exceptions: Orso Grigio and the Murals in Igne. My relationship with Orso Grigio was built on personal trust. Our relationship evolved into a warm and close friendship. It was in this context that Orso Grigio gave me his permission to both use his name and his pieces of work in my thesis. Therefore, he was aware of the use that I would make of the materials that I was collecting. Indeed, we agreed that part of these materials would be used on an article that should be published by one of the local research centres. Regarding the case of Igne, despite the fact that the murals are public, I received permission from the mural commission to use the murals in my thesis. Furthermore, in this case, a future publication on the local research centre journal was discussed and agreed.

Ethical themes, however, are not just related with the relationship between the fieldworker and the research participants. Studying what is normally considered an extremist movement raises questions that go beyond the traditional anthropologist-fieldworker as far as respect for the integrity and privacy of his/her informants are concerned. This happens, because what one takes for granted as ethical, does not correspond to what the party members subscribe as ethical, and might even been considered as resultant of the society to which they fight against. In the Northern League's case, the most problematic aspect is related with the movements' defence of xenophobic and racist positions. The use of these words is therefore in itself problematic, and I assume they would be considered by my

research participants as offensive. Yet, as stated in the ASA guidelines the relationship with the wider society also has to be taken into account by the researcher (section V, p.6). As a consequence, should the League views be considered as any other human group practices, or there are moral expectations regarding the anthropologist's work? In other words, what is the responsibility of the researcher?

I believe that this question would be simple if one adopted a relativistic stance. Morality is a cultural construction and one should avoid being ethnocentric. Human practices and beliefs ought to be understood and described in their particular context. Nevertheless, I think that taking refuge is this argument, could also constitute a dangerous silence and contribute to the further political institutionalisation of something that I believe is objectively wrong. As noted by Jipsons and Litton (2000:152) in their studies of racist movements, these groups "are involved in the creation of a counter hegemony to the popular notions of racism". Moreover, as Stolcke's (1995) article on the use of culture to support exclusionist political views noted, the main problem is that in exacerbating cultural distinctions, these political agents make the problem of inter-cultural relations look as if they are insurmountable. Spektorowski (2003), for example, traces the influence of the French "new right" in the League's rhetoric regarding the idea of "community". Xenophobic views are justified in both the National Front and the League's rhetoric as not being against someone, but as the need of the native, cultural self's preservation -- an idea that is also used by the racist groups studied by Jipsons and Litton (2000:162).

At this point it is important to note that part of the possibility of gaining access to research participants, was determined by the fact that I was white, belonged to the European Union and was Catholic. To some extent these categories were important to gain trust and rapport, since I was perceived as part of the Western and European imaginary community. Furthermore, I know that the *leghisti* that trusted me, had some expectations regarding my work. Betraying some of that expectancy could mean radicalising even more the distrust between them and the academic world, and of course between them and me. Having said this, when asked about my political views on these matters, I never concealed my values. Indeed, the debates regarding these ethical questions implied testing cultural boundaries. Ethical differences mirror not only cultural differences but especially the structuring points of those differences. Their attempts to persuade me of the fairness of these positions provided interesting data. As a result, I agree with the ethical, as much as methodological

positions, taken by Jipsons and Litton (2000) and Gabriel (2000). These authors emphasize the need to understand how these world views become part of mainstream society. In order to further clarify their positions the authors make a distinction between empathizing and sympathizing with a political movement's ideas. Empathizing implies an attempt to understand the nature of the belief system, and the social structure where this belief system emerges. Sympathizing, on the other hand, implies an acceptance of the ideology (Jipsons and Litton 2000:155). Ultimately, I agree with Fluehr-Lobban (1998:173) that ethical reflections are not the exception during the research process, but an unavoidable part of fieldwork. Therefore, ethics emerges through self-reflection and process of self-enquiry. This process of self reflection provides for the two routes that ethics and anthropology have taken, which ultimately lead to the same point on the horizon of knowledge and self-knowledge.

Chapter 3

Ritual, History and Culture: Integrating Belluno in the Nation

3.1.1 Introduction: Ritualizing History and Culture

One of the striking points about local people's interpretation of the dramatic episode in the European parliament was that *leghismo* was a consequence of the lack of a strong national historical consciousness. History is story of the becoming, and as is crucial in the process through which individuals "dream" the nation (Gourgouris (1996). History, on the other hand, is also an important practice through which the nation is collectively imagined as "community" (Anderson 1991). This initial chapter is an attempt to illuminate the question of how Belluno is historically, and culturally, incorporated into the nation-state's historical narrative, and sets out to explore how the Northern League contests this incorporation by reinterpreting national history from a "local" and "Northern" point of view. My aim is to show that the connection between local and national history is problematic both in theory but also in practice, and that the Northern League expansion can also been seen as a consequence of this unresolved historical tension within the local society.

The starting point of this investigation was the discovery of the permanent concern of local people with their belonging and local *identità*, and how this concern was normally negotiated through the discussion of the interconnections between local and national history. I became interested in this issue when I realized that the narrations of the relationship between official representations of history and local ones were an object of strong and passionate political discussion. I was surprised, especially, because the Veneto was an area where in the past important and heroic national battles took place in both World Wars. A good example was the historical celebrations held on the 25th of April. April 25th marks the end of fascism both in Portugal and Italy. Whereas I talked about this event with excitement, I noted that the 25th of April for local people had very different and ambiguous interpretations. These different interpretations of national history were publicly institutionalized by the different political ceremonies, organized to commemorate the national memory. As Connerton (1990) suggested, national ceremonies are an essential practice for the societies to remember what makes them a community. Hence, in a rather paradoxical way instead of celebrating a common national history and unity, historical

ceremonies celebrated the painful national disunion. In other words, the ceremonies expressed and ironically celebrated the Italian national *di-visions*.

In this chapter, I investigate how the discussion of historical events is used by different political actors as a means to access political power. I am interested in what Gourgouris (1996:11) inspired by Kafka, called the *mythistorical core*. The *mythistorical* core is the "the place where the historical order embraces the legendary". Ethnographically, I focus on the celebration of history through rituals and public ceremonies. I chose to focus on public ceremonies because they comprise not only an historical re-production of a *vision*, but also its re-creation. Ritual is a "vehicle of history-in-the-making" (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993. Therefore, ritual celebrations also express the social and cultural transformations that local and national society is going through. As suggested by Ricoeur (2004), the enigma of the past is constructed not only to address the problems of the present, but also the concerns of the future. To some extent Northern ideology has been contesting the future of the Italy as culturally united nation state, and the absence of an accepted historical conscience, I suggest is part of the reason of the Northern League success.

3.2 The Alps, The Alpini and the Nation

3.2.1 The Alpini Return to Belluno

Valter woke me up and told me: "let's go to Belluno. The Alpini are coming back to Belluno". I accepted. It was a beautiful day. Finally the rain had stopped. The sky was blue and yellow leaves littered in the garden. Romantically, Valter praised the beauty "of the mountains, *che bellezza.*" We got in the car and drove towards Belluno. We then crossed the Bridge of the Alpini. On the bridge two statues representing Alpini soldiers contemplate the mountains. At the bottom of the statue is a crown of flowers, the Italian national flag, and a plaque that reads: Centenary, 1872-1972 "Belluno city to its Alpini sons". The name of this important bridge, the statues, and the Italian flag confirm the value of this local and national symbol. As Stacul (2003:138) notes, the Alpini are normally identified "as people of the Alps". But they are also a special elite corpse trained to fight and survive in the mountains. In this sense, the Alpini symbolize the toughness of the local people, and their capacity to survive and fight in the mountains.

Image 3.1 Alpino soldier in the Bridge. Note the presence of a crown of flowers with the Italian national flag.

When we arrived at the town, we stopped the car in the modern city park and walked through the city square, where old and modern symbols of power are exposed: the commune palace, the Bishop's residence, the Palace that used to be the residence of the administrator of the Republic of Venice, now redecorated with symbols of the Italian Risorgimento such as: Cavour, King Vittorio Emanuelle I and Garibaldi, and finally the Province administrative palace that represents the Italian political domain.

Today the Piazza dei Martiri [Martyrs] was crowded with people and full of Italian national flags, which does not often happen in a quiet town such as Belluno. When we arrived, the Alpini were marching into the city. During their entrance, Valter told me that "in the past the Alpini were an integral part of the local society". Local young men generally did their military service in a unit with a connection to the Alpine arc. Valter recalled the time "when the army was an important moment in a local men's life". Another friend pointed out to me the importance of the "military in the formation of manhood" [*diventare uomo*]. As a rite of passage a boy became "a man" after leaving his town and entering the army. It is normal to find in older men houses the Alpino hat or their photographs in the national military uniform.

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This event was particularly significant to the city of Belluno. It represented victory over the arch rival city of Feltre, but also it celebrated the return to the city of an important national symbol. Generally, the Italians love the Alpini. Every year there is a large patriotic organized ritual known as the *adunata* (meeting). In this ritual, former Alpini soldiers from over the whole country meet and march with their coloured uniforms and feathered hats in a selected Italian city. During my fieldwork, the event took place in Parma in Emilia Romagna. It is also common for the A.N.A., the association of ex Alpini, to hold commemorative parades at war memorials or churches. The A.N.A is also particularly involved in civic protection and voluntary activities. While I was in the field, there were several voluntary parties where the Alpini helping setting up the stages and marquees used in the events.

Nevertheless the Alpini are not always seen as part of the Italian nation state, as for example suggested by Heady (1999). The Alpini are also an important local symbol that indicates and remembers the Alps and the mountain. As previously highlighted, the Alpini are a symbol of the Alps, and therefore of the North. Therefore, it is not a surprise that such an iconic symbol is often used by Northern League members as a symbol of social distinction of the local and northern identity (Stacul 2003). In effect, I met several former Alpini who passionately supported the Northern League. In their views the Italian state is ruining the Alpini by recruiting southerners, which for an elite troop associated with the Alps is seen with irony and sometimes grief. Murer told me: "what do they [southerners] know about combating and living in the mountains?" In other words, it seems that for these former Alpini, the Alpini are not "from the Alps" anymore.

A remarkable representation of the imaginary connection between the Alpini as an expression of the North, and northern ethnicity, is presented in the poster of a tall and blond soldier with a German look that I found displayed in the Northern League office, but also in Pontida (image 3.5) The poster says "Alpini military force of the North, recruitment in the North" (image 3.4).
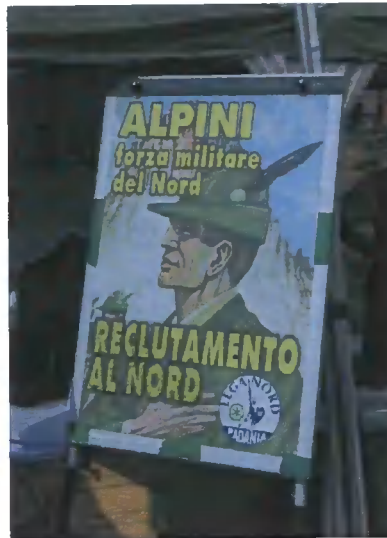
Image 3.2 Alpini Northern Military force. Recruitment in the North.

Image 3.3 Photograph of the Alpini Padanian Association in Pontida. The first banner shows a mountain with snow and reads: "the deep roots never freeze". The second says: "To the Alpini the legend remains, for those who cancel it the shame".

Today Belluno does not have to guard the boundaries from the dangers coming from the North, or the communist threat from the East. The end of military service and the recruitment of people from the South to the Alpini, helps explain why the Northern League's activists adapt what in the past was a national symbol, in a political northern key. As image 3.4 suggests they now associate the Alpini with the Northern need of defending their boundaries from the Southerners "invasion". As result, different meanings seem to be attached to the idea of Alpini identity. In the Italian official national narrative, the Alpini were responsible for protecting the patria's northern boundary from Italy's traditional enemies: the Germans and Austrians. As an elite troop the Alpini were consigned the

mission of defending the northern community boundaries, and are often the troops that represent Italy in the more difficult assigments. Indeed, some of the Alpini that were now marching in Belluno were just coming back from a mission of peace keeping in Iraq. The political representatives presented for the occasion celebrated their courage and devotion to the Patria. In contrast, for the Northern League the Alpini are a symbol of the North.

3.3 Integrating Belluno in Italian Contemporary History

3.3.1 War Memories: Belluno City of the Resistance?

One way of understanding the strength of Italian patriotism and its connection with individual social identity is to see how people deal with the memories of the two World Wars. The First World War is remembered locally with pride. The artillery duels in the mountains, and the Alpini battles in the trenches against the Austrians are normally associated with the patriotic defence of the land. After the defeat in Caporetto where more than 600,000 Italians were killed, Belluno came under Austrian occupation. In the autumn of 1918 the Austrian Empire forces were driven back. The Italians made a powerful counter offensive in Vittorio Veneto in the neighbouring province of Treviso, and they were finally able to beat the Austrians. In the area around Vittorio Veneto one can find the monuments to the soldiers from different nationalities who died in the bloody trenches of the First World War.

A more ambiguous and difficult patriotic memory was left by the Second World War. The Alpini were part of the German army that invaded Russia. Although prepared to fight in difficult conditions, they were unprepared to fight in such hard conditions and suffered heavy losses. More important was the situation after Italy signed the armistice with the allies and shifted sides during the war. The experience of the partisan war, and of the German response to the Italian treason, is still a motive of energetic discussion. This difficult historical period still represents an "unsolved trauma" in the Bellunese (as much in the Italian society in general).

An excellent example of the predominance of this *di-vision* was the celebration of the national liberation day (25 April). Despite the appeals of the President of Republic to celebrate Italian Liberation and unity together, the celebrations took place in separate cities. This was strongly criticized by the national press, which pointed out and lamented the

obvious: The incapacity of celebrating a common interpretation of history, and the contemporary Italian nation-state's "common birth". The left celebrated the martyrs and the courage of the resistance "against fascism" and National Socialism in Rome. The right, on the other hand, celebrated in Milan those Italians who were killed in "the civil war" that they claim took place after the end of the German occupation of the territory. In this sense, the right celebrated and represented the "blood of the vanquished", and the key role of the allies in liberating Italy.

On entering Belluno, the occasional visitor cannot help noticing that in the city plaque reads, "Belluno: Gold Medal of the Resistance". In Belluno both wars are remembered through plaques in the Palazzo del Comune. Painted in ochre, this original and beautiful palace displays several plaques that record the role of Belluno in important national events. The first plaque commemorates the annexation of Belluno to the Italian Kingdom. Close to this a tribute is paid to the Bellunese soldiers who died in the First World War. It recalls the "sons who died for the independence of the Patria". A third plaque is devoted to the local Alpini troops that during the First World War fought "in the hard sector of Mount Grappa, and "wrote with their actions pages of exceptional heroism in the First World War trenches". However, curiously the largest plaque is a commemorative inscription in marble, which explains why Belluno is the "Gold Medal of the Resistance". Its text is significant to the argument:

> After the armistice signed in September 1943, their (Italian) sons organized themselves into partisan formations. 86 were hanged, 227 were shot, 7 burnt alive, and several died due to torture. The 367 that fell in combat, together with the 301 wounded, the 667 deported, and the 7000 interned constitute the tribute of blood and heroism given to the glorious fight of liberation in the days of the insurrection. The freedom volunteers strongly opposed to the X division without taking in consideration the enemies numbers, neither its armament power. They closed the X German division composed of three divisions in Ponte nel Alpi and stopped them from retiring. In conjunction with the allied forces they obtained the rendition of the Germans. The river Piave was once more red with Italian blood, their partigiani that first embraced the arms against the invader, together with all the martyrs foundation and heroes of all the fights for one Italy united and free chose the road of duty and sacrifice.[20]

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[20] Subito dopo L'armistizio del Setembre 1943 I suoi figli si organizzavano in Formazione partigiana e gli 86 impiccati, i 227 fucilati, i 7 arsi vive, i morti per sevizie, i 367 caduti in combattimento assieme ai 301 feriti ai 667 deportati e ai 7000 internati costituiscono il tributo di sangue e de Eroismo dato alla lotta di liberazione nei giorni di gloria dell'insurrezione. I suoi volontari della libertà si opponevano arditamente senza misurare il numero del nemico nè il suo armamento, al X corpo d' armato corazzato tedesco forte di tre divisioni attestate a Ponte Nel Alpi e gli precludevano dapprima ogni via di scampo e lo attaccavano, poi di concerto con le sopraggiunte forze alleate ottenendo la resa e discrezione. Delle rive sacre del Piave arrossato ancora una volta dall Italo sangue I suoi partigiani che primi ebbero il privilegio di Imbracciare

Leaving the old town centre and the city's ancient walls by the Dante Gate we enter the Piazza dei Martiri [Martyr square], so named after the Second World War. The name commemorates the brutal violence of the German occupation. In this square, several Bellunese civilians were publicly hanged. The action took place as a reprisal against the military action of the partisans. "Seven civilians for one German" Valter told me with some indignation: "How could the partisans keep killing Germans?" After the public hanging, the bodies were publicly exposed and left unburied in the Square, as a symbol of Nazi power. The bodies were later recovered by the local bishop, in an act of courage claimed the right to bury the bodies, thereby humiliating German authority. The impact of the occupation and resistance against the Germans after Italy changed sides in the war is represented by several statues in the Garden.

Image 3.4 Piazza dei Martiri. German soldiers surrending

L'armi contro le invasore marciano oggi alla testa delle formazioni di martiri e degli eroi di tutte le lotte per l' Italia una e libera e ci additano la via del dovere del sacrificio.

Image 3.5 Italians imprisoned by Germans

It was precisely in this Piazza that Belluno celebrated the return of the Alpini to Belluno. In this intensely symbolic moment, where political and religious authorities were all represented, former Alpini marched in front of the soldiers. Then the soldiers performed military actions with a mathematical precision. When they finished their routine, the Italian flag was collected and the national anthem was played. The Piazza decorated with Italian flags sung together. After the anthem, the Italian flag was carefully and ritually folded and presented to the Mayor. The Mayor, a former socialist and now a member of the Democratici di Sinistra, was then invited to make a speech. In this highly charged symbolic Piazza he declared:

> In this square that remembers the Italian Republic born of the Resistance, I would like to welcome back the Alpini to Belluno, and wish that they stay in the city for a long time.

The integration of Belluno into the Italian nation-state narrative happens through the interpretation of the participation of Belluno in national history. In this short ethnographic description of material culture and ritual praxis one can see how the centre constructs the periphery and simultaneously the periphery constructs the centre. In this dialectical process the meaning of belonging and nationhood is negotiated, poeticized and embodied. In order to organize and better describe this relation, I have organized the symbols and their

historical interpretation, so that in the following sections the differences in their use become more explicit and intelligible.

Table number 1. Symbols and their Public Interpretation.

Symbol	Symbolical role	Historical representation	Mythistorical value
Mountain	Natural barrier between Us and them.	Place of combat for the Patria. Protecting Rome and Italy.	Integration of the local territory into the National meta-narrative.
River Piave	Blood of the Nation	Resistance against the Austrian and Germans.	Natural link between Belluno and Italy.
Alpini Mountain troops	Sons of the city. Sacrifice and duty for the community	Fighting in the mountains and resistance.	Protection of the Patria boundaries.

3.3.2 The Left-Wing Memory: Celebrating the Sacrifice for the Nation

I will now explore how the resistance to the Germans is interpreted by local political agents to give meaning to their political action, and to incorporate Belluno in the nation-state's historical narrative. When invited to talk after the parade of the Alpini, the Mayor of Belluno (DS, former PSI) celebrated Belluno and the Italian Republic as "born from the resistance". Generally, for left-wing activists "the question of memory", or better "the absence of memory", as they point out to me, is the story of the local resistance against German and fascist oppression. Left-wing activists represent themselves as the custodians of the national anti-fascist memory. For left-wing activists, the resistance against the Nazi invader after the armistice symbolizes the beginning of the contemporary patria. Indeed, the name of the local left-wing research centre clearly emphasizes this idea: Historical Centre for the Resistance and Contemporary Age [Istituto Storico della Resistenza e Etta Contemporanea: from now on IBREC].[21]

Left-wing activists interpret the resistance as an act of passion, love and sacrifice for Italian national freedom and unity. The link between the resistance and previous national heroes is

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[21]This centre as the name indicates was formed to investigate and document the role of the resistence and was deeply linked with the Communist Party. The democratic Christians also had their own research centre, called the Institute for the Mountain. This is an important difference. While the Historical centre is part of a national frame work, the mountain is a specific local symbol. Furthermore, the mountain is eternal, while history is made by men, as is clear in the ethnographic material presented in the next section.

presented in the mayor's discourse, but also on the plaque outside the commune palace, where the Italian partisans's resistance is linked with those past heroes that fought and sacrificed "for Italy united and free" [per l' Italia una e libera]. But what makes the local resistance a national movement, and at the same time such a politicized memory? I think we find an answer in Belluno's main garden, where we find a commemorative inscription to the resistance. The inscription includes several surnames of men that are not from Belluno, but from other Italian regions, especially Bologna. "They were communists" a *leghista* pointed out to me. These partisans came from Bologna, an important communist area, to fight and guide the Bellunese resistance "they were the worst and more violent ones." This was a common complaint. Partisans were often accused that under the legitimization of patriotism they took advantage of the absence of authority to kill and rob ordinary civilians. "They entered in my grandmother's house stole food, and cleaned their boots with the butter in front of her -- are these heroes that saved the patria"?

For many *leghisti*, and other local people that normally voted for more conservatives forces, the partisans came from outside their community. They fought not because of the patria, or democracy, but because they had their own political agenda, which puts them outside national history: as communists. Thus, the idea that communists fought for their "own ideals", rather than patriotic ones, implies representing the communists as outsiders of both local community and the Italian nation. As Tiziano a former DC and now FI supporter, often pointed out to me: "my father was a partisan, but he was not communist, what about his memory? The Americans liberated Italy, not the Partisans".

The resistance was an essential part of the PCI history of political resistance of fascism, and played a key role in how the militants understood their being Italians (Shore 1990). For the left-wing activist, the presence of other Italians and communists in the Bellunese mountains lends to the local resistance a strong national and ideological character. According to Alberto, a musician who was invited to sing at one of the ceremonies organized by the ISBREC, "without the local resistance, the allies would had much more difficulty in winning the war in Italy". "The partisans were essential to recover our land" a leftist told me. "They had more influence than in France, because they kept several German divisions occupied, that is history, but people do not remember". These interpretations represent not merely a difficulty in agreeing on significance of these past events, but rather

show how these interpretations of the past are attached to an official and political interpretation of the past.

During my fieldwork, the ISBREC organized several ceremonies to celebrate the partisans' heroic resistance. Often the partisans were invited to talk about their war memories. They narrated the resistance daily life, the humor of the troops, the capitan's charisma, the anecdotes of a life in the mountains, but also the cold, the hunger, and other hardships. I vividly recall a former partisan saying to the crowd: "the food? Polenta, polenta, polenta and *formai* (cheese) every day". The crowd laughed. "Then we would wait in the cold, hidden in the mountains for the next assault against the Germans". Often emphasis was given to the spread of the communist ideals. The captains were often described teaching and discussing communist beliefs.

Sometimes Loris, a professional reader, would read some stories or partisan auto-biographies. His strong and intense voice could take the audience into the mountains, creating a powerful identification. The practice of storytelling reveals:

> what is perhaps the most powerful human capacity, which is to understand one's own and other moods, plans and beliefs, and the metamorphosis of those mental states, in a long flow of action (Carrithers 1992: 74)

Through the practice of storytelling, history becomes legend and the past is lived and incorporated in the present, becoming an important element in individual political and social identity (Connerton 1990). The stories of the partisans lose their relation with the original experience and become part of a group memory. The stories told about the past become part of their life world. In appropriation and representing the struggle of the partisans, they create a relation between individual experience, the party's narrative, and the nation. As Connerton (1990) suggested, through celebrating the past people remember what they have in common, in this case what makes them both left-wing and also Italians. As a consequence, the left-wing activists presented recover and remember their ancestors' struggle by linking their individuals' life stories and identity with the historical narratives proposed by the ISBREC historians.

Later on, Albert would play the famous resistance, song Bella Ciao.[22] The resistance Song *Bella Ciao* [Goodbye Beauty] tells the romantic story of the partisans struggle in the mountains for their freedom. The song is a national symbol of the partisans struggle, and is often played in left-wing ceremonies.

Una mattina mi son svegliata	One morning I woke up
Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao Ciao Ciao	Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao Ciao Ciao
Una mattina mi son svegliata	One morning I woke up
Ed ho trovato l'invasor	And I found the invader
O Partegiano, portami via	Oh Partisan, carry me away
Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao Ciao Ciao	Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao Ciao Ciao
O Partegiano, portami via	Oh Partisan, carry me away
Perche mi sembra di morir	Because it feels like death
E se Io muoio sulla montagna	And if I die on the mountain
Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao Ciao Ciao	Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao Ciao Ciao
E se Io muoio sulla montagna	And if I die on the mountain
Tu mi devi seppellir	You must bury me
E tu mi devi seppellire	And you must bury me
Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao Ciao Ciao	Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao Ciao Ciao
E tu mi devi seppellire	And you must bury me
Sotto l'ombra di bel fior	Under the shade of beautiful flowers
E tutti quali che passerano	And all those that pass
Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao Ciao Ciao	Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao Ciao Ciao
E tutti quali che passerano	And all those that pass
E poi diranno che bel fior	Will say what beautiful flowers
E questo fiore da partegiano	And this flower of a partisan
Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao Ciao Ciao	Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao, Bella Ciao Ciao Ciao
É questo fiore da partegiano	And this flower of a partisan
È il fior di libertà	Is the flower of freedom

Although it is a national symbol, it is important to note the omnipresence of the mountain in the lyrics. The mountain is represented as a place of resistance where freedom is guaranteed and lived. The mountain symbolizes the nation. In operating as a signifier of nation the mountain symbolically protects and covers its children from the invader. The sons, on the other hand, sing their desire to die, if necessary, for freedom. Dying is linked with the resurrection of freedom, symbolized in the song in "the beautiful flower, the flower of freedom". As a consequence, through the collective performance of this national and political symbol (the song), Belluno is "Italianized" and inserted in the Italian national state collective memory.

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[22] To listen the song and observe some photographs:
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4UE40dUZL2Q&mode=related&search, to a modern use on Left wing festivals: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=55yCQOioTyY&mode=related&search

Alberto sang first in Russian and then in Italian. In singing first in Russian Belluno is also represented as part of the communist internal movement of liberation. Yet, the small crowd, which was gathered around him in an intimate expression of unity, sang in unison when the song was played in Italian. Even people that would not normally expose their political views in public sang on this occasion. Singing creates a strong feeling of community and sameness. The strong symbolism of the song, the melody of the guitar, the harmony of the singing, somehow transposes and embodies the feeling of heroism, sacrifice, and honor of the partisan struggle. Singing also allows the forgetting of the tragedy of death and loss. By recalling the nation's birth and freedom, singing provides a noble meaning and purpose to death.

3.3.3 Imagining the Nation through Sacrifice and Death

Public celebrations of history are also a place where current political problems are dealt with. This happens because rituals are an open social practice (Comaroff and Comaroff 1993). In one of the ceremonies a local left-wing activists told the audience: "Today I was in Treviso, the moral capital of the Lega, and everyone praised the *Tricolore* [Italian flag]". The speaker was therefore suggesting that despite being *leghisti,* and overtly contesting their social identity as Italians, the sacrifice of the *partigiani* included them as part of the Italian imagined community. In this public ceremony the sacrifice of the resistance was exposed through the exhibition of several photos of dead partisans killed by the Germans. I was particularly impressed by the violence of the photographs that showed the partisans who had been hanged on trees, and some bodies brutalized by the Germans.

The use of photograph as a political strategy to represent historical traumatic events is an important one. In the Cypriot society photographs, Sant Cassia describes that photographs are used by Greeks and Turks to remember the people that disappeared during the ethnic conflicts among the two groups. Sant Cassia (2005:147) noted that photographs were politically used "as means of memorializing it and rendering it more ontologically 'real' and closer to us." Therefore, if singing and storytelling transforms and links individual experiences into a collective group memory, the realistic photographs of the death bodies objectify the reasons of this heroism. They do so in a two-fold way. First, it represents the other: the enemy. The enemy is visualized and understood through its brutal practices. Secondly, photograph allows moving the past to the present. In this sense, the photograph

works as a realistic historic document of what happened, allowing people in the present to understand and live the past.

The exhibition of dead bodies, the descriptions of torture, the cruelty of the Germans is well expressed in the public exposure of the bodies in the Square. The Germans' ruthless disrespect for the sacred is an example of what the partisans stood against, the evil, rational and organized pleasure of killing. Nazis were not just a human enemy; they were also an anti-humanistic force, which reinforces the almost sacred character of the partisan's sacrifice. The proof of German evilness is presented in the disruption of the sacredness of death, by leaving the unburied and polluted bodies publicly exposed in the square and in the trees as a warning.

The images of sacrifice, the imagination of blood and death recalls the religious domain. It has strong resemblance with the sacrifice of Christ for the resurrection of a new era, of a new history.The death-pictures and their sacrifice therefore also stand as an accusation to the ones that contest this historical interpretation and re-presentation of the facts. The fact that these men's sacrifice is not fully acknowledged and recognized in the nation's official memory ironically reinforces the analogy with the Christian meta-narrative. Although the partisans were fighters, the photographs showed that many of them were simple mountain folk -this is clear in the exhibition of family pictures-. In this way their deeds and actions acquire a more symbolic and patriotic value, since they were standing against a powerful killing machine as David against Goliath, for the Italian patria.

The photographs of the dead partisans represent the Italian nation as an ethnic group with a common history. In the photographs the partisan is not represented as a local, but as an Italian that fights for the nation. The Italian "contemporary age" is therefore imagined following the sacrifice of their ancestors. The sacrifice of the ancestors is identified by Anderson (1991) as the key principle in the act of imagining the nation. The partisan's blood is shared by the audience as the principle that grounds both their national and political identity. The photographs operate therefore as political signifiers. They not only represented the local oppression over the national community, but also the need of recovering freedom and their territory. They are a metaphor of Italy "united and free". Therefore, the dead are, in this instance, a metaphor that expresses the Italian desire to control the land.

The theodicy of the *partigiani* sacrifice is linked with the metaphor of the river Piave *in sangue* [in blood]. This, in part, creates a historical connection between the First World War patriots, and the blood of the partisans who fought the other Northern power, the Germans. Blood is what makes this image and memory so powerful and persuasive. Politically, this means incorporating and connecting the periphery with the centre, the local into the national meta-narrative. This incorporation takes place by the most powerful and sacred symbol of belonging, blood and the most precious gift one has: life. In other words, it could be suggested that the Piave, like a vein, links Belluno with the Italian body. The resistance in the mountain contributes to the nationalization of both the mountain and Belluno. The blood of the ancestors represents not only the attachment to the local land, to the local community, but also the projection of this attachment to the nation and to the idea of Patria.[23] Left-wing militants are, consequently, the ones that conserve, guard and celebrate the resurrection of the Patria, and also the birth of the Italian state's recent history.

3.4 Resisting the Resistance: the Local Blood of the Vanquished

After lunch, someone knocked on my door. I opened it and Valter said "good morning" in local dialect. I smiled and invited him for a coffee. I was preparing a small paper to talk about the resistance, and read it to him. We discussed it, and then he told me: "Today I want to show you something". He drove to the Cansiglio Wood in the beautiful valley of Alpago close to the border with Belluno neighbours Friuli and Treviso. During the trip, Valter expressed his views on the resistance. In his opinion, their military role in the outcome of the war was almost irrelevant. For him the actions of the partisans made the occupation more difficult for local people. Furthermore, Valter, as other former voters of the Christian Democrats and more conservative political forces, associate the partisans with the post-war "civil war" and massacres of local population and "Italians".

After a long conversation we arrived at the mountain and Valter parked the car. "This amazing and beautiful forest hides a secret". We started walking through the mountains, and fifteen minutes later we arrived at a natural hole in the mountain covered by iron bars.

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[23] It is important to note that the mountains are related with Belluno, and not with specific valleys. This is not a simple detail, since, as we will see in the next section, local identities are also strongly linked with the different valleys.

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This was not a normal place. On the right side of the hole an Italian flag was displayed together with a large and powerful iron cross.

Image 3.6 Iron Cross in the *Bus de la Lum* [the hole of light]. Note the absence of Jesus' body. It could be interpreted as a symbolism of the resurrection, of the passage from the earth into heaven. It is also an important symbol of sacrifice and pain.

Valter told me:

> This is the *Bus del la lum*. It is a foibe[24], and only recently the tragedies that took place in the *Bus del la Lum* were openly recognized. Here the communist partisans killed several soldiers of the Republic of Saló and other Italians. It was an ideological crime, a civil war. It is these brave partisans that they say gave freedom to Italy? No one knows how many they killed. People remember however the mourning of the ones that were pushed inside and that did not died immediately.

Later expeditions and attempts to recover the bodies of the ones sent alive into the depths of the earth revealed that Germans also used this place to kill Italians. Although the confused and painful memories of what happened in this place are shared by the local population, its open public and official recognition came only recently. The following article that I found in the *The Avvenire* (the Episcopal Conference Newspaper) talks about the expedition to recover the evidence of these tragic events: the dead bodies. This was the second effort to recover the forgotten bodies and provide them with a proper burial, and it was only possible due to the use of modern technology.

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[24] The foibe are cavernous pits characterized by a narrow and often hidden opening on the surface but which descend for various hundreds of meters in the bowels of the earth. After the Second World War, Tito's troops used these natural holes to kill Italian refuges and partisans.

We will never know the names of the recovered. Now they rest in the cemetery of Udine. The mother that remained waiting for the whole journey, as an icon of the maternal pieta did not recognize her son's body. From this *addolorata* [in pain] of the Cansiglio, Mosetti [the leader of the expedition] tells two touching episodes: "From the remains we took from the cave, there was a quite clean mandible with some repaired teeth. Probably it was the only element that could make the body identifiable. I looked at the mother, and with delicacy I took it to her. For a few seconds I submitted it to the examination of the heart. Then she turned her head and covered her face with her hands. It was the only time that mother broke during the time we were in the Cansiglio. When we were leaving the foiba she took the hat from the cross where she had put it, and threw it to the hole, because an Alpini cannot rest in peace far away from his hat".[25]

Image 3.7 Tomb for the unknown dead in the Bus De la Lum, Cemetery of Udine in the region of Friuli Venezia Giulia

One evening, I invited Valter to come to a historical conference organized by the Northern League about the resistance. I was invited by Orso Grigio to the conference after we met for the first time in his house. In this occasion, Orso Grigio showed me a book by Marco Pirina, an historian. Marco Pirina was the responsible for the conference, as well as for a historical film about the partisans' crimes that I saw on TelePadania (the Northern League T.V. channel). Pirina started the conference by saying "in the schools the children think that it was the partisans liberated Italy. They do not know that the Americans did it"? The audiences laughed with indignation.

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[25] [In Italian]-. I nomi dei recuperati, ora custoditi nel Sacrario di Udine, non li sapremo mai. Non riconobbe suo figlio nemmeno quella mamma, che rimase lì ad aspettare per quelle lunghe giornate, come un'icona della pietà materna. Di quest' "addolorata del consiglio" Mosetti racconta due episodi commoventi: «Tra le cose che scivolarono nelle cassette vi fu anche una mandibola, abbastanza pulita, con qualche molare otturato, forse unico elemento utile per un eventuale riconoscimento. Volsi gli occhi a quella mamma, raccolsi il frammento e glielo portai, delicatamente: per pochi secondi lo sottopose all'esame del cuore, poi girò la testa di lato coprendosi il viso con le mani. Fu l'unico cedimento di quella madre per tutto il tempo che fummo in Cansiglio». E al momento di lasciare l'argine della foiba tolse il cappello dalla croce sulla quale l'aveva posato e lo g ettò nel pozzo, perché «un alpino non può riposare in pace lontano dal suo cappello.

Contrary to the left-wing ceremonies, in this conference, the civilians killed by the "red" partisans were the centre of discussion. National history, as Gramsci (1996:84) noted, is the biography of "the mother" transformed into the collective biography of the "good sons" that are opposed to the "bad sons". The historian invited to speak belonged to the research centre: *Silentes Loquimur* [The silent ones speak].[26] During the conference, the historian used testimonies collected through interviews with the victims' families. Photographs of the disappeared, and tombs of the people killed by the partisans supposedly vandalized by left-wing activists, were shown to the audience provoking indignation. As result, as in the communist ceremony, a large space was given to the horror of death and sacrifice for the nation.

This time, however, the aim was not to link the local with the nation, but to strongly criticize the Italian nation state for making such a distinction between "its sons". In Spain, Pirina told the audience, "when the civil war happened they built monuments to both sides. Here there is a part that cannot celebrate and pay tribute to their dead". If for the left-wing activists the partisans are Italians fighting for their land, the emphasis on the partisans' victims represent them as polluting others, as communists. In this sense, the partisans' crimes are linked with the massacres of Italian at the hands of Tito's troops that took place in the area of Trieste at the end of the Second World War. The *enfoibamento* recalls traditional anti-Slav feelings and "their crude and barbaric imagery continued to be reinforced during the Cold War by the sharp divisions between East and West" (Pizzi (1998:219).

The *foibe,* wrote Pizzi (1998:220), "stands as silent and empties vessels which have progressively been filled with memories, uncertainties, desires..." The bodies are the evidence of a nation that is unable to establish a common historical memory, to agree on a common biography by providing proper honours, burial and recognition of all their sons, lost in those tragic and confused times. The dramatic episode of the mother looking at a lost mandible and trying to understand alone in the forest if it was her son, I believe, shows more than the 'catholic' interpretation of these dramatic historical events. The focus on the figure of the grieving mother shows that this unburied memory is alive and still "poisoning the nation's life". The polluting character of the unburied bodies functions, in this way, as

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[26] Large wooden crosses placed at the edge of the *foibe* used by Tito's troops to kill Italians are engraved with the motto Sientes loquimur, which give also name to this research centre. We can see here an interesting operation that links these actions of Italian *partigiani,* with the Other (Yugoslavs). The common ground seems to in the fact that these crimes were perpetuated by communists.

an unfinished narrative, which demands public recognition and especially political closure. (we will see next how). Closure in the *Avvenire's* narrative with the desperate mother takes the hat from the cross (here it could be seen as the symbol a possible body) and through it to the depth of the earth. In so doing, she openly recognizes that her son's body will never be identified and properly buried. And because an Alpino "cannot rest in peace without his hat" (a symbol of Italianess), the mother's gesture while symbolizing closure on a personal level, comprehends grief on the collective one.

Pirina noted that only recently the nation state officially recognized this painful local memory. In 1994, the Italian President Cossiga went to the cemetery of Udine and paid his respect to the death of the *Bus de la Lum*, finally recognizing them as part of the "Italian national family".
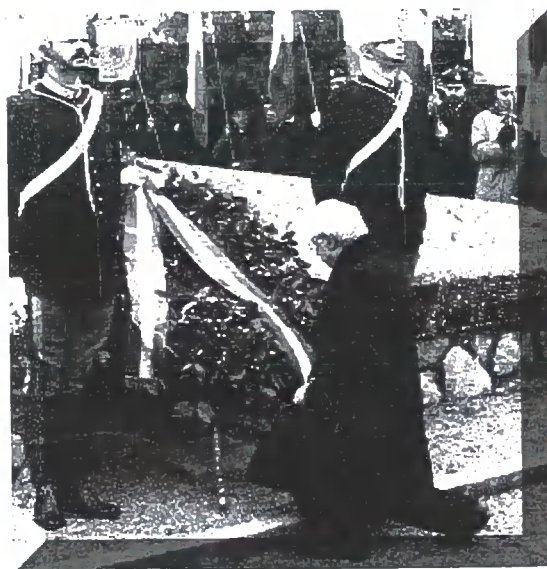
Image 3.8 This photograph was taken from the website of Pirina research centre. In this photo we can see the Italian national flag and Italian officer together with the Italian president, the Christian Democrat Cossiga pays tribute to the *enfoibati* (the ones inside the foibes) by kneeling in front of the tomb. In kneeing in front of the Tomb the President as the embodiment of the nation pay respect and publicly recognizes this painful memory.

The recognition of these "unknown" bodies functions symbolically as a second burial. The bodies are unknown to the family, but they became known as part of the nation's biography. It could be argued that the need of ritualizing their public recognized not only as part of the Italian kin and history, but also as national martyrs and victims.

In this conference the Northern League politically assumes the representation of the spirit of the vanquished. The League legitimises this political representation with the need to not

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only provide the families of the victims with closure, symbolized in a proper burial, but also to have justice, a political and public recognition of the political nature of these tragic events. Hence justice will only come with political closure.

During the conference, Pirina challenged the historians of the ISBREC to come to both the *Bus de la Lum* and to the tomb in Udine to "deposit flowers together". This ritual would symbolize the political recognition of the partisans' crimes, and would be an important step "to make peace with history". It is interesting to note that in order to "make peace with history" implies the political parties' and historians' recognition of this "unburied memory". While the left-wing historical interpretation finds recognition in several public monuments, where as the partisans are described as martyrs and national heroes (for example: Belluno city of the resistance, the monuments in the central Piazza and in the commune), the historical interpretation advocated by the League is an "unofficial memory" since it is not bureaucratically and publicly recognized in its own monuments. The losers' memory is, in this way, relegated to the private sphere, by being excluded from the public culture.[27] This explains the comparison with the Spanish civil war, where monuments built in common were an attempt, and an expression of "national reconciliation".

The recognition of this memory, however, is a not a simple issue. A local, respected historian from the ISBREC who assisted at the conference told me, sadly, "for them, all partisans were murderers and killers. What about the Germans, who fought them"? In other words, who recognized the sacrifice of the partisans in the nation's history? Was not that more important? Here, I recall a lesson of literature by a local left-wing intellectual. The lesson reflected upon the Sophocles' tragedy Antigone. Despite the fact that the interpretation of the tragedy was not directly related with the resistance, in this lesson the speaker clearly praised the action of Creon. He justified his empathy with Creon's love and defence of the transcendental and rational laws of the state, over the ethnic, family and religious motives evoked by Antigone. This interpretation of the myth represents I believe the communist vision that the sacrifice of the partisans against both Fascism and National Socialism was more important than both their dubious and controversial actions, and more importantly the "amoral familism" and localism, which they often claimed to combat ideologically.

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[27] Although I have not made further research on this topic, people that contested the public interpretation of the role of the partisans did so based on family memories and oral history.

Another researcher of the ISBREC told me that often Pirina sent his students to the local research centre "to study our archives, but he told me: "we already know how to spot them." As Bourdieu (1998) observed, collective groups have a "possessive relation" with history. The image of historians hiding archives from each other, as much as the challenge to end the dispute over social memory, is an example of how Italian national memory is still an object of political dispute. I think an insight from Hobsbawn can help us:

> What makes a nation *is* the past, what justifies one nation against the other is the past, and historians are the people who produce it. So my profession, which has always been mixed up politics, becomes an essential component of nationalism (1992:1)

In representing, and using the sons' unburied bodies, and the images of the grieving mothers, the League represents the state's national memory, and history, as both non-local, and unethical. In this sense, the state is represented as an outsider that tries to impose itself on local history. In representing the family, and the unwritten history, the Northern League politically defends the predominance of the family (blood), and the local ethnic history (territory) over the identification with the nation state transcendental history. Consequently, the demand for making peace with history, or the effort for the recognition of the different histories by the state, represents more than just a struggle about historical truth and memory between localists and nationalists. Nor is it a conflict over the definition of local reality, or even over territorial history. History is rather the backdrop through which political competition and struggle for power takes place. Who controls history, and the interpretation of the history of the bodies, seems to some extent control the practices, symbols and events through which the nation is dreamed and imagined.

There is one further point to make, here. Sant Cassia's (2005) work in Cyprus showed how both states (Turkey and Greece) were able to appropriate and collectivize the process of mourning and pain, by transforming individual experiences into collective wounds. This appropriation constituted an important font of power and provided legitimization to both symbolical political claims and normative action. The ethnographic material discussed here suggests that in Belluno the elaboration of sacrifice and loss, separation and unity, are also part of the political parties' programmes. This suggests that the constitution of the nation's myth-historical core became part of the political parties' function. In other words, the practice by which the Italian nation is dreamed and imagined is an integral part of the political dialectic between political agents, which on my understanding stops the formation

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of a (state) secular and historical transcendental narrative that incorporates local history into a national one.

3.5 The Histories of Local Culture. Regeneration and Unity

3.5.1 The Province Christian Identity

While Valter was taking me through the city we stopped in front of the local cathedral for some minutes. The church is situated between the Palazzo del comune and the provincial administrative Palace, and it is the official residence of the Bishop of the recently formed Belluno-Feltre diocese. Valter told me that Pope Giovanni Paolo I was from Belluno and that in the past the power of the Church was greater, especially when it was linked with the Christian Democratic Party. Today, Belluno is a more secular society, a consequence of emmigration and modernization. Nonetheless, Christianity plays a significant role in how people talk about themselves and understand their lives.

In this section, I will explore the role of religious ceremonies in the cultural and historical incorporation of Belluno in the Italian nation, and set out to explore how the church tries to mediate between local identities and national history. My objective is to understand how Belluno is integrated into national history, and the political principles beyond it. I argue that the Church tries to link the local with the national through the elaboration of a religious transcendental historical model, which bypasses modern historical events that, as we have seen, so deeply divide the Italian nation. The shift toward religion is also important, because the Church played a key role in shaping the Italian nation state. For that, I focus on the ritual that celebrated the first Sinodo of the recent formed diocese of Feltre-Belluno.

3.5.2 'History in the Signs': The First Sinodo Belluno Feltre

I will begin with an ethnographic description of the ceremony organized to celebrate the first reunion of the diocese Belluno-Feltre. In a time of political instability, a consequence of the spread of localist ideologies such as the one advocated by the Northern League, the Church tries to consolidate the cultural and historical unity of Belluno. I was invited to this ceremony by Enrico, a catholic. When I arrived in Feltre the ceremony was starting, the mayor of Feltre and two regional counsellors (from Forza Italia and *Margherita* – left-wing Catholics) were present. When I sat down young scouts entered the church, following the cross and carrying the flags with the Sinodo's symbol (three individuals with their hands linked and walking through a mountain). The Bishop made a brief introduction, followed

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by a speech by the mayor of Feltre. Then the Cardinal Tomko, who came specifically for the occasion made a homily.

> (...)In the past I spent several holidays with the Pope in your Valleys and mountains. [28] I appreciated the nature and your cultural differences and the positive aspects this plurality brings. I know the faith in your populations and I understand the demands that walking together implies. Your *sinodo*[29], which means walking together, must think about the future orientation. (he cites Saint Paul 17-22-34). We do not live on an island, if we look beyond our confines we find a world that we have to face, but also that faces us. [He tells the story of Saint Paul in Athens and concludes]: in a society where everyone has its own God, what is Freedom? [Then he continues talking about the conflict between tradition and modernity]. How to live your identity? Even in this remarkable period of social-historical and cultural transformation you are still Christians today. Christianity is in your genetic code. Your true richness is here. (...) Christ died, but he resurrected! (Cardinal Jozef Tomko)

The Cardinal's speech is followed by an important ritual. A speaker dressed in local traditional costume reads the 'history in the signs' (storia nei segni).

> In the Diocese Belluno Feltre born in 30 September 1986 and composed of 184000 inhabitants, 3263 km2, 158 parishes, several traditions are reunited.

After the ceremony introduction, the re-presentation of these several traditions takes place. Two couples in aristocratic clothes, representing the ancient diocese of Feltre, process to the altar. They carry on a small plate a piece of land "collected in the Feltrino". They stop in front of the altar and one of them takes the microphone and praises the "nobility and culture of the city of Feltre". He then highlights the strong presence of the Christian tradition "since the apostolic age".

> The Christian path started in the apostolic age through San Prosdocimo, the evangelist of Padova and Veneto. The vitality of the diocese is explained by the presence of the sanctuary of Vittore e Corona[30], and the popular devotion to the Virgin. In 1986 our secular path changed. The Holy Vatican decided that we would not walk on our own but with another diocesan community. Not as diocese of Feltre, but as diocese of Belluno-Feltre. The new path was not easy. Now after the juridical unification, the first Sinodo would be purely rhetorical if it would not lead to a unification of the souls and to the creation of a strong and richer identity that includes the different traditions and values of each of its components.

One of the representatives then consigns the earth to the Bishop. The Bishop in front of the altar, invokes God's protection over the land, and reads:

> As the grain was sparse here and there in the mountains
> When collected it becomes one

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[28] Giovanni Paolo II often spent his holidays in the province of Belluno. Symbolically the mountain is associated being closer to God.

[29] Sinodos comes from Greek syn plus odos (joint road). In this case it is associated with Ecclesiastical council.

[30] A local sanctuary situated in a hill outside Feltre. This sanctuary guards the body of two Saints.

To become in the table the Body of your Son
Thus the love of your Church in Belluno-Feltre is collected.

The Bishop deposits the land in a unique vase in front of the altar. After this action, the crowd and the choir sings.

Then, also dressed in traditional outfits, the representatives of the old diocese of Belluno walk toward the altar. One reads:

> Who brought Christianity to the valley? Saint Prosdocimo of Padova or Saint Ermagora and Fortunato from Aquileia? (...) Although there is not a clear answer we know that Christian life was developed around Belluno's Cathedral. Belluno's cathedral was the centre of Christian life for centuries. Today, the former diocese of Belluno disappeared. The Pope changed our ecclesiastic geography and gave us new companions in the path toward Christ. (...) In this new reality we want to walk with a sinodal spirit (...) everyone keeping their own identity but to realize a richer *identità diocesana.*

The land is then consigned to the Bishop who repeats the same action. After the bishop empties the land in the pot, the choir praises the unity of the land. Belluno representatives are followed by the representatives of the Cadorian valleys.

> Our land, the Cadore, has a long history. Religiously we were linked with Aquileia, where Saint Ermagona and Fortunato nominated by Saint Marc brought us the faith. For over one thousand and five hundred years, until the first half of 1700, the Patriarchate of Aquileia directly governed our land. In 1751 with the end of the Patriarch of Aquileia we passed to the archdiocese of Udine and in 1846 Pope Gregorio XVI transferred us to the Diocese of Belluno. From our mother church we keep some uses and traditions (they describe these traditions...)

The man dressed in aristocratic custom confines the land to the Bishop who empties it into the common vase. Again the choir, representing the people, praise this action.

Following the Cadore, the representatives of the decanati of Ampezzo e Livinallongo approach the altar. A young girl in traditional outfit reads:

> Why are our ecclesiastic institutions called "decanato di Ampezzo" and non-foranie as the rest of the dioceses? The answer is in our history. Until several years ago we were part of the important Diocese of Bressanone that comprised a significant part of the Alto Adige and Austria. In 1964 the diocese was redesigned and the boundaries established with the province of Bolzano being named "Bolzano-Bressanone". In 1964 we were taken by surprise when we were integrated in a new diocese. Painful was the separation from our roots and from the central references. It was not easy to initiate the path with other companions. Our commitment was the one of keeping the social, historical and cultural traditions that characterizes our community. We remember the missionary, the cult of the death, and the traditional Ladino culture. (...) Today in Feltre we are living a moment in the Sinodo that is important for our decanati and to the entire diocese (...)

The Bishop then repeats the same operations and empties the pot with the land in the unique vase. Then the choir sings.

Why do you cry and search for yourself, when your Lord is resurrected?

(...)

The choir stops. A small spade is given to the Bishop and a young girl presents him with a red abete [*Picea abies*], the most common tree in the province. The tree is planted in the vase by the Bishop, with the help of the child. After, a jar of holy water collected in the Sanctuary of San Vittore is given to the Bishop, who gently pours it in the vase. "It is the water of baptism, symbol of faith that irrigated our land for so many years". [The choir sings, and then the crowd claps enthusiastically.] The commemoration ended with the Cardinal and the Bishop blessing the crowd. After the ceremony, a meal outside the cathedral is shared by the participants.

3.5.3 The History and Stories of Local Culture

This ceremony was a significant moment in the provincial cultural and political life of the province. Its significance was confirmed by several participants who pointed out "the presence of some local regional counsellors, the mayor of Feltre and of an important Roman Cardinal". It is not possible to deal with all the meanings of this complex ceremony, and I will focus in what follows on only those elements that are relevant to the understanding of the relation between the local and the national.

Clearly, these Catholic ceremonies focus on the unity of the diocese. The ritual encompasses the different valleys that compose not only the diocese Feltre-Belluno, but also the administrative unit Belluno. The ceremony has some relations with the left-wing celebration of the resistance, since it tries both to unite and transcend the different valleys' ethnic identities, into a broader one, first the province (diocese), then the nation and finally the universe. One should note how sacrifice and loss are part of the ritual's "performative enunciates". Performative enunciates as Connerton (1990:72) noted, are the symbols through which the sense of community is constituted. Yet while, in the left-wing ceremony, loss is linked with images of military sacrifice for the nation, in this church ritual the sacrifice is of the local rooted identities, so that the community can walk and grow up together.

Thus, sacrifice and loss are associated with playing down local rivalries by emphasizing what links them culturally: the transcendental relation between the different local histories and generations and Christianity. Indeed, the Sinodo is dedicated to the: "cultural identity, a gift of a long history" [*identità culturalle dono di una lunga storia*], and is marked by

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Cardinals Tomko's question: "what is freedom if everyone has his own God?"[31] This phrase can also be seen as a metaphorical representation of the problems that the Italian society is currently suffering. What is the Patria if everyone has his own Patria? Collective identity if everyone has their own *identità*?

The ceremony tries to address current local questions as much as religious-administrative ones. The province of Belluno is composed of distinct valleys. These heterogeneous valleys have strong feelings of ethnic attachment, a characteristic that favoured the political expansion of the Northern League in the province (Amantia and Vendramini 1994, Diamanti 1993, Heady 1999, Stacul 2003). According to Enrico, the Northern League emphasis on localism and autonomy increased local political-institutional difficulties.

> In a province that already suffers due to its geographical and territorial composition, from the competitions of two regions with special status, and economic globalization, this lack of coordination makes more difficult to manage the political problems.

In Enrico's opinion, the spread of the *anti-politica* and of the autonomist ideas proposed by the *carroccio*, led to a further loss "of the sense of respect for the political institutions". He told me repeatedly that the politicians should have a "spirit of service".[32] Christian identity, understood as an historical gift (dono) from God (father), allows the Church (symbolically acting as a mother) to propose itself in the role of mediator between the different valleys. Enrico noted how the ceremony was taking place in the Cathedral of Feltre, "an important fact, given the strong rivalry between Belluno and Feltre". In fact, this rivalry grew up after the union of both dioceses (Amantia and Vendramini 1994).

As it is clear in the ritual, however, this was not the only strong conflict. The narratives of the representatives of Cadore and Zoldo clearly show the painful feeling of loss and reluctance in being administered by what they perceive as outside clerical forces. (Indeed, they praise the action of local priests that support local populations against the decisions

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[31] This question was allegorically presented in a painting of Tiziano Vechelio. In this allegory, an old man shows Jesus the table of law. Jesus however looks and points out to the open heaven. The refusal of the traditional table of law, and the acceptance of the divine law, is I believe an interesting metaphor to understand the effort to overcome and transform local identities. Ultimately, it is also the reason why Catholicism can not be used as the core of the national identity since often the church contests men's right to change Gods prerogatives, which makes emerge a conflict between state and religion. The strong defence of a state normative interpretation and obedience to objectivity of the natural law, raises large suspicions in Italian political society.

[32] Spirit of service is an important political concept within the Italian political system. The Democratic Christians try to characterize their action on politics as "servants".

made by the Vatican.) In this sense, they are I believe, an important example of the difficult process by which these cultural-ethnic areas were historically integrated in both the national and religious administrative categories.

Table number 2: Symbols and their public interpretation.

Symbol	Symbolical meaning	History	Mythistorical
Mountain and land	Symbol of the roots. Plurality of the local identities.	Links local history and local realities with a universal history.	Local cultural history started when the saints brought the faith.
Tree	Growing together in direction to heaven. Regeneration, peace, unity.	Kinship genealogy.	Rootness and continuity with tradition.
God Christ	Cultural and historical unity. Cultural Father	The history of the Church as a mother that transcends local (patria) community boundaries	Local history and culture transcend the Italian modern state.

3.5.4 Practices of Unity and Regeneration

The ritual that takes place after the Cardinal's important speech may be interpreted as a ritual of unity and regeneration. The enactment of unity is symbolized by the passage of the different soils from the different (symbolic) local representatives to the Bishop. Land is an expression of political boundaries. In this ritual the land symbolizes local people's attachment to their identity, to their ethnic roots and history of their small patria. In this way, the representatives that consign a piece of their land to the Bishop not only provide a piece of their own sacred substance, but also open and stretch their symbolic boundaries. They submit to a transcendental rule (father), which legitimizes the normative character of their religious representatives' decisions (church mother).

The regeneration of this relationship between different local identities is symbolized through the tree. The ritual of planting a tree finds correspondence in local ritual practices. In the Carnic Mountains, Heady (1999) describes a rite that involves a pine tree [*Picea abies*]. When a new house roof is completed, the builder attaches a pine sapling to the front of the house. When this happens, the future proprietor invites the builders to a ceremonial meal. The author interprets the use of the sapling tree as the desire of the family to "grow like a tree". He also notes that the tree is locally associated with the masculine domain. The same symbolic meaning can be suggested in the Bellunese context. The tree is symbolically linked with male life and reproductive forces. Indeed, in the ritual the Bishop in the symbolic role of the father, plants the seeds of the new house (territorial Diocese Belluno-

Feltre), and then celebrates it through a common meal. In this case, the tree associated with the house becomes an important symbol of social reproduction expressesing not only the regeneration of the local community, but also the will of the diocese to "grow together".

Planting a tree is often associated with the resolution of conflicts. In the Iroquian symbolic universe, trees were planted to symbolize the agreements between Iroquians and colonizers. Parker reports the symbolical associations between tree, land and the resolution of conflicts:

> I Dekânawi'de, and the union lords now uproot the tallest pine tree and into the cavity thereby made we cast all weapons of war. Into the depths of the earth, down into the deep under earth currents of water flowing unknown regions we cast all the weapons of strife. We bury them from sight and we plant again the tree. Thus shall great peace (...) be established. (1912:612).

In Heady's example, as well in the discourse of the Iroquoian chief, to uproot one tree implies to plant another one in its place. This metaphor is taken a step further by the ideas of depth. "Under the earth" is a common metaphor for both death and the past. Indeed, the reader should note how in the ritual "the weapons of strife" held in a number of these Northern valleys, celebrates their history and local identity symbolized in the earth, is buried and mixed in the deepness of the vase, so that the community can be imagined as transcendent to local ethnic identity.

However, before this highly symbolic passage takes place, the past is first remembered and mourned through the representative's spoken discourse. Only then is the land consigned to the Bishop, and mixed into the single vase (which symbolizes both Belluno and the nation). As the representatives' narratives show, this consignment is interpreted as both loss and sacrifice. The mourning of the past is linked with the sacrifice of the flesh, a sacrifice that is associated with the need of achieving a higher form of life. Let me try and clarity this last point. Christian mythology reflects the classical Platonic division that defends the precedent and higher symbolic value of the spirit over the body, the transcendent over the immanent, essence over existence. The representatives express, in this way, the desire to pass from an immanent existence (body linked with earth, with passion, with flesh, to a earthly father) to a transcendent one (symbolized by heaven).

This passage from earth to heaven is symbolized through the link between the sacrifice and loss of the representatives (as sons) and the suffering of Christ when crucified. The loss of his immanent life took him toward the transcendent father. For that reason, the unity of the province soils is linked with the Christian central belief in the resurrection. In Christian mythology the resurrection of Christ is associated with the regeneration of life. The ritual planting of the tree symbolizes regeneration. As Mircea Eliade (1971) reminds us in his magisterial survey, the religious role of the tree is often used to link, symbolically, earth and heaven, but also to symbolize the centre of the world (Christ and God, but also the passage from earth to heaven). In the ritual described the tree symbolizes not only the desire of growing up together, but the path to achieve inner peace, that comes from passing from earth to heaven. After the ritual of the unification of the lands takes place the choir sings "why do you cry and search for yourself, when your Lord is resurrected"? The sacrifice of the representatives is symbolically linked with the suffering of Christ. As the Cardinal concludes "Christ died, but he is resurrected". This resurrection is concluded when the Bishop feeds the land and the tree, with the "water of baptism, symbol of the faith that irrigated our land for so many years".

The link between the tree and the land also has an important metaphysical symbolism. They are not just symbols of the representation of local space and unity. They also territorialize and contextualize local history and identity into a wider transcendent collective framework. In the Western imaginary, trees are a common and powerful metaphor for kinship and belonging. As Malkki (1992:27) remarks "botanical metaphors are used by people to think of themselves, as being rooted in place and as deriving their identity from that rootness". In Christian mythology the tree is an important representation of unity, knowledge, for example the Christmas tree, or the tree of wisdom in Paradise. Christianity is also often represented as a vine. For example, when the present Pope was elected he declared himself "as a humble servant in the Vine of the Lord". The vine is symbolically associated with the blood and sacrifice of Christ.

Although the substance of local identity is theorized as coming from the land, and imagined as a traditional bounded community, the to attachment the small patria are presented as branches of a large historical tree that links local identities and history with a specific cultural centre: Christianity an historical institution: the Vatican, and a transcendent father (God). As the Cardinal metaphorically explains "Christianity is in your genetic code. Your

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true richness is here". In other words, it is part of your essence (blood), it comes before the land. In fact, during the ceremony, the Bishop declares that "the diocese of Belluno is part of the 3000 Catholic dioceses, and mirrors the Universal Church". The passage between these different levels in the ceremony is symbolized by the mediation of both the Bishop and the Cardinal each responsible for guiding the community's path. The association between the tree and the sacrifice of Christ becomes, in this way, not only the signifier of unity but also the metaphor that integrates the local within a wider social-historical context. As a result, the narratives of the representatives are part of a conjunction of narratives that interrelated themselves with a common and fixed historical denominator, the Church, and a common essence that precedes existence: Christianity.

By combining these various interpretations one can interpret the rite of planting a tree as regeneration of local identity, as an attempt of linking the feeling of ethnic identification with the national administrative unit of Belluno. At the centre of the ceremony is the mediating role of Catholicism and the Church in transforming a bureaucratic, administrative unity, Belluno, into an historical and cultural one. In culturally sacralizing the territorial administrative categories proposed by the nation state, they are building a powerful identification between the religious domain and that of the nation state. Hence, Belluno becomes not only a legislative, but also an important cultural signifier. By transcending the local and particularistic sphere the rite reveals and, at the same time, tries to address a national social-political problem, the creation of social practices, but also ideas, by which a common historical collective framework and a strong cultural and political community unity can be imagined.

Thus, in focusing on what historically unites local populations, the Church tries to address the problem of particularism, segmentation, and historical division that so strongly characterizes the Bellunese and Italian society. Segmentation "is the political phenomenon in which, in the absence of centralized authority, social groups subdivide and reunite according to their social distance" (Herzfeld: 1993:101). Segmentation is often be used to explain the Italian society (See Heady 1999 and Stacul 2003). The problem of segmentation and strong ethnic feeling that cannot be resolved on the secular level due to the politicisation of historical memory, but also the church's ideological action in protecting and representing local ethnic feelings. Still, ritually the church tries to resolve the segmentation problem by emphasizing a model of community imagined through the

natural symbolism (water, earth, tree, cultural-religious tradition), and through a model of religious transcendence based on the equivalence between local ethnic sacrifice (sons) and the death and blood of Christ.

In comparison with the communist memory, the Church therefore emphasizes the rootness and hegemony of the Catholic system of belief. As Pius XII declared: "for more than fifteen centuries the Italian people has remained faithful to this order of belief, which appeared to them entirely normal and unquestioned" (in Ginsborg 2001:103). As result, the ceremony also represents an important political statement about the principles that should ground Italian nationality: Italy should be a Catholic country and the laws should be made by the national state, but discernible and based on the principles of divine (natural) law in humans. In other words, the nation should embody the cultural-religious values that historically transcend and anticipate the existence and formation of the modern and contemporary Italian nation state (law of the father). Here we find a strong dispute with the left-wing model that allocates the idea of father to the state. However, this model of cultural and ritual mediation that for a long time linked the local with the national, as we will see next, was deeply affected by recent events in Italian national political history.

3.5.5 The *Parocho* and the *Priest*: the Treason of the Church

Image 3.9 Religion trap or salvation (Religioni trappole o Salvezza). The title of the statue is Conscience and soul imprisioned? [trans Anima and conscience Prigioniere] In this statue it is important to note the separation between Jesus and the Church and religion. As we will see during the thesis local people strongly identify with the mythical figure of Jesus, but they have more reservations about religion, that they often associate with an external force that wants to dominate them. This symbolism is presented in the fox hunting trap, a device used to hunt a clever and wild animal.

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Orso Grigio's provocative representation of Jesus Christ looking inside an old fox trap (with cross) is a fascinating representation of local public diffidence regarding institutional religion. The small plaque reflects this dilemma: is religion a "trap or a means of salvation"? Throughout the thesis I will often reflect on the central role of religion, and religious mythology in the understanding of the Northern League's message. However, in this final section of the chapter, I would like to explore the *leghisti* understanding of the Church as a representation of the other, as an "outsider" or "external" political institution. For that, I focus on the ambiguous role of the priest. Orso Grigio used to distinguish between *parocho* [parish] associated with the defense of the local population and *preti* [priests] associated with the Church hierarchy. The *prete* was normally represented as the representative of an outside institution. Instead, the *parocho* gained legitimacy from the good he did for his parishioners, and was associated with local identity.

The priest is an ambigous figure. On the one hand the priest represents and embodies local ideologies and ethnic feelings. On the other hand, he represents external source of symbolical and political authority. In the past, the priest was responsible for most local ritual activity. Today, despite the secularization process, the priest still plays a central role not only in important rites of passage such as baptism, marriage and death celebrations, but also in village ritual activity such as processions. In the past the priest also retains responsibility for mediating between local populations and state bureaucracy since he knew how to read and write. This mediator, role as Heady (1999:122) describes in relation to the village of Carnia, encouraged local people to view the priest with suspicion, especially due to their connection with the powerful.

Leghisti, but also local men in general, view the Church with suspicion. This suspicion is clearly present in the adages and episodes *leghisti* tell about priests. For example, Angelo told me: "when we were poorer the Bishop would visit us in his Mercedes and tell us that we should accept our lot". The expression *bocone di prete* [the piece of priest] is used to characterize the best part of the meat, and recalls the time where the best part of the beast was given to the priest, in exchange for "favours" (practical and spiritual). This expression implies not only the recognition of priest's moral superiority and higher status, but also his power as a patron and mediator.

The post war political situation saw the Church actively participating in local and Italian political life. The fear of the communist expansion and the emergence of a great catholic party, the Democratic Christians reinforced this role (Diamanti 1993, Ginsborg 1996). Indeed, part of the future Italian political elite, specially in Veneto, was forged in the local parishes (Ginsborg 2001). During the province's industrialization process the hegemony of the DC the priest also controlled access to important economic resources. As several *leghisti* told me: "the recommendation of the priest was essential to access many jobs". This happened because part of the local industrial class, and the state bureaucratic sector, was controlled by the DC through patronage and clientelism. Patronage was used by the DC to keep their political power and mediate between local and national interests (Diamanti 1993, Ginsborg 1996, 2001, Golden 2003). The expressions *parla come un prete* (He talks like a priest), and *scerzi da prete* [priest jokes] reflect the priest's rhetorical ability to persuade people. The expression is also associated with deceiving and control of people's minds. They were often mentioned to me as metaphors to describe priests' attempts to "convert" local people for vote for the DC.

The priests' role as cultural mediator led to a strong association between the Church and the DC after the Second World War. The vote for the Christian Democrats was a *vote of delega* (Diamanti (1993-1996). That is, a vote where people trusted and delegated their vote to a political interlocutor. The DC presented itself as the mediator between local interests and national ones (Diamanti 1993-1996, Biorcio 1997, Ginsborg 2001, Stacul 2003). In this sense, the DC took advantage of the Church to have and maintain political power. However, to some extent this stopped them from creating a strong politicization of the masses, since the identification with the part was a religious one.

> The church, as result of its own predominant cultural longevity and by means of the Christian Democrats, was the very essence of institutional authority, both political and moral. The culture it preached vis-à-vis authority was fundamentally that of submission and docility, accompanied by the unparalleled virtues of mediation, which all too easily slipped into clientelism Ginsborg (2001:103).

The exposure of clientelistic linkages after the massive corruption scandals of *tangentopoli* in the early nineties enhanced the scepticism toward the role of the Church and its

connections with the centers of power. In this sense, the *leghismo* could be understood as a reaction against Catholicism Ginsborg (2001).[33]

> You know Vasco, you cannot forget that we voted and were governed by a party called Christian Democracy. These are two important names, and then all that corruption and shame, I trusted them. They said we fight the communists, and then collaborated with them and stole from us (Mario, Northern League activist.

Trust, wrote Sant Cassia (2005:22), "is not just a social relationship, it is a culturally informed perspective and expectation that are bought to bear in dealing with others". In this case, the delegation of democratic representation to the Christians Democrats was clearly affected by the scandals that would dictate the inglorious end of the political class, who guided the Italian state destinies since the Post War. I think we catch a glimpse of this disenchantment with the role of both the church and the Christian democrats' mediation, in the following art work of Orso Grigio. In this work Christ is represented in a sad and reflexive posture between the two thieves. In the place where Christ's body was supposed to be, there is a written in local dialect: "More than two thousands years in the middle of thieves." The work echoes the moral episode where Christ forgives the thief who acknowledges his crimes and asks forgiven for his sins. The work seems to suggest that although Christ gave the example, the DC committed the same sins.[34]
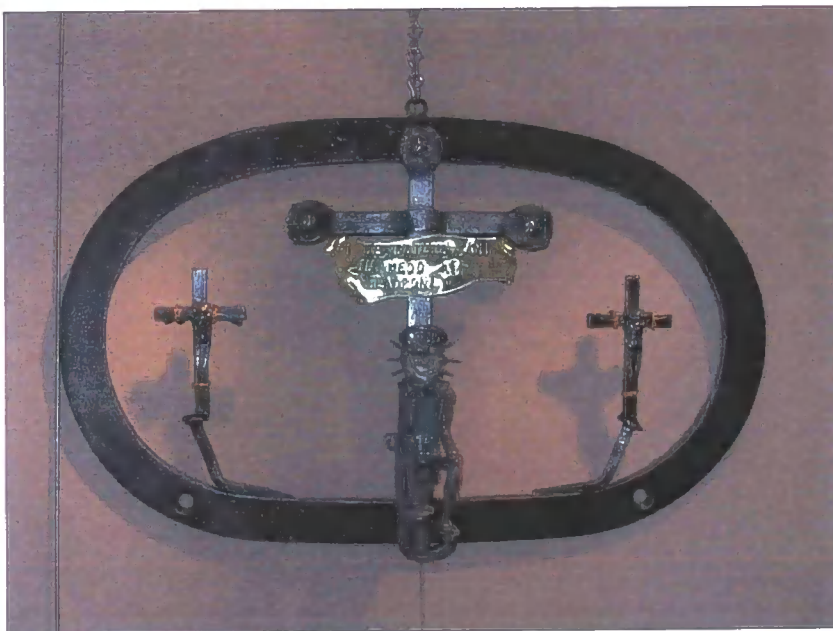
Image 3.10 In the centre of the statue it is written in local dialect: "More than two thousands years in the middle of thieves" [trans:Pi di doimila anni in medo ai Ladroni"]

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[33] Indeed leghismo can be understood as a mythopoetical attempt of linking rooted religious values and convictions with modern means of economic production. In this sense, as we will see later on it is more than just a "reaction", since it shows the incapacity of the church paradigm to adapt to global economic change.
[34] It could also ,mean theat the artist is reflecting that Christ's message has always been betrayed.

The secularization process that started taking place in the region due to emigration, the increase of education and the change in life styles, means that the role of the priest has continued to change. The progressive political separation between the DC and the Church, led the priests to view the expansion of modernity with suspicion. As reported in Amantia and Vendramini's (1994) pioneering research on the expansion of the Northern League, local priests played a decisive role in generating an interest by local communities in "their lost history". In Trentino, Stacul (2003:165) noted how "priests acted as repositories of village traditions and advocates of the maintenance of local traditions and dialects." Priests were particularly active in the publication of books about local history, and supporting local people's desire for more autonomy and a greater share of economic resources, which they saw as fundamental to keep people attached to their roots. Heady's (1999) ethnography goes as far as describing local priests trying to introduce the mass in local dialect, albeit unsuccessfully.

The priest still has some political influence. A league former MP confessed to me that during the Northern League's initial campaigns he "spent several hours drinking wine with local priests." He also told me that in the mountains, in particular, he had some success. Interestingly, I heard the same conversation from a left-wing regional counselor candidate. All this suggests that the priest retains at least some political influence, but not the same power or capacity to create unity and mediate between the local and national. I believe that for many *leghisti,* the ceremony that took place in Belluno would go against their autonomist convictions and support for ethnic and historical "auto-determination." As a matter of fact, although *leghisti* see themselves as Christians, as far as political identity and belonging is concerned they turn their attention to the animistic cult of the territory as a source of historical and cultural unity, thus effectively separating themselves from the Church's message of Italian cultural-historical unity. In other words, although often reflecting local people's concerns, the Church, as an institution, is neither able to mediate nor create a strong feeling of cultural wholeness and unity either at the level of the village, the region, or the nation.

3.6 Conclusion: The Betrayal of the Nation

Catholic and left-wing dialectic were part of the process through which the National history was imagined. Both departed from the same doxic point: the unity of the Italian nation

state. Although, as noted, they differ in how the nation is imagined, they also share important ideas. Both historical interpretations try to transcend local ideologies. At the metaphorical core both ideologies understand the transcendent as high (nation, god), and the immanent as low (local cultures, ethnicity). Finally, both interpretative models share the key idea that sacrifice of nature (ethnic feelings) is crucial in the process through which individuals imagined the community.

It seems, however, that for the activists of the Northern League the relationship between local and national history is not perceived in terms of progress, but as an interminable series of defeats and frustrated hopes. History is described and presented as a kind of local and ethnic collective trauma, where the interpretation of the past is seen as a continuous betrayal. I believe the next work by Orso Grigio (Image 3.10) accurately reflects this disenchantment and sense of betrayal.

Image 3.11 Work of Orso Grigio: Communist symbols and Christian symbols and barbed wire. In this work of art Orso Grigio represents the three nationalist views described in this chapter. The barbed wire symbolizes the soldiers that died in the First World War trenches for the Italian patria. The agricultural tools symbolize the PCI as the representatives of the working class and Christ stands for both the Church and the DC. His interpretation regarding the role of both ideologies I believe is clear: You will never be able to know. Those who give you life or that can also kill you? [Trans: Non lo saprete mai, quelli qui ti danno la vita, o possono ucciderti?]

As the ritual practices and historical interpretations of Italian state history described in this chapter, art should also not be divorced from politics, which makes Orso Grigio's

interpretations a precious means of understanding how the *leghisti* feel. In representing national history as violence over local identity, his work denounces the façade upon which national political identity is imagined and dreamed as strategies to hold and gain political power. His works represent, in this way, the end of compromise, negotiation and sacrifice of the local history, and ethnic identity, toward the hegemonic and transcendent idea of Italian nationalism, a contestation that as we will see in the next chapter, the Northern League embodies and politically represents.

Chapter 4

A Party Community: The Imagination of the Northern Identity

> The ideologies have had their time: the days of rationalism are dead we arrived at the expressionism of politics. People need common values, there are no ideologies anymore, and religion is too weak. We only have left the ethnos, the ethnos never dies. Umberto Bossi (in Biorcio 1997:6)[35]

> Maybe it is an ingenuous and simplistic conviction, but I feel that good is where the people are. Evil is entrenched in the palaces of power, and in the cupole mafiose Umberto Bossi (1992:187)[36]

4.1 Introduction: The Importance of Ritual in the Institution of the New Nation

When demonstrating against the Italian president, Northern League members unfolded the flag of Padania. The speaker of the parliament immediately asked the League parliamentarians to withdrawn the symbol. One of the most original aspects of the emergence of this new nation is that the idea has little historical background. Its only historical base is the Padana Valley that crosses part of Lombardy and Veneto. However, nationalist claims do not necessary need an historical background. This argument was recently put forward by Tambini (2001). He pointed out that all nationalisms are performative and consequently the League project should be interpreted as following classic nationalist theories. As Gellner (1983) suggested, it is "nationalism that creates the nations and not the other way around".

In this chapter, I am interested in how the Northern League imagines Padania. I explore the Northern League symbolic construction of the Northern community. Having explored some aspects of the articulation between Belluno and the nation, and the Northern League interpretations of these "integrative narratives", in this chapter I will "leave" Belluno with the purpose of systematizing and providing a deep account of how the Northern League constructs its own paradigm of social identity. The objective is to place the different models into a comparative framework. In the second part of the chapter, I explore the elaboration of the central concept of "the people" and its imagination as the expression of Northern territory identity, political demands and problems.

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[35] Le ideologie hanno fatto il loro tempo: I giorni del razionalismo sono morti, ormai siamo all' espressionismo della politica. La gente ha bisogno di valori comuni, ma non ci sono più ideologie e la religioni è tropo debole. Non ci resta che l'ethnos, quello non muore mai.
[36] Sarà una convinzione ingénua, semplicistica, ma io sento che dove c'è il popolo c'è il bene. Il male se annida nei palazzi di potere e nelle cupole mafiose.

Ethnographically, I will focus once again on ritual as a creative source of representation and collective identity making. Through ritual, I argue the Northern League attempts to contest the political control of the Italian nation state over the Northern territory. More importantly, it contests the hegemony of both the Italian state and political parties over key symbols and ideas through which social identity and the nation is thought and imagined.

Rituals, on the other hand, are important for the creation of a new collective group history, a "tradition" (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983). As Kertzer (1989:238) noticed, new nations are just as invisible as the ones they want to destroy. It is because they are invisible that they have to be symbolized. The victory of the new nation over the past is obtained through symbolic manipulation. In presenting his model of the development of National Socialism, Mosses noticed the essential role of the party in the process of structuring and theorizing a new feeling of belonging. The German 'volk' was institutionalized by the Nazi party, and renovated cyclically through ceremonies and rituals.

> It was thought that the mission of the nationalism was not just the liberation of the nation, but also to set every individual awareness free, with the purpose of preparing the rediscovery of the belonging to the volk and to acquire truly creative capacity (Mosse:2006:153).

Public ceremony and ritual is the vehicle through which these social representations gain a sensible and "magical" character (Bourdieu 1991). Ritual practice, however, does more than just telling or representing a story, but they elicit, re-create and articulate world of complex ideas. The symbols and practices used by the Northern League however are not simply "invented". As Bourdieu (1991:17) pointed out the "act of institution is an act of social magic that can create difference *ex nihilo*, or else (as is more often the case) by exploiting "pre-existing differences". In order, to construct the idea of Padania as a representation of the whole Northern people, the League has to use symbols and practices that were already powerful. As result, the description of rituals will not only help us understand the problems that part of the Northern society is going through, but also the extent to which the Northern League utilises symbols and ideas which reflect rooted cultural understandings. Precisely for that purpose I would like to start with an artistic interpretation of Padania created by Orso Grigio outside his house in the village of Sois in Belluno. Only then will I explore "the ceremony of Venice".

Image 4.1 Sun clock Calendar painted outside wall of Orso Grigio's house. The calendar summarizes the history of the Risorgimento of the Northern (local) volk. It shows the confluence of the different regional leagues into a single northern national identity. Note how this union is symbolized by the sword of the Padanian warrior touching the piece of iron used to mark time. The question, in Latin, is 'What time is it?' is answered by the Padanian icon at noon 'It is time to start'. It is also important to see the values that are associated with Padania, and that are represented on the bottom of the picture. On the right there is a balance, a symbol of justice. Then a man and a woman joined in dance, a symbol of union and joy. On the right, below the warrior, there is a bow and arrow, a blatant symbol of combat.

4.2 Remembering and Celebrating the Birth of Padania

I would like now to focus on the ritual that took place in Venice to celebrate the birth of Padania. For that I explore the Northern League minister Roberto Calderoli's narrative of the events. In 15 September 1996 the League organized a large public ceremony in the Gulf of Venice. During this ceremony, Umberto Bossi proclaimed the independence of Padania. For many *leghisti* the ceremony of Venice represents "the courage of the Northern League to fight against the domination of the Italian state". "It is a dream" some of the activists told me. Others interpreted the event as just a "political provocation," or a "joke". "Padania

is a promised land it is a democratic society, closed to the people, a real nation." (In Biorcio 1997). In this ceremony there is a clear concern with the "nationalization of the masses" (Mosse 2006), and in the interaction of the crowd with the key symbols of the new nation. We can see this concern clearly embodied in the construction of the arena where the ritual takes place. Arenas are:

> the concrete settings in which paradigms become transformed into metaphors and symbols with reference to which political power is mobilized and in which there is a trial of strength between influential paradigm bearers (Turner 1974:17

Image 4.2 Arena where the Venice ceremony took place. The Padania Symbol, the sun of the Alps is on the centre. Note also on left Alberto Da Giussano and on the right the Lion of Venice. The two symbols historically echoes the Austrian Lombardo-Veneto and symbolize the territory where the NL is still electoral strong.

By contrast with the ritual in Pontida where the stage emphasised the role of the speaker, by presenting him alone, the stage in Venice comprises banked seating, a more obviously formal arrangement. The stage is clearly inspired by traditional national parades, at which state representatives preside (as in military parades for instance). Behind the microphone sit the movements' leaders, while listening to political speeches and waiting for the entrance of Bossi. Above them, is a banner which reads Padanian Peoples National Party [*Festa Nazionale dei Popoli Padani*]. The different peoples united under the same nation are

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represented by several individuals wearing traditional regional outfits, each of which symbolize both the aristocratic and their popular classes of former Italian city states.

Image 4.3 On the right side of the state individuals symbolize the old Italian city states aristocracy, on the left side people use traditional popular outfits.

In 2006 Padania celebrated its 10th anniversary. Calderoli narrated this symbolical event to the crowd.

> We are celebrating the birth of the rediscovery of what we were, of what we are, of what we want to be, that is Peoples of Padania. Even if this fact is not appreciated by the Roman palaces, Padania has existed since 15 September 1996. Our party constitution reminds us, we are the Northern League for the independence of Padania (...)

Connerton (1990) suggested that through public ceremonies community identity is emphasized and thus remembered, represented and included into a meta-narrative. The ceremony of Venice symbolizes, for League supporters, the rediscovery of who they were, are, and want to be. Calderoli's identifies the main opponents of this symbolic re-birth as "the Roman Palaces". As Gramsci (1996:84) reported also during the Italian national Risorgimento, it "was supposed that what you want, had always existed and that it could not openly manifest due to the intervention of external forces or because the intimate virtues were asleep." Canetti (1966) in his study of the relation between crowds and power described that in order to promote a feeling of communion among the constituents of the crowd it is necessary to expel those that provoke disharmony and that questions 'our' unity . "The Roman palaces'" in Calderoli's narrative is the symbol of those who have tried to erase the Padanian northern ethnic identity, a conviction that finds correspondence in Bossi's quote above where he describes the volk as living in "the people".

As in the oath of Pontida, the act of remembering is reinforced by reference to the Northern League's political mission. A mission institutionalized in the movement's political constitution. After 1996, the movement set up its political goal in achieving "the independence of Padania". In Umberto Bossi's speech this goal was presented as the last ambition of a "long road", of a long journey, a prophecy of the party leader that recalls the Padanian national anthem, *Va Pensiero*.[37] The Padanian national anthem is an aria from Verdi's Opera, *Nabucco*. The opera is inspired by the biblical episode of the Jewish Babylonian captivity. Verdi composed this opera during the Italian national agitation against the Austrian control of the Lombardo Veneto kingdom. The opera was first performed in Milano (1842) and was immediately acclaimed by the Italian public as a symbol of the struggle against Austrian-Hungarian rule in Northern of Italy (Martin 2005).

The title of the aria *Va pensiero* (Fly thought) is extremely suggestive. It implies an understanding of Padania as almost a dream, something that lives in the conscience of "the people". Indeed, the first part of the lyrics tells the story of a people forced by an external force to leave their native soil and condemned to roam in the search for the land of their fathers.[38] Their homeland, in the poem, is remembered through the invocation of the natural characteristics of the land, the rivers, and the smell of the native soil, which as we will see in the next section, has interesting correlations with the natural symbolism used to symbolize Padania.

Va, pensiero, sull'ali dorate;
va, ti posa sui clivi, sui colli
ove olezzano tepide e molli
l'aure dolci del suolo natal!
Del Giordano le rive saluta,
di Sionne le torri atterrate.
Oh, mia patria sì bella e perduta!
Oh, membranza sì cara e fatal!

Arpa d'or dei fatidici vati,
perché muta dal salice pendi?
Le memorie nel petto raccendi,
ci favella del tempo che fu!

Fly, thought, on wings of gold,
go settle upon the slopes and the hills
where the sweet airs of our
native soil smell soft and mild!
Greet the banks of the river Jordan
and Zion's tumbled towers.
Oh, my country, so lovely and lost!
Oh remembrance so dear yet unhappy!

Golden harp of the prophetic wise men,
why hang so silently from the willows?
Rekindle the memories in our hearts,
tell us about the times gone by!

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[37] In Venice the NL celebrates one step further on this long journey. A few days after the ceremony, there had been a parliamentary vote of the federal constitutional revision known as devolution.[37] Although the Northern League was able to approve the reform in the parliament, the reform failed to pass the national referendum, where it was not able to collect the necessary support in the South.

[38] Later in his career, Verdi composed another highly symbolic opera: the Battle of Legnano. The Battle of Legnamo, as I previously noted, celebrated the German Emperor Barbarosa's defeat at the hands of the first Lombard League. The opera finishes with a chorus saying: *Italia risorge vestita di Gloria* [Italy resurges dressed in Glory]. So associated had Verdi become with the Risorgimento that his name became synonymous with Italy as an acronym on public buildings as the Italian king: Vittorio Emanuelle Re d' Italia.

O simile di Solima ai fati	Remembering the fate of Jerusalem
traggi un suono di crudo lamento,	play us a sad lament
o t'ispiri il Signore un concento	or else be inspired by the Lord
che ne infonda al patire virtù!	to fortify us to endure our suffering!

Verdi's aria operates as a mythical narration of the Northern people's quest for their own Nation-state, Padania. The aria works as a romantic myth, and clearly represents the "tragic history of the northern peoples" (associated with the tribes of Israel) that are condemned to live in exile in their own territory. The myth represents, in this way, a tragic and dramatic understanding of history.

The aria of Verdi, however, is also important from another point view. It reinforces the modern Northern League political structure. If, in the first part of this wonderful poem, the loss of the patria is nostalgically described, in the second part hope is symbolized by a prophetic wise man, who reminds the people of their past, but also helps them "to support and endure their suffering". Kertzer (1989:237) remarked that the myths of new nations are normally grounded on the idea of a hero who leads his people to the Promised Land. This role is fulfilled in the League by Umberto Bossi. Bossi is the one who leads his people in the direction of the long aspired to northern freedom and rediscovery of the volk.

In the following passage, Calderoli narrates Bossi's political deeds as a leader and *condottiero*:

> Putting together the small leagues and making the great Northern League, the sword that Bossi used to send the first Republic home. Then something even more ambitious, the passage from politics to *identità*. Picking up the water in Monviso, making a human chain with the different northern populations from Monviso until Venice, and it was in that moment that our *identità*, Padania was born. We became ourselves again, and in that stage we took an oath, - and remember the oath is for the entire life- to defend our interests, our history, our *identità*, and every year we have to remember it, because it does not stop here.

The Northern people initially segmented in small regional leagues followed Bossi's sword and were able to change Italian history. In the process of fighting together they forged and rediscovered "who they were". And the proclamation of the independence of Padania, with its public oath, symbolized precisely this Risorgimento and demand for freedom.

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Image 4.4 Poster announcing the ceremony of Venice. "Come sustain Padanian freedom"

4.3 Ritual Practices, Symbolism and Iconography

I would like now to look more closely at the magic symbols and practices used in this rite of institution (Bourdieu 1991). We need to examine the symbols used in the ritual not only to understand how the new nation's boundaries are marked, but also to explain the criteria that define people's sense of belonging to the new nation, and the extent through which these ideas of belonging present a political ideology.

Prior to the main ritual event in Venice, Bossi and some *leghisti* went to the source of the river Po at the Pien del Re in the Mountain of Monviso (a river that starts in Piedmont runs through the North and enters near the Venice Gulf, see image 4.6 below) and ritually collected a sample of water in an ampoule. On the day of the proclamation of Padanian independence the water was transported up the river Po. Several *leghisti* watched the trip close to river with their hands linked in a human chain. This chain symbolized the union\alliance of the several northern peoples around their political leader, and the ampoule. After the proclamation of Padanian independence, Bossi opened the ampoule and released the water into the lagoon of Venice. This practice became known as the rite of the ampoule. As Calderoli emphasizes it was in this moment that "Padania was born", that is, when Padania was institutionalized in the social world as a new identity.

Image 4.5 Poster announcing the ritual of the water collection in the mountains of Monviso in Piedmont. Note the omnipresence of the mountains and the sun. The slogans read: devolution and freedom, (*libertà*), and Bossi.

Before the recent turn toward the defence of its Christian roots, the Northern League adopted the revival of paganism as part of the rediscovery of northern Celtic roots.[39] Paganism consisted in a form of animism, especially related with the adoration and cult of the territory. The territory metaphorically embodies the power of the ethnos, and is the central unit in the League's political discourse (Diamanti 1993, 1996, Biorcio 1997, Giordano 1997, Cento Bull and Gilbert 2001, Cento Bull 2003). Through ritual practice and performance therefore, the League animates the land as a source of identity.

During the interviews realized with *leghisti* I was often told that: the "League does not belong to left or to the right, but to the territory". We don't want to know about ideologies, we want to make something for our land." Often, League posters associated the Padanian and Veneti symbols with the slogan *vota per te* (vote for you), which means voting for the land where you were born. The choice of green as the colour of Padania further emphasises this choice. Green not only recalls the northern "Celtic heritage"; but also the colour of the environment, of nature, that is of the territory. As result, the territory is rhetorically used as an expression for a distinctive understanding of social identity and society.

Bourdieu (1991:120) noted that "to institute, to give social definition to an identity is also to impose boundaries". In his seminal work on the *Symbolic construction of the Community* Cohen (1985:117) wrote that agents:

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[39] A good example of the recovery of Celtic rituals was the invention of traditional Celtic games where men would compete in ancient rituals. Other example was R. Castelli a NL minister marrying following 'Celtic rituals'. With the shift versus traditional Catholicism Castelli re-married following the catholic rite.

can make virtually anything grist to the symbolical mill of cultural distance, whether it be the effects upon it of some central formulated government policy, or a matter of dialect, dress, drinking or dying. The symbolical nature of the opposition means that people can 'think about themselves into difference.

During the ritual that precedes the declaration of the independence, Padania territory started gaining symbolic boundaries through the river Po. In the Italian social imaginary the River Po separates the North of Italy from the South. It is precisely at the source of this river in the Piedmont region high mountains that the water sample used in the ritual is collected. It is through, and around, this river that the human chain formed by Northern League's activists symbolizing the northern people's alliance is established. As result, symbolically the chain institutionalizes the river as a natural frontier and magically affirms the cultural differences between us (North) and them (South). It is therefore not a coincidence that in the League's rhetoric the river Po is described as a "God". On the other hand, the mountain where the water is collected, and the Alps symbolize the new nation's northern boundaries. Thus, animist practices are used to symbolically affirm the predominance of nature over the divisions orchestrated bureaucratically and politically by men. It is from the contrast between naturalness and artificiality that the Padanian territory and boundaries emerges.

The idea of movement, of following the leader or the dream, can be better understood through the analysis of the icon chosen to symbolize Padania. The "sun of the Alps" *(sole delle alpi* see image 4.2 above) consists of a green sun inside a circle. The reader should note how in the poster announcing the collection of the water in Monviso, a great importance is given to the sun. Above the sun is written "freedom and devolution". The sun of the Alps therefore illuminates the way forward and unites the different peoples. Ethnographies in the Portuguese mountains, but also in the Alpine arc indicate that the sun is an important symbol of social order (Cabral 1989). The sun symbolizes the passage from disorder to order, from darkness to light (Heady 1999). On the other hand, the ideas of circularity are often associated with solidarity and demarcation of the village community boundaries (Pais de Brito 1987, Heady 1999). This helps us to understand the symbolic use of the sun clock by Orso Grigio to interpret Padania. The sun clock uncovers the objective of the leagues, as if it was always there, the dream of an independent northern nation-state. The light of the sun uncovers and 'links' the uncorrupted and pure people of the North, and symbolize their path in the struggle for struggle for justice, and the re-appropriation of their territory.

Image 4.6 Italian Map. Note how the River Po is the biggest Italian river and separates the North of Italy from the South. It starts close to the French border and finishes in the Ocean close to Venice. Note also the omnipresence of the Alps. The mountains establish the boundaries, but also the connection between the North of Italy, and France, Switzerland and Austria. In particular the Central Alps in the region of Lombardy, and the Oriental ones in the region of Veneto were part of the Lombard Veneto Kingdom.

During the transportation of the water through the territory that separates Piedmont from Veneto, Bossi metaphorically uncovers and celebrates the "power of the earth", as the creative essence of what one is and consequently where one belongs. Bruno is a good example. As other *leghisti* he often told me that: "I know that it is a blasphemy, but my nation is the mountain". Furthermore, the mountains are symbolically invested as the symbol of the pure origins of the Padanian roots. The League ideologues suggested that the Celtic genetic, and cultural heritage, survived because it was partially conserved in the Alps Albertazzi (2006). This idea finds resonance in local ideologies. As Heady's (1999) and Stacul's (2003) ethnographies in the mountains of Friuli and Trentino pointed out, local people see themselves as "racially different". I found similar representations among *leghisti*:

> Where there are mountains all the people are hard workers. In the South there are not mountains. True mountains. Mountains that make you work. In my work I had to deal with the *meridionale* (southerner). I realize that we were different, even in our way of living. We are another race. For them it is always everything ok, for us we need to do. The Padanian is a person who wants to do, is a hard worker (*laboriose*). Work is a spirit, a spirit that you have inside you. It is something that comes from the geographic exposition, *che te spinge da fare* (push you to work hard).[40]

Race is a common idiom in the North, it should not be necessary understood as race for example in national socialism ideolgies. Heady and Stacul made the same points.

It seems, that the Northern League is able to capture and represent values, symbols and metaphors that already inform and shape a part of the northern population everyday life. The Alps is understood as an ideal type that symbolizes a specific form of understanding of the world. It is also a symbol through which the North is imagined as different from the South. This explains why the water is collected from the mountain. Bossi, in his role of high priest, collects the water from a pure source, since it comes from inside the deepness of earth, and transports it.

The water represents the source of the pure northern identity and is associated with its magic regeneration. After the water is transported through the northern territory, the description of the problems and injustices that the North is suffering, the ampoule is ritually emptied in the Lagoon of Venice. As Tambini (2001) pointed out, the water symbolizes the purification of the territory. This symbolical purification is closely related with the League's political rhetoric, regarding the impure immigrants and the nation state that "culturally" threatens the northern ethnic unity. The ceremony serves therefore to symbolically purify the northern territory from the Italian state presence, to demand the freedom of the land. To purify the territory symbolically of the national state bureaucratic presence, also implies the idea that the territory now belongs to the natives. The desire of recovering the control over the new nation's boundaries is clear in the next speech.

> ....we are leading people that at this moment are proud of having been discovered. We Padanian people rediscovered in 1996 have maybe the right, maybe no! Definitely, the right of not giving up to fatalism. To the ones, who come to our house to impose their rules, changing ours, raping our women and taking our sacraments. If they do not want to live by our rules, they can go back to their houses, maybe with a kick in the ass. Because this is Padania and we command over here. (..) We are like brothers, like a true people that is marching toward its freedom (...) Alessandro Alessandri Federal President of the Liga Veneta

Anderson (1991:146) suggested that people imagine the nation simultaneously as "open" and "closed". Nations inspire self sacrifice love and pleasure, but also the fear of loathing and rape. As Biorcio (1997:201) described Padania was first imagined as a civic religion and "was created with the collective conviction of representing a special vocation and mission of salvation". In Alessandri's discourse the new defined territory is metaphorically represented as a "house", which has to be defended from dangerous outsiders that do not respect the "natives" laws and moral codes.

As a result, the symbolism of Padania creates an idealization of a "natural sacred area". The sacralization of the land is performed in the ritual through the water's release in the Venice lagoon, made by Umberto Bossi. As Calderoli reminds the crowd, it was at this moment that Padania "was born". Although the ceremony emphasizes the animist cult of the territory, through the use of natural symbols, it strongly recalls Christian symbolism. In Christian mythology through baptism, individuals gain awareness of themselves in the world. The baptism in the Christian narrative is considered as the "waking up of the spirit", as entering in a different community. In the Padanian ritual this transition is well expressed in the new name that was given to the territory, which stopped being Italy, Lombardy, Piedmont and Veneto, and was baptised as Padania. Moreover, baptism implies the passage from a state of impurity linked with the original sin to a state of purity. In fact, one is not born Christian, but becomes one through the administration of the sacrament of baptism. In this case, Bossi in the role of high priest administrates the sacrament, who symbolically transforms the Northern peoples into a united People.

As in the case of Pontida during Bossi's illness the ritual ceremony did not take place. When Bossi took the stage to celebrate the ritual everyone rose up and applauded. In this way, they showed their respect for the high priest of Padania and their spiritual leader. Yet, due to Umberto Bossi's ill health, "the rite of the ampoule" was performed, on this occasion, by two children. The involvement of the children can be seen as a political act. Such a powerful symbolic act cannot be appropriated and performed by any other *leghisti*, for this could be read as a transmission (and therefore diminution) of Bossi's charismatic powers. In the local culture, children symbolise a purity of intention. They are free of any political competitive intention and therefore perfectly substitute Bossi. When the ritual was performed, Verdi's *Va pensiero* started playing. People put their hands on their chest and sang in unison with their leader. Thus, the symbolic purification of the northern territory marks not only the "waking up", but also the resurrection (risorgimento) of the "Padanian spirit", the emergence of a new Man who belongs to a new community, Padania.

The Padanian nation is materialized and symbolized through the celebration of symbols and metaphors that in the Italian social imaginary are already deeply associated with the North, (Alps, Po, Venice). In the poetics of ritual celebration, a feeling of veneration and gratitude toward the party symbols, party representatives and among people is created. The preponderance of public ceremonies, rituals, and mass parades are therefore essential not only to remember the belonging to the volk, but also to incorporate it within the individual

life-world through social practice. As Arendt (in Mosse 2006:119) argued, it is through the ritual performance that "history enters into life and becomes part of life". Padania, as we have seen, is understood as a thought, it travels in the conscience of their members as a dream and it is materialized as part of the individuals' life story through ceremonies.

4.3.2 A New Model of Identity: the "People" and the Territory

I would like now to compare the ritual practices and symbols described in the previous section with the ones we explored in the previous chapter. The emphasis on specific territorial symbols (earth, mountain), religious practices (water, baptism and purification), but also the emphasis on the respect of the "northern people's diversity", suggests that Northern League rituals have more resemblances with the Catholic vision, than with that proposed by the left, which is primarily focused on historical events and rationality. However, for the Northern League, its essence is not dependent on a creative force existing outside the natural world, neither is it related to the rational national state, but it is written in nature, and as we will see in the next section it is embodied into specific social practices and understandings of the world. This can be understood as an example of Bossi's classification of modern politics as "expressionism", which suggests that the struggle for political power is understood through metaphorical rhetoric.

What I mean is this. The Northern League has created a national identity for itself that is not so much thought of in terms of rational self interest, (even if as we will see throughout the thesis the League is also determined by self interest), but organized around key metaphors (combat-nature-people, for example). Indeed, at the heart of the League's struggle for political power is an operation of cultural hegemony, where the metaphor of nature, that through ritual is elevated to be the direct embodiment of a universal whole, plays a vital and decisive role in affirming the supremacy of the territory and local laws over the state ones.

As an expression of nature, the Northern League metaphorically represents the superiority of the native over what is considered a bureaucratic and non-local imposition of identity. Therefore, the Northern League's new model of identity clearly comprises an important shift in relations with the models previously studied in the last chapter. These models, as I have noted in the previous chapter, try to resolve the tension between belonging to the ethnos (to be native, ethnic identity) and wider imaginary units (to be Italian, European). Their objective, somehow, is to overcome local peoples' natural attachment to the ethnos

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and kin, through its "elevation" to a transcendent level (national-universal). Instead, in the League's political thought, the immanent, symbolized in the earth-territory, as metaphors of the ethnos, should prevail (and therefore have to be liberated and expressed) from powerful outside forces: either heaven or the history of the nation state.

The metaphor of nature allows the Northern League to locate the essence of identity in the ethnos (territory-land-small patria). The reproduction of the ethnos reflects the difference between a "true nation" (Padania) and a fake one (Italy). Both the practices of symbolical purification and the use of natural symbols symbolize this stance. Padania is imagined as an expression of nature, and therefore grounded in both the earth and the land. Padania is therefore in contrast with the attempt of both the left and the Catholics of both sacrificing (local identity, ethnic history) and transcending nature. Indeed, often the Padania in the Northern League posters is associated with the notion of love and pleasure. There is therefore an inversion of the metaphor of high-transcendence (nation, heaven) low immanence (land, ethnic belonging). This, I believe, shows that the ritualization of Padania is not just related with the need of linking individuals' life stories with the movements' new proposals and symbols. The metaphor of nature and the use of local symbolism operate as a counter narrative, which challenges the Italian state's hegemony over the process by which national identity is imagined.[41] In this sense they represent not only the rediscover of the ethnos, but more importantly the purification of the practices by which the community and national identity is imagined and perceived.

4.4 The Theatre of the Past and the Projection of the Future: Re-Presenting the Northern "People" and the "Territory"

4.4.1 Sophisticated Naives? The Concept of "People"

The Northern League shares common principles with many other mass political movements (the appeal to emotion and passion and the relevance given to "the logic of practice"), ideas (egalitarian rhetoric and appeal to popular will) and action logic (mass parades, public ceremonies). Historical studies of political movements that use the concept of "people" as an essential political concept, including fascism, national-socialism and populism, highlight

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[41] Hegemony, Gramsci (1996) is the "organising principle" that permeates a society's entire system of values, (attitudes, beliefs and morality) and that both supports and transform power relations into something perceived as natural. When internalized it becomes part of the people's life world, of "their common sense" Gramsci (1957).

the importance of both ceremonies and collective performances to engage individuals in the political field (Wolf 1999, Taggart 2000, Mosse 2006). These studies show how movements grounded on the "idea of people" are particularly appealing to popular classes, who are frustrated with their economic situation, and middle classes who having acquired an economic prosperity, are affected by a disruptive process of economic change that threatens their stability. As Borghezio's action in the European Parliament shows, it seems that with the intensification of the globalization process, these issues become politically relevant, since a substantial part of these classes feel the need to be "protected" by the state.

Another factor that ought to be taken into consideration here is the lack of political representation. The inter-class idea of "people" and its construction as an inter-subjective core of values and social ideals, make it a very broad and seducing "catch all" political category. As a "people", individuals emerge as participants in the political representational system. Taking part in public manifestations and ceremonies represents a new form of citizenship, and allows individuals to take an active and public role in the polis (Mosse 2006). As a result, the concept of "people" provides a platform for political engagement and mobilization (Gellner and Ionescu 1969,Laclau 2005 Taggart, 2000).

However, the idea of "people" could not be more ambiguous. Indeed, its apparent simplicity raises important questions about both its propagandistic value, but also how in a relatively sophisticated, modern and industrial society seems to sustain such unproblematic messages and ritual performances. This is odd even because as we have seen in Orso Grigio's last works, League militants and activists seem to be aware of the rationality and machinations of power behind nationalistic and elitist constructions of the idea of "people".

It is therefore the ambiguous, and naïve notion of people that seems to emerge as problematic. For this reason, in the final section, I investigate how the Northern League tries to provide meaning and content to the signifier of "the people". As Bourdieu (1991:111) argued "the source of power, in reality resides in the institutional conditions of their production and reception". In other words, the power of an ideology is linked to a social-cultural context and with a system of ideas. Therefore, in order to understand how the northern "people" is characterized (partly as the embodiment of the Northern territory), I will focus on the practices that take place during public rituals and gatherings organized by the party. In their apparent naivety, I argue we can distinguish not only the practices by

which the northern (Padania) society is dreamed and imagined but also a complex and sophisticated operation of mystification of political power and ideology.

4.4.2 The Re-presentation of the Popular as an Expression of the "People"

> Power cannot be measured. But the way it controls social action and the strategies of persuasion can. Power gives the possibility of imposing will. That is, it tries to address the problem of entropy (Balandier 1987 my translaction).

The nation is a form to think about the world and becomes part of, as much as it is an expression of, your selfhood (Anderson 1991). In this section, I focus on how, through ritual practices, the Northern League evokes and reproduces models that individuals already use to make sense of their lives. These models express not only a connection with the past, but also project a possible future Padania. They function as a theatre in which the past, the present, and the future are represented.

The Northern League ceremonies are made to reproduce what is commonly perceived as a popular and rural environment. The imagination of this popular environment is clearly presented in the organization and activities that take place during the public rituals that are often advertised as being followed by a "popular fiesta" (Biorcio 1997).

Image 4.7 These posters announce Northern League events as "fiesta". The first in Treviso reads: "League in fiesta" and then says "all night: food stalls, diverse events, administrators, leaders, parliamentarians". The second poster announces the ceremony of Venice and reads: "National fiesta of the Padanian Peoples".

The environment created during Northern League rituals reproduces the kind of "popular fiesta" that takes place in villages halls during the weekends. Everything is built in accordance with what is normally perceived as a popular aesthetics and practices. There is music, markets, food, entertainment etc. For Giuseppe and Rolando the League rituals "recall the popular fiestas, the *sagras* [popular fiestas] that used to take place in our villages". As result, popular fiestas are interpreted as an expression of older forms of local sociality (and solidarity), recalling in this way an important memory-habit (Connerton 1990). "In the Northern parties we can relive these moments", Giovanni told me.

The Northern fiesta environment is a lively one. People not only have the opportunity of listening to political speeches, but also to meet, talk and eat and drink together. In the following narratives, *leghisti* describe the ambience of these parties:

> Fiestas are a place where the base of the movement that shares certain ideals, you see Bergamaschi, Piemontesi, Lombardi. It is beautiful to see, and it is a tradition to go. It is more because of the fiesta, to see all these people. It is not just to hear the politicians, who are always the same. You have the possibility of seeing the bancarelle, (stands). It is a sagra (fiesta). (Firmino 60)

> The atmosphere is wonderful, great! There is a strong unity among us. It is nice to be together. I do not know even how to define this emotion. The environment helps us to increase our moral. After we listen to our capo (boss-Bossi) clearly you leave Pontida reinforced in your conviction. You take a part of him with you. Therefore, Pontida is a moment to recharge batteries, to renew our belief, and to encounter the ones that come from other parts of the North, but that think like me. You feel strong. In short, this is the message of Pontida. So many common people, so much friendship and union between older and the younger, a beautiful experience. Gabriella (55), a NL activist

Gabriella's narrative expresses the effervescence and pleasure of being involved in the Northern League's parties. The party rituals are a chance for people not only to renew their belief in the Northern League, but also to find and meet others "who think like her". Participants dress informally and use a green piece of cloth, symbol of their political identity. It was also common to see individuals wearing costumes and warrior helmets alluding to their "Celtic and northern identity". Overall, activists participating in these events seem to have fun. Having fun and being in a relaxed environment can been interpreted as a reaction against the bureaucratisation and complexity of politics by emphasizing moral and spiritual simplicity. As result, Padanian gatherings represent politics and "the people" as both an aesthetic and moral ideal type.

Image 4.8 Bar in Pontida. Note the informal environment and the display of a variety of symbols relating to the Northern League.

Image 4.9 The re-presentation of the self. Northern League activists in Pontida.

As an observer I felt somehow uneasy with what I was witnessing. This uneasiness was provoked by an intellectualist and prejudicial understanding regarding these "invented popular traditions". To some extent, my attachment mirrored the view that Italian society and academics in general have about the Northern League activists. Yet, when reading my fieldwork diary and preparing the photos included in the thesis, I realized that my prejudice was related to my own views of how politics (and the nation) should be understood. In becoming aware of the "sacred character" of my own representations, I realized the negotiation of power involved in such "desecrating" representations, and the extent to which they effectively contest the dominant national hegemonic model.

Northern League rituals, and political fiestas, operate as anti-structure (Turner 1969). By playing down and manipulating the power structure conventions, the fiesta (sagra) environment provides individuals a space in which to freely challenge the nation state. To some extent it could be said that ritual of the League allows the contestation and conflict toward the main society values to be channelled (Gluckman 1955). I think, however, something more complex is taking place. The modes of experience represented in the fiesta are not simply expressions of individuals' experiences, but in this case are used to express a diverse world, with distinctive objectives and social practices. As result, in operating as anti-structure the ritual performances contributes to strongly mark the differences between being *leghista* (popular, ruder, rural, natural) and being Italian (intellectual, sophisticated, civilized, artificial).

As Bourdieu (1991:95) argued "popular is one of the applications of dualistic taxonomies which structure the social world according to the categories of high and low." Here the reproduction of what is normally perceived as low is used to rhetorically persuade that the Northern League is a movement that comes from the bottom, and that it represents the "people". Ritual disrupts the idea that politics is a space reserved for the elites. On the other hand, it creates an ideal type of the Northern "people". In this way, what mainstream society (including myself) categorize as "populist", the Northern League transforms into popular.

The popular character of the fiesta is often reproduced in the major ritual performances, which often take place in a light-hearted, relaxed atmosphere. Irony, auto-irony, strong protest and vernacular language, are all vital elements which help to create empathy between the crowd and the movements' leaders. The power of the spokesmen, of the

leaders, is as dependent on their way of speaking, acting, as much as by the substance of their discourse. This echoes Bourdieu's (1991:115) reflections that

> in order the ritual to function and operate [it] must first of all present itself and be perceived as legitimate, with stereotypes symbols serving precisely to show that the agent does not act in his own name, on his own authority, but in capacity as a delegate.

The next photograph (Image 4.10) indicates how this sophisticated, popular naivety operates. The photograph was taken after the swearing of the Northern League oath at Pontida. The minister for the constitutional reform, Roberto Calderoli, dressed in shorts and wearing a green t-shirts (with microphone in hand), is telling the crowd: "now you can say that you have seen them oath, that you saw them in Pontida". (In an explicit reference to the poem of the Italian nationalist Carducci that celebrated the first Lombard League union). The crowd laughs and then applauds the minister and the other regional counsellors around him. Like Calderoli, these party delegates are dressed informally.

Image 4.10 Pontida (2006). The League's regional counsellor performing the Northern League oath of Pontida. Note the informal clothing and ambience, the presence of green, and the T-shirts with Bossi's picture.

It could be inferred therefore that the popular environment has another important function. It legitimizes the Northern League leaders' power as the representatives, and direct expression of the "people". In acting, dressing, talking as the "people" they create a powerful ideology based on an idea of homology (Bourdieu 1991). The homology between League leaders and activists is further reinforced through direct contact. The League meetings are used by party leaders to reinforce feelings of unity and companionship. Stefano Stefani, a League MP who founded the association "being Padano", voices these ideas clearly in the following narrative, in which he links the party atmosphere with the values that define the *leghisti*:

> What I am going to tell you comes after going around the tents and stands. I believe that besides the rhetoric there is something that should be said: you are the holders of a great value that is a plus to our being *leghisti*. I think you are the holders of the friendship and brotherhood that link us (*chi c'e lega*). They are very strong values.

Kinship provides the political field with a familiar and cherished model and language Balandier (1987:60). The notion of "brotherhood" is an interesting notion of spiritual kinship, central in Catholicism. Joseph Ratzinger (2000:67) describes the term "brother" as used in the Catholic symbolic universe as meaning something more than a friend. Friends, Ratzinger argues are dependent on individual choice, while brothers are "given". "Brother" implies a natural bond, coming from the same father (God in Catholicism, Bossi-league leaders in the case of the League).

Popular fiestas, however, are not unusual political practices in the Italian political context. Mass movements easily succeed in areas where there is already a tradition of appeal to the populus (Mosse 2006). Kertzer's pioneering ethnography provides further relevant insights. He described the essential role of the popular fiesta in the Communist Party universe (PCI) (1987:127). Popular fiestas were used by the PCI with the purpose of contesting the Church's political and social monopoly of these important local, social events. Yet, while the Catholic parties exalted patrons and saints, the PCI exalted the Party (Kertzer (1987:130). The organizations of political fiestas are therefore an important aspect of the struggle both to define and represent the "people". As Andrea, a League activist told me, the League used the "popular fiestas to contest the PCI domination over the concept of *popolo*". For him, it was a form through which to "show to the communists that they were not the only ones that held popular fiestas and had the capacity to mobilize people into street parades".

Yet there are also things that Northern League holds in common with the communist fiestas. Kertzer's ethnographic description of PCI parties (called "the party of unity" [festa dell'unità]), notes that the exaltation of the party's popular character contributed to the politicization of the masses. Kertzer reveals that the egalitarian ideology of the PCI often emerged through the possibility of role reversal. He gives the example of a PCI senator who used to play waiter during the parties and serve at the tables. I had a similar experience During my fieldwork among members of the former communist party (PRC), the local leader worked in the bar and served food to the activists. These practices of role reversal were greatly appreciated by party militants. A comparison could be drawn with the Northern League case. The fact that the party's representatives talk and eat with the people is of the utmost importance. These social practices corroborate and ground the movement's rhetoric, as genuinely popular.

> I went to hear Bossi speaking and I thought this (Bossi) says what I think. Everything is right (tutto robba giusta). He is not from the left or the right. These ones (League) are good (bravi). Then it is an easy going person (a la mano), when he comes here after the discourse he is capable of spending four hours talking with you. You can make the questions and he answers. He does not need security. He talks with you in the bar with no problem. Fini (leader of AN) would not do that. It was this closeness made me interested.
> Rolando, a Northern League activist.

While represented as a brother, as one of us in the bar, Bossi has full control over the movement. This type of link between the leader and the crowd is similar to Borneman's (2003:24) characterization of patricentric authority:

> Attempts to unify their subjects and create a modern subjectivity through identification with a leader who becomes the standard of all value, but who himself operates without measurement.

This strong identification between the people and its leader represents an important distinction with both the PCI and the Church. Both in the former PCI and in the church, the leaders are seen as having a pedagogic and mediating role between "people" and "polis". League leaders re-present themselves rhetorically as a direct embodiment of "the people". Indeed, the militants often described the Northern League as "the voice of the people", which shows that individuals strongly indentify with their leaders. Rituals practices are therefore a powerful rhetorical strategy, through which individuals experience are woven into a meaningful political plot. In this process of weaving, the concept of "the people" is defined and emerges as a significant of their own representations of popular.

4.4.3 Dreaming the Nation: Civic Community and the Importance of Economy

There is still another question to be answered, how is this new nation imagined? And to which extent is this imagining used to claim political changes and symbolize local social concerns? In this section it is suggested that the environment, and the practices that take place in the Northern League rituals corresponds to the need to create a generative structure that highlights patterns of continuity between local experiences, ideas of community and the imagination of Padania.

During the parties I attended in Belluno, but especially in the mass rituals a strong role was given to voluntary and popular organizations that were inspired by "being Padanian".[42] Among these associations there were: the Young Padanians, the Padanian collectors, the Padanian drivers, the Padanian Medical Association. There was also the presence of military organisations such as the Alpini Padani-- the Padanian civic guard generally known as the "green shirts". The role that these associations play is relevant in relation to Northern League ideology. They represent the mobilization of civic society in northern Italy. The concept of civic community versus the state, to use the terminology of Putnam (1993), was an integral part of the Catholic ideology in the north of Italy, and was wisely explored by the DC to gain and hold power (Diamanti 1993, 1996, Ginsborg 2001).

After the publication of Putnam's book, the role of civic society was widely debated (and the work heavily criticized for its historical determinism) in Italy. With its curious title: *Making Democracy Work*, the book put forward the argument that in the regions where the "civic society"[43] was more organized, the political democratic institutions worked better. Putnam's work concluded, therefore, that democracy "worked" better in the North than in the South. This affirmation was substantiated precisely in the comparison between the level and impact of both "social capital" and "civic traditions" in the level of political institutional efficiency. Putnam justified the disparity between the North and the South due to the presence of what he called a: "civic community tradition". Civic community tradition was the pre-modern basis on a civic society, and it involved the need of cooperation and solidarity, what he called social capital, (the participation in voluntary and civic associations were a practice through the amount of social capital could be measured). Putnam traced this period to the medieval period, and the existence of the free communes,

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[42] At least formally. I did not pursue research on their specific activities. Therefore this analysis will concentrate on its important symbolic and political value.
[43] Concept inspired by de Tocqueville's study of American democracy.

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and later to the presence of highly organized Catholic networks of mutual and voluntary organizations. Instead, the South was mainly characterized by vertical relationships and by the predominance of "amoral familism" and clientlism[44]

At the time, Putnam's argument perfectly served the Northern League's political vision, that as described in the historical backdrop in chapter one was strongly influenced by the medieval political concepts and imaginary. In the Northern League's context, the voluntary organizations are an expression of the "people's" capacity to organize themselves around essential political themes, such as security, health and humanitarian assistance. They express a model of social solidarity based on horizontal reciprocity, which as we are going to see in the next chapter, is typical of the local "rural communities" and common in the catholic subculture (Cento Bull 2004).

These practices echoes Worsley's (1969:229) findings in the African context where "the concept of people" was associated with "great stress put upon cooperative and modern forms of communitarian help, and upon the idea of self help with the village as the key unit for development purposes". In the Northern League context, civic associations are the modern representation of local models of social solidarity. Finally, civic organizations are also the practical embodiment of the values of private initiative, hard working and northern altruistic culture. As a result, civic associations operate as a representation of an autonomous society based on "the people", where traditional communities' forms are a practice through which the North is not only imagined as different from the South, but also through which a new model of society is represented.

The imagination of the society based on the "people" as an expression of the rural and popular imagination, is also embodied in the market. In major League ceremonies this socio-cultural system is re-presented as specific to the Padanian national community. Economic activities were focused on the industrial manufactured products such as clothes and shoes. With the purpose of affirming their political identity, the products sold were symbolically presented as "Made in Padania". (The same happens, for example, with local food, stamps, and passports). In the case of industrial products, Padania stands "for hand

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[44] Term coined by the American anthropologist Banfield to explain the suppose lack of interest for the civic society of peasants in the South of Italy. More recently the Firenze historian Ginsborg wrote a book contesting this idea, and claiming that the more civic regions in Italy were the ones where the PCI used to control.

made" and familiar production, and are associated with the values of honesty, quality, and hard work. Indeed, in some local shops one can read: "Padania produces *qualità*". Re-branding the products as "Made in Padania" transforms them into an expression of a specific vision of the world that contrasts (for example) with the Chinese one (seen as cheap and without quality).

Politically, local markets correspond to an idealization and re-presentation of traditional communities' *habitus*. The economic exchanges of products was not just related with making economic profit but were also an important sign of social solidarity. The market is therefore a symbol of the traditional community committed to sell products at a fair price, which underlines the shopkeepers' understanding that the economy should be moral and be at the service of the community. As Masquelier demonstrates in his ethnography of the Bori in Nigeria, the market represents an important narrative of power and wealth. He goes on to suggest that the struggle to appropriate the market is not just economic, but essentially cultural and political. In the Northern League case, popular markets are a representation of local traditional modes of production. It proposes a model of economy based not just on rational imperatives, but also on moral and traditional ones.

Image 4.10 Small shop in the Pontida. Such markets are made to resemble traditional rural markets. Industrial production is a representation of the small and medium companies that strongly support the Northern League.

Image 4.11 A view of the stalls at the Pontida gathering.

The idea of a moral economy, as Austen (1993) noted among the Atinga, expresses a close relation between the market and the reproduction of community. Yet, often the idea of moral economy: "represents a conception to the very hegemony moral economy is supposed to be contesting" (Austen 1993:92). In the northern league's case, this is by clear the emphasis given by the Northern League to private initiative and hard work which are central and often contra-posed to state interference in the economy (Biorcio 1997). However both Masquelier and Austen's insights are important, in part because each allows us to think about economy not just in terms of rationality, but also as an expression of the values of society.

In the case of the Northern League economic practices are strongly related with how the Northern League militants imagine the nation (Diamanti 1996, Cento Bull and Neville 2001). As result, the concern with controlling the market is a metaphor for both political control of the territory and social reproduction, and I believe is explicit in Borghezio's confrontation with Ciampi. Therefore, visions of the market and economy play a vital role in the way in which the nation is imagined. Among the speeches made during the mass rituals, the intervention of Roberto Cota is particularly important. Roberto Cota was Berlusconi's junior economy minister. When he comes closer to the microphone he

receives an ovation from the crowd. With a green Padanian scarf around his neck, he passionately proclaims:

> ...the territory and everything that it represents such as its *industrial patrimony* has to be defended. We cannot forget our industries *where we came from*. We came from work! It was the work that made us strong! But the truth *Padanian brothers* is that today there is a confrontation between two visions: one that puts at its *centre the people*, that puts at its *centre the territory*; and another vision, instead, that puts at its the *centre the business* of few! And that abandons completely the people and the territory. To this vision the *identità* is not a value to be defended; to this vision globalization should be total and without rules. This vision is progressing through this Europe! This Europe, which we do not want like this, we say it loudly and clearly here, today, in Pontida! [Enthusiastic Applauses] This Europe that took forward a constitution approved by bureaucrats that is not based on the *values that we believe*. This Europe of free and uncontrolled immigration, this Europe of the Euro, that is strangling us, that is strangling *our families and our entrepreneurs*, this Europe that *does not protect our companies*, that considers them by last. (Fieldwork diary)

Acclaimed by the expectant crowd of Pontida, Cota describes a struggle between "the people" and the European Union (and politicians in general). What is the subject of this struggle? I think the answer lies in the rhetorical process used by Cota to characterize the signifier "people". In his discourse Roberto Cota associates the character "people" with the inchoate pronoun, "we" (our). The central point of this association is a shared territory and an "industrial patrimony" [*il nostro patrimonio industrialle*]. This patrimony, argues Cota, must be "defended".

A better look into the etymological origin of both words provides us with further insights. The term "industry" derives from the Latin *industria*, meaning working, zeal, and energy. The word "patrimony" comes from *pater*, meaning, inheritance but also heritage. Patrimony is also an idiom that recalls the ideas of a common shared past, a common culture and set of values. Cota's next phrase provides further insights. He argues that *"We cannot forget our industries, where we came from. We came from work! It was work that made us strong!"* As a consequence the local industrial productive system is imagined (industries) as a cultural expression of a unique ontological reality, of a common shared history, that characterizes "our" (People) *identità*.[45]

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[45] Note here the extensive use of the inchoate pronoun "we". The use of the Inchoate pronouns (I, we, they, you) allows to rhetorically transform an inchoate situation into concrete predicated one (see Fernandez 1986:11).

Local *identità*, (us-we-our-family-northern-people) is then represented, by Cota, as fighting against they\them (State-Ciampi-politicians-Europe). "They" are accused of having forgotten "our industries" and "our territory", and in so doing they are "strangling" local families and entrepreneurs. Here we can see again the importance of the defence of the family values. The family is described as the main victim of the values of "few". For Cota these values of few are expressed in the European constitution. The association between house and work and the community is not a pure economic unit, but an entity with multiple patterns of rights and obligations, that push in a different direction from the logic of global and market rationality. Hence, for Cota, as for the Northern League, defending the local economic system is not just a matter of defending a particular economic position but also the reproduction of a fragile social-cultural system. The characterization of the signifier "people" with the local industrial system, but also the understanding of social relation based on a rural community operate rhetorically as a metaphor for Northern territory. Therefore the link between people and the territory is not just an expression of a political "demand," but an attempt to inject into the core of the economic and political process an ethical, (and, in the case of the NL, an ethnic) and localist political criteria.

4.4.4 The Imagination of a State Based on "the People": The Practice of Voting

The formation of the idea of "people" is strongly grounded in the opposition to the other. The League understanding of Padania is an exclusive one. Padania is imagined as a small, rustic village sustained by a strong civic society, hard-working culture and private initiative. Politically, Padania is imagined as a popular democratic Republic. This could be seen as ironic, since it is known that the Northern League has an extremely ordered and central hierarchical structure - as the use of military and medieval metaphor shows. Indeed, the legitimization of the movements' leaders is often made through popular acclamation. However, this legitimization does not derive merely from public performances, but often comes in form of popular referendums.

In this last section, I deal with the idea of popular democracy proposed by the Northern League as an idealization of a society based on the people's sovereignty. I start with Borghezio's discourse in Pontida:

> This is a great day, a day of 'people'. In France and Holland the people had
> the opportunity to vote. We have to organize the election privately, because
> they do not want to give the possibility to the Padania peoples, but also the
> Italian, to vote. Because what is at stake, as it is in the European constitution,

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is the popular sovereignty that is the most precious good that in democracy a people has. It would be needed to have at least the decency to call the people to vote, to express their opinion. Instead these lobbies of Brussels, these criminal gangs NO! They treat the people as if they were puppets. [he makes the sign of a actor that manipulates puppets] Their economy their dignity, their laws, their will, do not matter. Well, the League is another thing [opens his arms and shows his chest]. *The League is the people!* [applause] *Bossi is the people!* [he raises the voice and the people immediately reacts to it applauding and waving the flags]

In Pontida the militants were invited to vote on two important themes: European integration and the Euro.The questions on the ballot reflected these reservations. The first question asked whether the militants supported the Northern League's intention to change the Italian constitution, by introducing an article in the Italian constitution which obliged rectifying International treaties that questioned the "popular sovereignty" through a national referendum. The second question regarded the possibility of changing the currency. The ballot paper offered three possible responses: the return to the Lira, the *'Calderolo'* (the reintroduction of the lira linked with the dollar) and finally the reintroduction of a double currency.

Leghisti always appeared enthusiastic about the use of the ballot box. Luigi's description is a good example:

> I joined the Northern League to give a new impulse to my land. I wanted to give a new direction to politics. It was great to involve the people in direct democracy. The citizen could vote inside the party about what the party would do. The interest of making the interests of our territory that we are going to govern. The NL had a very concrete basis. (Luigi (27) NL activist

Laclau (2005) noted that "the People" emerges in the political universe through the opposition to "them". As Zizek (2006) sharply pointed out, the political demands go beyond the need to change those in power, they emerge against an Other that they want to destroy. It is imagined that the destruction of the other (in the Northern League case first the state, now the European Union) will bring stability and order back to society.

On the other hand, "the people" incorporate existing expectations. The constitution of "the people" represents the struggle over the definition of values that should structure society. In this sense, the practice of voting represents the aspiration of a new community, a new nation, based on "the people". Therefore, voting and popular democracy helps corroborate the ideal of the Northern League, as a movement that gives voice to the will of the "people". As result it is not a coincidence that the questions on the ballot paper evoked

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notions of "popular initiative" and "popular sovereignty". Sovereignty, is a transcendent heteronomy, and implies the idea of unity against difference Gourgouris (1996). Voting represents a symbolic contest and resistance to the dominant logic of parliamentary representativeness, which threatens the peoples' will. Therefore, the emphasis on democratic practices implies the representation of a secular transcendence, by which "the people", as a universal category, is elevated to the symbolic role of God or King (Worsley 1969, Zizek 2006).

The referenda, thus, embody the proposition that the League (and Bossi in particular), is the minister of the "people." As argued by Borghezio: the Northern League "is another thing". "It is the people, Bossi is the people". In this way, voting becomes an effective practice which engages each individual in the political process. Even if the participation is symbolic, it contributes to the construction of an emotional link between the party, as a bureaucratic institution that represents the "people" and the individuals. Thanks to this "new politics", the League supporters are organized into a new political force, which has come to express their aspirations of order, democracy, happiness and community unity.

4.5 Conclusion: New Understanding of Politics: "The People" and "the Territory"

An insight from the excellent work of Ernest Laclau's can help us further understand the importance of the ritual is the constitution of the concept of "people" is linked with a given "the territory". On his book *On the Populist Reason* Laclau (2005) argues that "the people", as a political subject, does not correspond to an already formed, pre-existing social group. In other words, it does not have an historical tradition. "The people" emerges in the political world through the enchainment of several demands, autonomy, economy protection, anti immigration policies. (Curiously, this idea of enchainment corresponds to *Lega* (to link) in the Italian language). Therefore, it was often considered that in emerging in the social world as the enchainment of political demands, "the people" does not have an ontological character, but just a transcendental one (Zizek 2006).

The decision to construct ritual events which assume a popular aesthetics and reproduce a rural environment is an attempt to provide the signifier "people" with an ontological character. The emphasis on natural symbols and civic and popular values diffused in the northern society plays an important role in the Northern League's sophisticated elaboration of the political concept, "the people", by linking it with the northern territory's specific *habitus*. Clearly symbols and the social practices used by the League are not just very

powerful, but more importantly, are deeply anchored in segments of local culture. They play a vital role in how people already imagine the nation, as the embodiment of the ideal of "community". This resemblance helps us to explain why the northern construction of "the people" as the embodiment of local ideas what is "popular" is rhetorically persuasive. As a result, the ethnographic data discussed seem to support Lakoff's (1996) view that people do not just follow rational calculation and self interest when understanding political discourse, but that their beliefs are sustained and informed by metaphorical frames. Again we find an excellent example of the metaphorical frame in the work of Orso Grigio (Image 4.12).
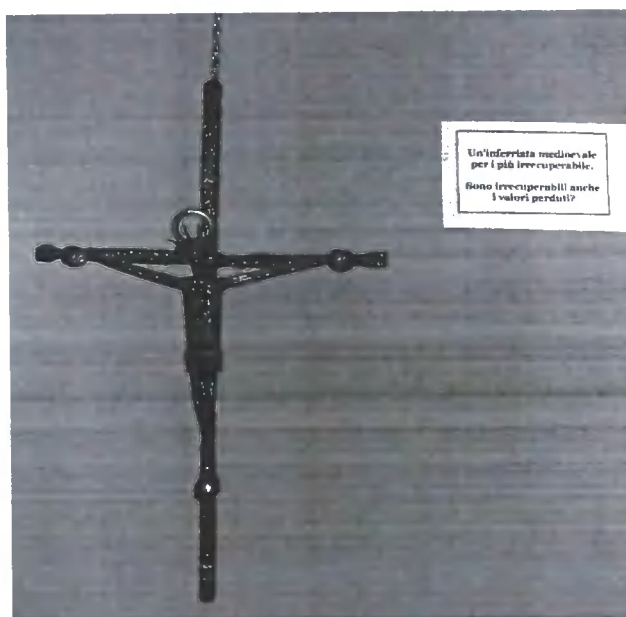
Image 4.12 Work of Orso Grigio. This piece is made with a medieval lattice. The title of the statue is a significant one: A medieval lattice for most people irrecoverable. Are the lost values irrecoverable? [*un inferriata medievale per I piu irrecuperabile. Sono irrecuperabili anche I valori perduti?*]

Orso Grigio poses the question: "are lost values irrecoverable?" Orso Grigio appears to be suggesting that tradition is crucified by modernity. The piece suggests that the ideas of Padania and "the people" go beyond an instrument of struggle to change the structure of Italian politics. "Padania" and "the people" are perceived as the resurrection of something that was thought to be dead. They operate as open signifiers in that the two terms project political demands, dreams, and even political utopias – including an imagining of the nation as village community founded on traditional values. It appears therefore that Padania is not only a "nationalization of localism", but that its persuasive power is due to the fact that it is presented as almost a (narcissistic) moral and spiritual way of life. As Worsley

(1969:216) argued, such pure and authentic appeals common to populism can only occur when *wertrationalitat* (following Weber the commitment to some overriding dominant values) already exists.

What appears at first sight to be naïve symbolism, demonstrates the sophistication and the pregnancy of the Northern League's political proposals. What links the symbolic and ritual imagination of a new nation as a representation of the ethnos (that never dies) through natural symbols, and the elaboration of the new paradigm of nationality as an expression of "the people" is the struggle to change the practices by which politics is understood. In other words, the League's elaboration of the concept "the people" is to "resurrect" the idea of ethnic identity as the core of the political process. As a result, the elaboration of new symbols and practices by which collective identity can be imagined reveals a hegemonic struggle to define the principles that should inspire political and normative action.

Nevertheless, political understanding cannot be reduced to mere rhetorical and metaphorical struggle. The symbolical and ritual "purification" of the territory, the return to nature, seems to emerge as a reaction to both the political and economic transformations that are currently taking place in Europe and that are affecting Italian, and more specifically, Northern society. The imagination of a society based on rural and autonomous "communities" can be understood not only as an expression of disenchantment with the national state, but also as the concern with the impact that globalization and modern forms of technocratic governance are having in the local social world. To better understand how the Northern League is seem by local people as an attempt to solve these questions, in the next chapter I will return to Belluno and focus on the study of popular art as an attempt to therapeutically integrate both traditional values into modernity and re-establish the link between personal identity and the territory.

Chapter 5

Transforming Local Identity: Art as an Historical Narrative

> The continuity of any social system depends largely upon the ability of adult members to transfer the particular cultural tradition of the system to the following generation, a tradition that includes a heritage of both customary behaviour and material property" (Goody 1962:275)

> The traditions of all the dead generations weight like a nightmare on the brain of the living. (Marx 1963)

5.1 Introduction: The Artistic Transformation of Local History and Identity

In this chapter, I focus on two key questions that emerge from the last chapter. The first is the implications of the Northern League's return to the idea of "territory", to the ethnos as a source of social and personal identity. This takes us to the second question. The ritual that we studied in chapter four is concerned with the social bond not only between individuals (social solidarity) but also with what links individuals to their fatherland, to their territory. This present chapter deals with local people's interpretation of Northern League proposals. It contends that although boundaries can be rhetorically constructed "virtually of everything" (Cohen 1985:117), in order to gain symbolic value, boundaries and national\political identities have to find correspondence with the social practices that people already use to imagine the community.

To understand this relationship between the League imagination of the community and local peoples' practices, I turn to the study of popular art. Popular art, as Sant Cassia (2005:156) notes, "is often engaged in a dialogue with tradition, and can refer to images drawn from cinema, religious iconography, political propaganda, etc". Art is not just about the symbolization and communication of problems, or simply a (counter) discourse. Indeed, according to Gell (1998:11) art "is about life-projects that agents seek to realize through their relations with others". Here is his credo:

> In place of symbolic communication, I place all emphasis on *agency*, intention, causation, and transformation. I view art as a system of action, *intended to change the world* rather than encode symbolical propositions about it. (my italics)

I propose to understand art as part of the social process by which identity is practised, and social problems exposed and narrated. The objects and paintings that we are going to

investigate will allow us to explore how, through art, local people try to change their social world. By narrating and re-presenting their history through public paintings, local members of the Northern League try to make "the village" emerge as a new collective framework of memory, and consequently the locus of social *identita*. As Halbwachs (1992:40) notes, collective frameworks "are the instruments used by collective memory to reconstruct an image of the past which is in accord, in each epoch, with the predominant thoughts of the society".

The predominant thought in local society, and particular among *leghisti*, is to elaborate a discourse that facilitates the linkage of local history and traditional practices, with those current in society. This need, I argue, is part of a strategy to recover the sense of collective pride and local control that was lost during the passage to a modern,capitalist system. The chapter shows that the League's appeal for a return to the local and their own construction of community is seen by local people as the most appropriate medium for the expression of their whole selves. Through an artistic interpretation of *leghismo*, local people attempt to insert a vision of local history and tradition into their everyday life, and to reconstruct a relationship between identity, "community" and the land. Therefore, art allows us to explore how the Northern League's political ideology engages local people in a process of negotiation by which their social and personal identity can be imagined.

5.2 The Village of Tradition: Painting and re-presenting the Past

> No one loves his country because it is big, but because it is yours. (On the cover of the book about the history of Igne the village of fire)[46]

5.2.1 The Artistic Representation of Memory. Art as a Public Narrative

I arrived in Igne at a later stage of my fieldwork. Igne is a typical Alpine village, situated on the margins of the urban and industrial area of Longarone a few kilometres away from Belluno. Leaving the main road in Longarone, towards the beautiful valleys that characterize the province of Belluno, Igne's campanile emerges in the landscape after ten minutes by car. Igne follows the local dispersed pattern of settlement based on small villages, which corresponded to the needs of the local agro-pastoral economic system (Wolf 1974, Heady 1999, Stacul 2003).

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[46] Nessuno ama il suo paese perché è grande ma perché è suo.

I discovered Igne by chance. After a conference about the Lega, someone asked me if I was interested in interviewing a member of the local NL. I showed interest and they invited me for lunch. When I arrived, I was offered a glass of wine and I sat down in the house's veranda with my gentle host (a former emigrant in Germany who is now a local successful entrepreneur in the spectacles sector). From his terrace, I contemplated the majestic and mysterious mountains. I was impressed by the relation between the mountain's toughness and the gracefulness of the landscape with its different forms, shapes and colours. My host told me:

> It was extremely *dur* (difficult) to live over here in the past. Many of us had to emigrate. Today, however, everything had changed. The economic development after the disaster of the *Vajont* allowed people to stay and live on the mountain.

When we were having lunch we discussed the "old days". "Did you note the houses" Yes, I said, "they were mainly built by emigrants like us. If you see some photographs of the past it was not like this". Indeed, domestic architecture and furniture had a modern look. To make me understand more about the hardship of the old days, I was offered a traditional dish composed of *polenta* (maize dumpling), *formai* (fried cheese) and *pastin* (fat pig meat). In the past this used to be everyday food, "polenta, every day it was polenta, Santa polenta", a focus group participant told me. Today these dishes are an important part of the local cultural heritage. Serving *polenta* as a traditional dish frames tradition as something that is now overcome. Yet, there were aspects that kept the symbolical structure of the past. The *polenta* was served on a traditional round plate made of wood. Also to conform to traditional practices, it was the man who split the *polenta*, a practice that Heady (1999) interpreted in the Carnian environment as an affirmation of masculine power and control.

During lunch they showed curiosity in what I was doing. They confessed themselves to be supporters of Forza Italia. They justified their support with the need to roll back the influence of the state in the economy. They consider that the high taxes they pay do not correlate with the services provided by the state, which meant that local entrepreneurs involved in fierce global competition, did not receive adequate support. When we were discussing tradition through a haze of irony and pride, they mentioned the local murals (*murali*). "They are a memory of the past, of our traditions." After lunch, I was invited for a walk to see the murals and meet the person I should interview.

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As in other characteristic Alpine villages, in Igne everything is perfectly organized. The streets are clean and outside each house several piles of perfectly stacked lops wait patiently for winter. The Stacking logs neatly organized are an outward sign of pride in one own's organization. Close to the local Church, a monument commemorates the natives of Igne who died for the Patria in the First Wold War. Interestingly, I found nothing in the village regarding the Second World War. After we visited the church, Elena took me to the first mural. Being a medical student in the University of Padova, Elena presented the murals with some irony, showing a different aesthetic taste, but also a different vision about the past. Instead, I was surprised by it. The mural was a representation of an old woman sitting down on a small chair making shoes, or as Elena told me in local dialect, *scarpette*. We continued walking and we stopped in front of other murals, this time on public property. The murals represented the several waves of local emigration, first to Brazil, then to the Balkans and finally to Germany.

A little later, we arrived at Mr Fulvio's door. He kindly received me in his kitchen. During the interview his wife assembled spectacles in the living room. Fulvio (50-60) is an artisan who owns a small factory that is situated in his house's garage. Besides being a *leghista*, he is also the political representative of Igne in the council of Longarone and a mural's commission member. When, at the end of the interview, I asked him about the murals, he told me that there were eighteen in the village. Observing my interest he invited me to see them and explained enthusiastically that the murals "were the fruit of the cooperation between villagers". The murals were an attempt to "remember the story and sacrifice of our avi (ancestors)."

All the murals were painted by famous Bellunese artists, "some of them with the collaboration of local people who told them about the past". One of the painters, Franco Fiabane, was my neighbour. I asked him about his mural and he told me: "I didn't need to study. I painted my memories, how I lived when I was a young boy". The murals might be considered kitsch by more cosmopolitan tastes. Nevertheless, they say more about the influence of the League's appeal, and how local people make sense of it, than their apparent simplicity suggests. They show how local ideologies, aesthetics and moral values interact with official\political ideologies. As with the ritual activities presented in chapter four, they are a representation of the old symbolical system that used to govern local people's life, and that (as with *polenta)* is now seen as local tradition and heritage.

Overall, the murals wish to recreate an idealized past for the local community, which, given the transformations that local society is going through, becomes even more idealized; and this, in turn, explains its artistic and pictorial elaboration. In this sense, they are performing a loss, which explains their public exposition in local people's houses. On the other hand, the murals are an attempt to visualize and represent a reality that is no longer part of present social practices, but that to some extent still informs people's worldview. In a society characterized by fluidity, the murals are part of this fluidity, but also express the desire to change the mechanism that determines the formation of identity from the global to the local. A good example is the murals' titles, and a local interpretation of why they were written in local dialect. A local man told me:

> There is no longer the dialogue between grandfather and grandson. This is a society of image. When we tell our children certain aspects, they do not believe us because now they take certain things for granted. We could understand it without an image, because when the grandfather was telling us the story, he was doing these works, as for example in the mural of the *filò* [image 5.7]. For young generations if you did not live these moments, it is difficult to ask about it, it is also difficult to talk about it. If they see it, at least young people ask about it, and we can explain it to them. My grandchildren often ask me about it.

The titles of the murals presented in this chapter derive from the conversation with the local commission and from the photographs that were given to me. The titles are written in local dialect, which increases their ethnic connotation and contributes to distancing local history and memory from the official and dominant historical representations that we previously study. I present and examine all eighteen of the murals below. I order the murals by category, and have glossed the meaning of each, drawing on conversations with local people.

Order and Territory

Image 5.1 Il bosco egli animali

View of the wild mountain. It is important to note how, in this representation of nature everything is ordered and that the wild animals are represented far away from the village centre, which is not even represented.

Image 5.2 Le casere Marchet

The *casere* were houses where local people used to stay when working high in the mountains. They are a symbol of the practices of transhumance so common in pastoral societies. When the pastoral activities were abandoned many were converted in places where people organized small parties and spare time activities. They lost, however, their old practical-economic function. This mural was ordered privately to honour the memory of their childhood and their parents.

Male economic activities in the Mountain

Image 5.3 Teleferista

The scene represents a timber station. The timber was transported through a cable car system. Until the 1950s the majority of local men were lumberjacks. Their ability was known in the whole province. Working in the woods is often associated with ideas of strength, independence, and social solidarity.
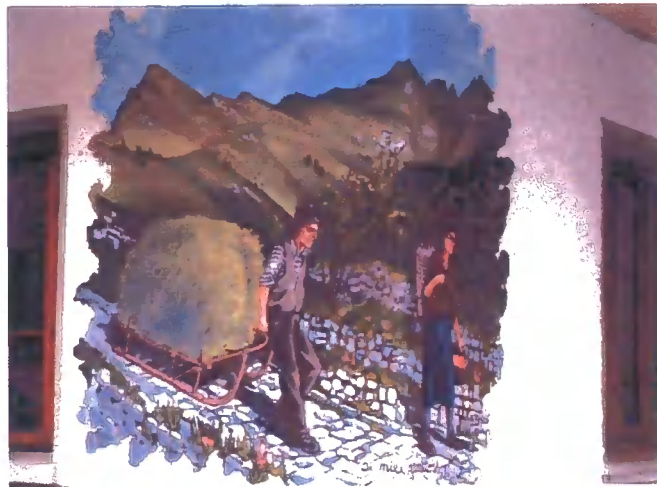
Image 5.4 Le Endra (The Sledge)

A family cooperates. A man carry the hay to the feed the cattle from the mountain. The woman carries a small basket with pieces of wood. On the bottom there is a small phrase saying thank you grand father, an allusion to their teachings of the value of hard work, cooperation and strength. Also note how the mountain roads are represented as perfectly kept.

Women's activities

Image 5.5 Al Darlin (basket making)

Women collecting small pieces of wood that they used to make baskets that we can see in the previous mural were used to transport objects.

Image 5.6 Rui Molin

Women washing their clothes on the local river. While some women wash, one carries a small baby. Both practices represented women in their traditional role as housekeepers and mothers.

Image 5.7 Al Filo (Spining)

An old woman weaves in a stable. During winter it was common that people would gather close to the beast to spinning the wool and talk. It was an important practice for socializing younger generations.

Image 5.8 I Scarpet

A Member of the Mural commission explained, "The scarpet were our typical shoes. Every woman was capable of making them. It was long and hard work that took place in free time after other domestic works. The working journey was long and hard, not even during the *filo* [weaving] people were with their hands in their hand (always doing something)" The *scarpet* are today seen as a symbol of the past house independence and autarchy in relation to the outside world.

Village Cooperative activities

Image 5.9 Laorar Inte Camp (work in the fields)

"Planting potatoes involved the whole family. Potatoes and beans were the major agricultural products from our area. They provided sustenance through the winter." Mural commission member. Note how high in the mountain the working takes place. This aspect is symbolized by the presence of the village bell tower *(campanile)* way below (on the right). In the past "even the smallest piece of land was used to produce" as a member of the mural commission told me. Working in such a difficult environment demanded cooperation between households. In the mural one can also see the division of labour that is also reflected in people's body positions ('hexis', in Bourdieu's terms). While men stand up and work the land, the women plant the potatoes and beans staying down.

Image 5.10 Far Fien (hay making)

This mural shows local people collectively reaping the hay to feed the cattle. As with the timber work, reaping hay was not only an important economic activity, but also an important social activity were local people cooperated. It is also a memory of an ordered and controlled cosmos where local people controlled and maintain the forces of nature and the mountain under control.

Image 5.11 Portar al Alt in Lateria

"At night, between five and six, the road toward the cooperative milk (lateria) was full of men and women that took their milk and returned with cheese and butter. The products were without doubt genuine." Member of the Mural commission. Note how the past productive system was linked with authenticity. The milk cooperative was also a symbol of the villages' capacity to cooperate among themselves. In this way, it becomes a symbol of village independence in relation to the outside world.

Modern Economic activities

Image 5.12 Emigranti

"The murals pay tribute to the emigrants of Igne. It represents people in the Balkans, the transatlantic emigration to Brazil, men working as cable car operators in other Italian regions, and people selling ice cream in Germany." Member of the Mural commission. Immigration played a decisive role on the development of local economy. Many villagers were emigrants and returned when the local industrialization process started, becoming small entrepreneurs, or workers in local factories.

Image 5.13 I Primi Gelati (First Ice Creams)

Many local people were specialists in making ice cream -- as in several local villages, also in Igne. Several families used to work or own small business in Germany where they made their fortune. Ice cream making was a family cooperative activity. Indeed, in the background the father breaks the ice, while the woman and a younger man cooperate to mix the ice with the milk.

The House

Image 5.14 Al fogher

This mural is a representation of a past domestic scene. In contrast modern houses where there the fire is close to one of the houses wall, in the past the fire was central in the kitchen. Being the main warmth and light provider, the kitchen was the centre of the house social life and people use to sit around it as represented in the murals. The change in the fire location in the house structure is a consequence of modern improvements such as electricity. In this mural the gender differences are affirmed through the working tools and activities. While women work in the house, men smoke their pipes, meaning that men's work is mainly outside the house.
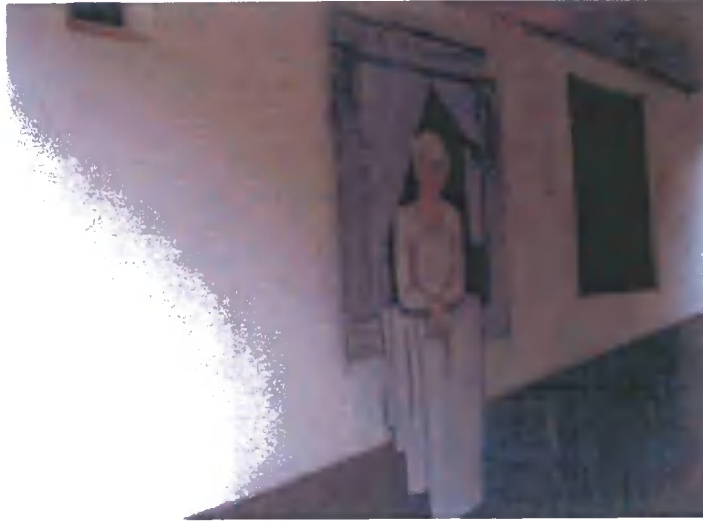
Image 5.15 La curiosa

"It is an image of a curious lady that looks through the window to observe what is going on and talk. There was no television and people found the time to be together" Member of the commission. The television is seen by local people as the symbol of anti-social nature of modernity. It is also the means by which the global and national enters into the local intimacy. Despite the fact that, there are several regional television stations that put strong emphasis on local realities, local people complain to me that "they do not pay much attention to local realities; they are always making us see foreign places." It is also a characterization of the women personality.

Linking the Village with the Outside

Image 6.16 The Village Priest

"Don Constante was our priest for 37 years, and the Cardinal Luciani, future Pope Giovanni Paolo I, often came to Igne to meet his friend. We thought it was important to remember two people strongly linked with our land." Commission member.

Image 6.17 Il Stagnin

Besides the priest, the Stagnin (Tinker) was the only village 'outsider'. The tinker was a small artisan who specialised in repairing pots and umbrellas. As the stranger in Simmel (ref), the *stagin* was also an important source of information about the outside world.

Modern Representation of the Mountain

Image 6.18 Sport and Leisure in Montagna

"This represents our beautiful mountains when it is still possible to have a life in the open air." Member Mural commission. It symbolizes the difference between life close to nature and life in the city.

5.3 The Dialectic between the Ideas of Tradition and Modernity

5.3.1 Social Change and the History of Practice

These paintings represent a vision of the past and also foreground issues regarding local collective memory and identity. But in what way does art try to address the contradiction between modernity and tradition? After the interview with Fulvio I proposed to organize a focus group. He became very enthusiastic about my interest and three weeks later I returned to Igne. When I arrived, fifteen people were waiting for me. Although initially the environment seemed to intimidate them, during the conversation their enthusiasm about the murals came to light. The majority of the participants, and the more active ones, were middle aged men (50-60 years old). There were also some young people that participated little and a couple of older ladies (50-60). After we sat down, I asked them if I could record the conversation. When I put the recorder on the table the photographs of the murals were given to me. I then decided to break the ice and asked what the murals represented. After an impasse, a man in his sixties asked if he could talk. The others agreed and he started:

> We were thinking about it a long time ago, when we realized that the world was starting to change and that young people did not know anything about our history. We thought let's do something to explain our history to young people and then as an attraction to the village.[47] When we restarted doing the *corpus dominus* procession, we decided to insert the murals and things worked out, they worked out quite well.

> [another man around his fifties interrupts] In the past society was repetitive. Everyone had the opportunity of learning these things. We passed from a culture let's us say archaic, to a modern way of living.

> [another man makes an intervention] *Globalismo* is cancelling everything bit by bit. If we do not start conserving we will lose it. Everyone talks about memory and *identità* -- this is memory, our's though! Today, time runs too fast. In the past we lived pretty much with the same things for 2000 years, now in thirty years everything is different. There is the risk that in a few decades young people will not know our history.

As Rosaldo suggests, in modernity: "change rather than structure becomes society's enduring state, and time rather than space becomes its most encompassing medium" (Rosaldo 1989:103). For Rosaldo, as for authors such as Giddens (1991), modernity is characterized by permanent change, which implies understanding culture and identity as a permanent borderland (Rosaldo 1989). To some extent this means that the process of self-

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[47] This is an important aspect. It shows how local *identità* is also linked with economic opportunities that probably come from the change from an industrial oriented economy to a tourist one, where *identità* and tradition become important assets.

identification is becoming de-territorialized and in permanent flux. It seems that one of the issues that deeply concerns local people is how change is affecting the reproduction of local history and memory, and how this history is linked with the territory. This fear of a "fast change" and loss of young people's knowledge of the past is presented in the perception that young people do not "know local history", that time "is running too fast", and that "*globalismo* is cancelling local traditions". The murals reflect in this way not only the concern of older generations with the reproduction of who they are, but also the fear that young generations will forget traditional kinship obligations.[48]

The disruptions to the local mechanisms of social reproduction, and kinship traditional obligations, were particularly emphasized when people talked about recent changes in the landscape. During the focus group the participants made clear to me that the territory, the mountain, was in a state of "disorder" [*disordine*] even if for me, an outsider, the territory looked perfectly organized.

> [a man around his fifties] first the mountain gave wood, pastures and land to farm and therefore was always clean and ordered. Now it is abandoned. If you look at a picture of fifty years ago you see pastures everywhere, now everything is forest. You cannot give trees [*bosco*] to the animals to eat. The animals eat hay [*fien*]. When these activities ended, nature took over the fields and the forest started growing up. There was an environmental impoverishment. Today, you find the forest near home and snakes and wild animals come close to the village. With the spread of the forest there is much less light in the village. It is dark in the village. I feel oppressed.

This was a common complaint in the villages outside Belluno. Similar emotions were described in other areas of the Alpine Arc (see for example Heady (1999) and Stacul (2003). For example, Heady (1999:14-15) reports that in Carnic society people classified the advance of the woods and the spread of the meadow as "ugly" and "dark" which is contrasted with a past in which ideas of control and order were symbolically linked with sun and light.[49] Sun light is important. In the past everything was clear, visible, and knowable. In penumbra the shape and meaning of things are unclear not knowable, much like their perception of the modern condition. In fact, activities such as harvesting grain, cutting the forest and cultivating the land were, in the Carnic symbolic universe, related to order and cleanliness. Instead, the abandonment and the absence of control are now related to darkness and with the oppressive character of the night. I think a correlation can be made

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[48] I own the kinship suggestion to Peter Loizos.
[49] Here we find an interesting relationship with the key Padanian symbol, the sun of the Alps. Also important is the omnipresence of the mountain in the murals and in the NL representations.

with Igne and with Belluno in general. The activities that are taking place in the mountains, depicted in the murals, are all bathed in sunlight.[50] The idea of disorder, however, recalls Douglas's (1966) notion of "matter out of place". In the case of Igne, the idea of "out of place" is embodied in reference to the wild animals. As in Carnia, so it is in Igne the snake symbolizes the spread of darkness and nature that invades the intimacy of human boundaries (Heady 1999:159-162). Snakes coming to the village symbolize in this manner the loss of control over the territory and nature, further confirmed by the association of ecological impoverishment with the absence of light and order in the village.

5.3.2 Economic Change and the Cultural Collapse of Meaning

Nevertheless the change in the landscape is not just related to an idea of order and control over the territory. More than one participant narrative seems to suggest that the forest expansion is not just blocking the sun light, but also the village's social memory and traditional culture. Hence, the spread of darkness can be interpreted as a metaphor describing the change in the practices where the imagination of local "community" was reproduced. In the neighbouring Carnic mountains, Heady notes, local people ironically talked about themselves as a "dying race" (1999:14). Stacul (2003) registers identical representations in his study of two villages in Trentino Alto Adige. In the province of Belluno, I was often confronted with similar feelings, especially when in contact with *leghisti* seemed to mourn in particular this former symbolic system.[51] The photograph below (Image 6.19) represents a visualization of this feeling of collapse.

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[50] In the mural of the potatoes it is important to note the absence of wood on the backs of the protagonists and on the landscape in general. In fact, the mountains seem very far away and the fact that the campanile is at a lower level than the fieldwork site indicates just how high people in the past would work the land.

[51] See for a comparison Orso Grigio statues presented in 7 page:).

Image 6.19- Old *Baita* [barn] in the mountain. Title: The Collapse of Culture and of Traditions[52]

This photograph was displayed in the house of a *leghista* that I interviewed in another mountain area of the province of Belluno, the Cadore. Vincenzo, the photographer, is a former Alpino who used to be an important local figure of the party, before he had to defend his "autonomy from the party's bureaucratic office". I met Vincenzo during a trip to the mountains with a friend who coordinated the province's voluntary associations. As a former Alpino, Vincenzo is involved in several civic protection activities. When we entered his carpenter's workshop, I noted several Northern League posters. I asked my friend to introduce me, and we agreed to arrange an interview. After talking with Vincenzo, I met some of his friends, and we had wine and sausage together in the workshop. During our conversation, they asked me if I believed in God. After a period of reflection I confessed my atheistic positions. "You are like Vincenzo then". In an affirmation of authority and autonomy, Vincenzo told me that "the church was for women", a position also described by Heady (1999) and Stacul (2003) in their ethnographies.

The other men had a more cautious approach. It is common for local men to distance themselves from the church, which they often perceive as an institution that compromises their autonomy. They then pointed out photographs of Bossi and asked, "Do you know

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[52] Il crollo delle culture e delle tradizioni. The baita is represented on mural number 4 Le casere Marchet

him?" [Yes]. "He is a great man; he is *dur* (hard)."[53] They were all autonomists and League supporters. Vincenzo was considered by the others to be an expert on "local history and traditions", and a strong defender of "the local rules". Vincenzo proudly showed me several newspaper articles concerning the local village's legal battle to re-establish the domain of the rules (*regole*). The *regole* were a system of laws that in the past controlled and organized the local communities' access to natural resources such as timber. Vincenzo then told me: "you see, in the past there was order".

Vincenzo is a confident and proud man. He strongly believes in the importance of local political autonomy. Contrary to many of the participants in the focus group that use modern clothes, Vincenzo used traditional ones. He interprets autonomy following the autocratic model of mechanical solidarity represented on the murals. As with other *leghisti*, Vincenzo thought that the increase in local autonomy was important in channeling and keeping economic resources to the small villages. Economic resources were seen as an opportunity to stem the process of social and ecological desintegration that is taking place in the mountain areas, by helping and keeping "young people attached to the land". As he talked, he reminded me of Orso Grigio's question: "Is it not possible to return to agriculture with modern means? It would be the best way of keeping the territory in order".

During the focus group in Igne people also recalled the passage from a rural system to industrialization as a time when both productive systems existed together:

> At the beginning [of the industrialization process] people would leave the factory come back and work in the fields. But today this is also disappearing, because young people also want to have fun and not just work. It was an evolution that contributed to the eliminations of these works. In the past, they did it for survival, today we do it as a hobby. Who still does it, does it for passion [*passione*] for respect to the Mountain and to the *vecchio*.

The passage from agriculture to modern industries implied a state where both modes of economic production coexisted and completed each other. These hybridization practices are not so common today, and as the participants bitterly noted, this was part of an "evolution". This evolution further separated young people from the land, and symbolized the passage to a modern understanding of the world, as a time when young people "also want to have fun", and the tradition is "practised by passion and respect", but no longer out of necessity.

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[53] The importance of the idiom of hardness and masculinity will be explored on charter seven.

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Ideas such as these partly show why the League's identity model is so appealing to these people. When I met Vincenzo for the second time, he took me to a beautiful rustic house high in the mountains. As in Igne, the view over the forest was splendid. Vincenzo told me, sadly, "The forest is too close to the village. Timber does not have value anymore and only old people cultivate the land". After we finished, he took me to see the *malgas* where they take the cattle during summer and that now produce for an outside cooperative. He complained to me about the European Union's veterinary laws that further contributed to the abandonment of the local milk production (the same was mentioned to me in Igne).

At the end of the interview, I drew attention to the significance of the title of one photograph: "The Collapse of Culture and of Tradition" (6.19). I showed him the photograph, and he told me, with some emotion that,

> The collapse of culture and of traditions... That is still something wise. They are the most beautiful words. We are becoming like the barn because what supports it is falling down. The collapse of culture is revealed in tradition, because today when one sees a barn collapsing, that is *destroyed by time*, it is because *no one takes care of it*. It means that it does not matter to people, it does not matter a beautiful environment like that, it means that we are really going badly culturally and traditionally. The end of culture and tradition is a beautiful phrase, meaning the end of local history and culture, do you understand? If we are not able to keep our traditions, *everything falls down*. It is a great problem.

The picture of the collapsing barn indicates how, through art, local people try to make sense of the social changes that are taking place in their social world. For Vincenzo, the collapse of the barn symbolizes the end of "local culture". The end of local culture is linked with the abandonment of traditional productive activities. Vincenzo's interpretation allows us to see how economic and ecological systems, and, as we will see next, labour organizations, are deeply intertwined in the formation of an historical model of "culture". This model of past culture now seems to play a vital role in the formation of the idea of "tradition", but more importantly in the rhetorical construction of local identity. Hence, for the people that were brought up in this system, modernity and industrialization destroyed local history by changing the local symbolic structure. This seems to confirm Weber's (1968) understanding of modernization as a social process where the enchantment of rural life based on ritual and myth is substituted by a disenchanted world, understood in terms of rational and economic prerogatives.

5.3.3 The Artistic Imagination of Time

For Angelo, as for several participants in the focus group with autonomist sympathies, the collapsing barn embodies the historical transformation of the local society from circular and repetitive, to linear and "rational". Circular time is related with the idea of tradition as a historical period "where we lived almost 2000 years in the same way", "where everyone had time to learn", "where time did not run as fast". Linear time instead is associated with new forms of economic production and labour organization (globalization) and with the influence of the nation state (modernity). In other words, the image of the barn represents the disruption of the enchantment of the idea of reproduction in itself.[54]

Nevertheless, I think this is only part of the truth. It is not difficult to see how the changes in the local economic system disrupted local people's life-world. The idea of repetitive time, however, according to Stacul does not necessarily means that time is perceived as such. In representing time as repetitive, Stacul (2003:150-151) argues "agents put themselves outside the national history". In other words, the idea of an enchanted world, of history as mythical and circular, works as a local political counter discourse. Thus, time has a similar function to what Cohen (1985) called a community symbolical marker, and has the function of marking the local community boundaries (the we), from the disruptive influence of the nation state (they) and globalization.

I think Stacul's interpretation holds some hermeneutic value in this case too. In Igne local people were extremely proud of their modern looking houses and of the level of prosperity achieved with the change in the economic system from agriculture into industry. At the beginning of the focus group, a participant proudly (and defiantly) told me, we "could paint the murals because we had money, because there is *benessere* [prosperity]". As in the *polenta* example, the murals represent a re-invention of tradition grounded on the idea that they overcame this tradition and this past. Thus, to some extent they are the consequence of local adaptation to modernity.

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[54] To add to Weber's reflections, the activities that in the past were part of the villages' everyday life, are today partly competence of bureaucratic offices that are interestingly called mountain communities (*communità montane*). Local people view this passage with bitterness. A reason for this bitterness is that practices such as hunting, or cutting trees that in the past were the responsibility of the community, are now subject to bureaucratic control, which local people perceive as an invasion of the community boundaries and political control over their public (private) property.

Conversely this prosperity was not achieved without losing something. The participants' privatization of "their' history, "their" memory, "their" identity, through the murals suggests their need to gain political control over time and their territory. That is, over what makes their nature (here 'nature' is a metaphor for ordered society). The murals also highlight the process by which the ideas of tradition and modernity are used to make sense of the inchoate nature of late modernity. Art allows individuals to link these two apparently contradictory models. Indeed, one should note that there is something in these paintings that excludes personal interpretation or doubt. Everyone seems to agree that the murals "are" their history. It seems, in this way, the murals try not only to represent the past, but also to 'close' it. In operating as the local framework of memory and history, the murals suggest a distinction between 'natural memory' and 'official memory', between the small patria where true identity roots are, and the official memory where these roots are bureaucratized and historically constructed as discussed in previous chapters. The murals are a narrative of the local stories, which through art becomes empowered as local history.

The choice of art, and in particular of painting, is not a mere coincidence. On the one hand, painting allows the movement of what is gone, what is not part of daily experience, into the modern world, making visible in this way what young people don't know. Young people, here, are not just related with younger generations, but as we will see further on, could be associated with the young modern Italian state. On the other hand, art is used because in contrast to local discourse, that is, the reinvention of rituals, or the publication of local history books that are associated with low culture, painting has a high symbolic value in the modern world. By interpreting and painting the past local people not only become the central agents of their own narrative plot, but also raise, symbolically, the value of tradition, making it more likely to compete with official and modern ideologies. As a result, the idea of tradition is not just associated with mourning the past, but also with breathing new life into it, of resurrecting it as part of their everyday life. Art is therefore part of the interpretative social process by which local people try to make sense of their societal contradictions.

5.4 Art as a Collective Social Process: The Construction of a Practical Myth

5.4.1- Nostalgia and the Problem of Social Solidarity

It would be, however, rather surprising if the murals represented only a valorisation of local experience and a counter discourse. The difficulty with the idea that local history and ideas of tradition are part of a counter discourse and opposition to the nation state is that it neglects the local people's search for a model of symbolic coherence, for a feeling of wholeness. Indeed, what is painted is not a static and/or closed image. What is captured and painted is the poetics of movement and how movement establishes and symbolizes order. The murals, in this manner, resolve an important paradox that is already expressed in the League's imagination of the concept of "the people": how can we be successful moderns and at the same time traditional? Or better, how can we reclaim something that is "gone" and part of the past to be the roots of our (evolved and richer) social world and identity?

The second question will be explored in the final section of this chapter. In this section, I argue that much of the symbolic investment in the murals is associated with the search for the re-enchantment of the world; it is related to local people's reaction against what they perceived to be a social collapse. A good illustration of this fear of social collapse comes from Giovanna's answer to my question about what local people felt when they looked at the murals.

[Giovanna [between 50-60 years old] A feeling of nostalgia.
[Someone interrupts her]: she feels nostalgia because she lived it.
[G. restarts with conviction]: I want people to understand that these were important things. Now few people care about it.
[Another one interrupts her, and says] sorry, nostalgia, but not for having lived it, you were happy to live it, Right?
[G]: Yes, I was happy. I feel that there is something missing in young people.
[What things? I asked] [Someone intervenes]- *Allegria*, [joy]!
[She answers]: well besides joy... cohesion, being together and living together. That is what I feel when I look at the murals. It is a message for them.

Etymologically *nostalgia* comes from the Greek (*nostos* homecoming, plus *algos* pain/grief). However, unlike several other focus group participants, Giovanna never emigrated. I think in this case, nostalgia is used to represent a wistful yearning for the past and expresses the deep transformation of local sociality. In this instance, nostalgia represents accepting tradition not as loss but as an absence in (local) contemporary life. This interpretation is plausible because Giovanna does not associate *nostalgia* with the

activities in themselves, with the past that is now gone, but to the way in which these activities provided meaning and organized the village social relations. Later on, during a more informal conversation, Giovanna told me "we are becoming individualists. In the past people would work together and being together was part of the everyday experience". Being and working together is associated with the idea of *allegria*". In Igne, and in the mountains of Carnia the idea of *allegria* "combines the sense of joy and togetherness" (Heady 1999:14;).[55] Stacul (2003:132) describes a similar association. He mentions that for local people the past is understood and described as a time of friendship and cooperation. Therefore, also in Trentino local people related social solidarity to the local agro-pastoral system. *Nostalgia* seems therefore to be related to an original and mechanical model of social solidarity.

In his pioneering effort to understand social memory, Halbwachs (1992:49) suggested that older people tend to be more nostalgic about the past since they no longer live an active life. For him, contemplative memory comprises an "escape from the society". According to Heady, *nostalgia* is a cultural response to the need to keep the same symbolic order. The insistence on the ideas of solidarity based on village cooperation is an "attempt to overcome the social isolation and loss of collective pride caused by economic change" and is expressed by Carnians with the expression "we were better off when we were worse off" (1999:199-200, see also page 190). However, I think the *nostalgia* expressed by Giovanna does not comprise an "escape from society", but a strategy to influence it politically. As noted above, local people know that they cannot go back in time. As we have seen, they appreciate some of the results of modernity. Hence, other interpretations have to be searched for this identification of local identity with past.

Confronted with a similar phenomenon, Stacul (2003:150) suggested that the evocation of nostalgia was part of a strategy to assert moral superiority and authority over the territory, in relation, for example, to outsiders such as the urban dweller, the state or younger generations (young generations can be read as an euphemism of the state). This hypothesis merits some reflection. I agree with Stacul that *nostalgia* seems to operate as an attempt by older generations to re-affirm their authority. The different life styles proposed by late modernity seem to threaten the older generation's controlled over "ground power". "Ground power is the power of nobody" (Castoriadis (1991). It corresponds to the process

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[55] In fact, it is not a coincidence that I was received by some many people, a demonstration that the spirit in the village is still alive (someone thanked me for my interest, and because this way they got together to talk).

by which the social is (coercively) internalized and incorporated in the individual. It could be, therefore, interpreted as an attempt to protect local community social symbolical structure from other symbolical models. In this sense, the nostalgic re-presentation of the past model of solidarity becomes in itself part of a practice where old structures are transformed and adapted to modernity. Hence, I do not think that we should see the murals merely as part of a political resistance, a kind of weapon of the weak (Scott 1985), but as part of an act of politically dreaming and imagining a different society. In other words, it shows the search for a deep symbolical coherence that as we have seen in chapter three the Italian nation state, religion, and secular official historical representations are not able to provide.

5.4.2 Local Cooperation and Solidarity: Art as Practical Myth

To explore these important questions further, I present another art work, this time made by Orso Grigio.
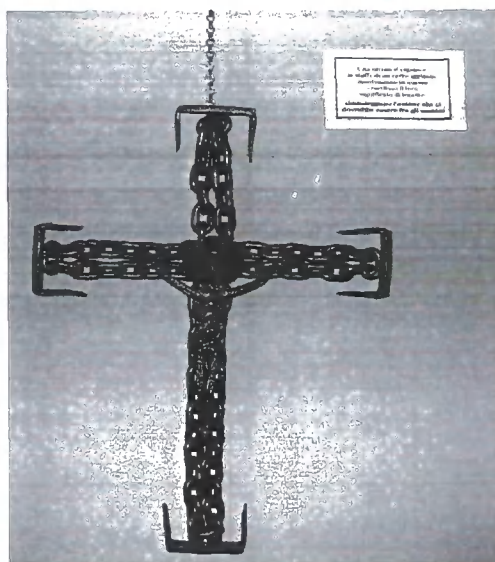
Image 6.20 "A chain from the winch and stirrup of an agricultural cart, retain, in this crucifix, its connotation of unity: They symbolize the union that should exist between men.[56] The work represents the spiritual values of the past, the unity and solidarity between the people.

This crucifix is a particularly relevant representation. When I discussed its meaning with Orso Grigio, he told me that:

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[56] [trans: Una Catena d' argano e le staffe di un carro agricola mantengono in questo crocifisso il loro significato di Legame: Simboleggiano l'unione che ci dovrebbe essere fra gli uomini.]

> It is the memory of when people used to sacrifice and help each other. That is something that we are losing. In the past, life was difficult and people would depend on each other to live and to make the community grow.

The connection between the former economic system, social solidarity and the sense of community is all too obvious. However, this crucifix seems to confirm the search for symbolic coherence. In the past, symbolic coherence was linked to the hardness of life in the mountains and to the local structural poverty. People had to stay together to survive, that is local culture was strongly linked with the material production (as we can see in the mural 5.3, 5.6, 5.9). This seems to explain why Orso Grigio associates the (central) sacrifice of Christ with hard work and cooperation, thus demonstrating that hard work and the sacrifice implicit in work is more important than religion as a mechanism of unity.

The prevalence of labour cooperation over religion as a mechanism of unity is embodied in the Christ's aesthetics. Orso Grigio's work seems to represent local culture without having contact with modern rationality and aesthetics, including religious iconography that is so common in Italy. Therefore Christ aesthetics is in contrast with the religious representations that are often linked with the Italian 'high' culture. This is no mere coincidence. In fabricating the object, Orso Grigio shows how local identity was carved in the self through the identification with the other, and how at the core of this interaction was the hard sacrifice of the body and poverty.[57] As the murals and the focus group participants seem to suggest, this system was imagined in itself as an ordered and highly functional one, where the relation with nature was more than just controlling and owning, but it was for the "community". The village community is therefore imagined and represented as a single and organized system where people were linked together. Economic solidarity forced people to sacrifice themselves, forming in this way a transcendental model of truth, which found correspondence in the local religious interpretation of the sacrifice of Christ for the community (human) salvation.

As with Orso Grigio's representation, the narratives of other participants laid strong emphasis on bolstering the local sense of solidarity. A good example comes from the following short narrative. When Fulvio was showing me the murals for the first time we stopped in front of the village bridge. The bridge is an important local symbol. Built recently, it connects the core of the village to the neighbouring woods. During the winter,

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[57] It could be also an idealization of what a leghista should be.

the bridge is lit by many lights which gives Igne its nickname: "the village of fire". I asked who built the bridge. Fulvio told me:

> the people of the village got together and made the bridge. How? We used our cable-car skills. You see we do not need engineers, or architects; we can manage ourselves.

On the one hand, this story suggests change because collective work is not part anymore of the daily village experience, as for example the closure of the village *latteria* (milk cooperative) shows. On the other hand, the bridge is seen as a celebration of village cooperation and the use traditional knowledge. Finally, the affirmation of the local community's strength links with the rhetoric of self-sufficiency and autonomy that plays an important part of local and Bellunese ideas of themselves.

However, if local economic practices fell into decline and are no longer the centre of the village life in what ways cans the murals provide a solution? One strategy for recovering and "resurrecting" the sense of solidarity has been the revival of collective religious rituals such as the *corpus dominus*. Although this ritual tradition was interrupted for some time it was revived after pressure from the older generations. This is not an isolated development. For example, I was invited by other Northern League activists to visit the Ladino area of Belluno and observe the return of the cattle from the mountain huts (*malgas*) where the cattle used to stay during summer time. Practices of transhumance as represented on mural 4.4 were common in the Alpine Arc. Today due to mechanization and modernization they do not take place anymore. The recover of the ritual was a strategy to incorporate the past in the present. After the ritual a great popular party was given and people ate together.

However, this re-invention of tradition did not provoke effervescence, partly because it did not involve everyone. The younger generation see it as a past that is now gone, and do not show much attachment to it. Other strategies used to generate this Durkheimian *collective conscience* include folkloric groups or choirs where people sing together and normally wear traditional outfits. I think the best example of this attempt is the murals in itself. A local man told me:

> We (the volunteer group) set apart some money. We had a common fund where we put some money apart that it is used to organize the parties like the *sacra paisana (popular parties)* we hold during the summer. We auto tax ourselves and then there are always gifts from the community. We never

asked anything from local institutions, we are self managed. Then there is the voluntary work. Without it we could not create all these things. If there was not the voluntary work, we could not do so much because of the costs.

Clearly, collective organized village practices were vital when local economic livelihoods depended on agriculture and forestry, but as this short narrative indicates the murals are perceived as the continuation with former patterns of solidarity and cooperation. "It was like in the old days, some of them told me, we got together, we helped the painters, and we worked collectively". Village cohesion and unity are reinforced through the "sacrifice" of work and through money gifts (a modern expression of hard work and sacrifice), but through the economic development of the village that allows them to be independent from "the local institutions".

The auto-taxation practice shows the strength of village organization and political structure, but also indicates the trust of "community members." That is, it is an idealization of a *gemeinschaft*. Thus art, as Gell (1998:11) suggested, art is seen as a form of *common action*. "It is about life-projects that agents seek to realize through their relations with others". Through art, local identification with the past is not just informed, re-presented, or symbolically interpreted but also collectively performed. As result, art emerges as a social process where tradition is resurrected as part of an inter-subjective history, becoming the local "community" symbolical centre.

5.5 Looking for Symbolical Coherence and Practical Continuity

Who participates in suffereing, at the same time participates in wisdom, and from the bottom of his soul announces and proclaims the truth to the world. (Nietzsche 1995:84 my translaction)

5.5.1 Searching for Continuity in Change

Orso Grigio attempts to fabricate a crucifix an identity that is now gone, a past where time, culture, and space were united and reproduced through economic practice, hard work and labour cooperation. Thus there is also a relation with Christian theology. Christ submitted himself to a humble and servile social status. He was innocent and still considered guilty by a state that, in the figure of Pontius Pilate, was incapable of defending the truth. We can say the same about Vincenzo's photograph. Through a photograph, Vincenzo rhetorically and empirically describes what is happening in his own life world, the comment on his photograph operates as what Carrithers calls a story seed. Story seeds are "minimal narratives" which, when they "find resonance in listeners, it is because they call up familiar

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information, familiar motives, and familiar story lines" (2007:11).The story seed symbolizes a shared social process that the whole community is experiencing. This seed is amplified, visualized and therefore objectified through the photograph, which provides solid empirical evidence of what is happening in their social world. Both artists have in common the need to be faithful to their fatherland and this is part of the ideals of coherence and *essere dur* (hardness) that animates their thought.[58] Christian ideology also has a vital role in these representations.

However, Orso Grigio's use of religious iconography and Vincenzo's use of photography have a clear polemical and political intent. They could be interpreted as criticism of the Bellunese adaptation to modern cosmopolitan models, which marginalize the older social-symbolic structure, as something that local people overcome. As Cole and Wolf (1974:267) noted:

> To the Italian, the rural dweller, the *contadino*, holds no honoured place. Rural life is negatively valued as a way of life without profit and honor, a life one leads by necessity, not choice.

The crucifix, the photograph and the murals have in common the revaluation of what officially was considered vernacular, as "low culture". In part, this helps us to understand why the Northern League's discourse was so widely accepted in the region. Yet, while the crucifix shows an opposition to both religious and cultural submission, it seems to me to reinforce the hegemonic relation between the centre and the periphery, the city and the rural, the murals try to accommodate both models. This accommodation is reflected for example, in their happy and colourful aesthetics. Together with the new houses the murals are the symbols of the successful passage from an economy of subsistence to a modern industrial economy and represent the new acquired community pride - as Fulvio told me, the murals "involved local famous artists" - and thus we arrive at the final step of this chapter: how can local people reclaim something that is gone to be the roots of their evolved, modern and economic prosperous social world?

Another insight from Sant Cassia's work can helps us. He has recently argued that popular art in modern societies could be understood as having a similar function to myth in primitive societies. Supporting also his analysis with reference to Levi Strauss, Sant Cassia notes that in Cyprus, public paintings were used to deal with local social contradictions,

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[58] I will explore this in chapter seven on masculinity.

more specifically with the "feeling of losing something, and the presentation of this loss as something that was not lost" (2005:155).[59] In Igne, I believe the murals try answer to the same paradox. Still a question emerges, how can they draw on something that was gone, to become the core of their present social life? I think the answer lies in the themes chosen to represent the past. Almost all murals represent economic activities. Why choose economic activities to represent the past? And more specifically why such emphasis on work? We have seen that work is linked with central ideas such as order and social solidarity. However, as we will see in the next, work also relates to local people's attempts to create a mythical continuity between the past and present.

5.5.2 Linking the Past with the Present: the Role of Work and Sacrifice In Imagination of the Community

Valter, a Northern League supporter, often told me:

> In history books they are always teaching us the history of great generals, of great statesman, but what about the people who build? The *Bellunese* and the *Veneti* are not warriors; we are constructers, hard workers. We like order.

It is likely that the murals represent not only what is normally considered "low" culture, but also, to use Wolf's (1982) expression, the history of the "people without history". Or better still, the people that do not have a place on the official history. The murals try in this manner move these stories from being outside to being inside history from being invisible to becoming visible, and work and economy seems to be the central mechanism that allowed this passage to happen. Although emphasizing and representing history, the murals represent a particular kind of "history". They should, I believe, be understood as an example of the mythopoetical interpretation of the Northern League discourse. Individuals use the notions of local identity, of the small patria, to reconstruct the village (the territory and ethnos), and the practice of work, as mythical sources of their identity. Murals shows therefore local people's free play ability, their agency. While they are represented by the League, they also play and use the League concepts to attempt to transform the nature of their own social world and personal and social identity. As a local man told me during the focus group:

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[59] Despite the fact that Sant Cassia studies a more sombre theme (the Cypriot missing people after the Turkish invasion), I think that art in this case seems to be used to resolve the same paradox. It is in this existential sense that I use his reflections on popular art.

I think the culture of work is stronger here than in other places because we suffered the consequence of the wars. The wars here devastated, destroyed everything. In the mountain there was nothing and no one gave us anything and therefore what could one do? (...) In order to eat one should do something, in the end only who had land could do something with agriculture; but as we told you it was a poor agriculture. As you can see from the murals people went around the world to find a job. We worked harder and then we came back. When one does not have any support one learns how to survive. We were never colonized like in the South. We had freedom but we did not have anything. However, freedom gave you also the possibility of thinking of doing. If I did something I could obtain. As a result, free people with nothing in their hand besides their will. Our economic development started from there. I can also say to you that there are other areas in Italy that have a similar economic tissue, the North of Varese, North of Milan, nel Bresciano.[60]

In this narrative about work we find a perfect expression of Northern League's political thought. The story has some resemblance to mythical accounts. The world is first defined as chaotic. Local populations are presented as victims of the great political manipulations. The wars between states destroyed their ideal and ordered (pre-modern) world, and therefore the nature of their society. From this destruction an inchoate new world emerged. The status of victimhood is further reinforced by the fact that nobody came to their assistance, which confirms their ancestors' political and cultural marginality in relation with their state. "What could we do?" my research participant rhetorically asks.

Yet, a social agent expressed on the pronoun "we" emerges in the world. There was a "we" that was free, a "we" that went around the world, a "we" that had to do something to eat, a "we" that in contrast to the South (they) (that "was colonized"; that is, dependent on state support), that was free. If they did something, if they acted in the world, they would "obtain," "their development started from there". From a chaotic state they progressed to an understanding and transformation of their world. Once again, desperation and hunger are rhetorically presented as what impels humans to act and transform their world, and one could argue, enter modernity.

The story represented in the murals might, however, also be seen as being about the Italian nation state, viewed through the prism of the *leghisti*. The state and the politicians fight and the people try to survive. For the League, Italian society is still divided because the welfare

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[60] These areas are the political strongholds of the NL in the region of Lombardia. This points out to another characteristic of work. It is a representation of social segmentation. The role of economy and the local economic structure will be discussed in the next chapter. For now I am going to focus on the importance of work as a mechanism that links the different generations with the land.

state helps sustain the South's rural mode of production (the pejorative name that is used to characterize the Southerner means "people from the land"). That is, the state (and the political parties' interests) is responsible for the colonization, underdevelopment and absence of a strong working culture in the South. Because the state did not invest in the North, the North was able to develop and become modern through their own hard work and self-sacrifice.

The imaginary of self-sacrifice and its role in the social and symbolic construction of the community is present in all three national models studied (Leftist, Church, the League). The leftist model of national memory emphasizes the sacrifice in recovering the loss of political control over national territory during the Second World War. The reaction to this loss is elaborated through the sacrifice of one's blood and even life, for one's country. In the memory of the left, the soldier's sacrifice is not linked with local liberation, or wider regional units, but with the liberation of Italy itself. Therefore the link between the local and other sub-national unities such as the province, the region and the nation invoke the imaginary of military courage and faith in the united and free patria. In the case of the historical model imagined by the Church, strong emphasis is placed on the relationship between the local and national culture. The community is imagined as a consequence of a common religion and dreamed as the consequence of a "two thousand year old culture". Unlike the soldier's sacrifice that associates the local directly with Italy, the catholic model proposes a system of cultural and historical mediation between local, ethnic identities, province, region and the state. The touching point of this union is the sacrifice of local community for the "common good" identified with the Italian nation state and Rome (Vatican). This interpretation of community sacrifice was used politically by the DC to present itself as the mediator between local communities and the nation.

The Northern League model instead draws the central notion of sacrifice to autonomous hard work (*fai-da-te*) and the local economic system. When invoking ideas of hard work, entrepreneurship, and autonomy, members of Northern society find an ethnic correspondence in other parts of the North, that is imagined as having a similar economic history, but also hard working practices, a characteristic that in particular *leghisti* link with their ancestor's culture, as we can see in the following narrative.

> Work was not just about sacrifice (*fatica*). This only happens when you work
> for others. The cable-car was autonomous work, making shoes was
> *autonomo* work. All of them were autonomous work (*mestieri*).That is the
> difference. There are jobs that are not dependent of other jobs that are

independent. These were all independent works. It was working for the house. I would have problems with working for others.

Working for the household and cooperation with other villagers allowed local people to keep their house independent from outside forces. Indeed, the sacrifice of work only comes when they are "dependent" the same does not happen when they are autonomous. This, I suggest, is linked to the ideas of work and cooperation as a horizontal solidarity principle that did not determine either as master or slave. In the past, solidarity was established through the cooperation between the different houses and reinforced through kinship relations. However, the last narrative was not accepted by everyone in the focus group, and led to a discussion about the question of autonomy. For some of the participants the idea of autonomy was a "modern concept" related with local economic practices (entrepreneurship). For them, autonomy was not necessarily related to this more traditional way of living, based as it was on household autonomy. Fulvio's intervention is an attempt to conclude this debate:

> You know Vasco, the fact that *in Italy* we paid more than one five hundred millions in TVA, the majority of it especially in the North, maybe it is a fact that depends of the exigency of being *independent, from the hard work mentality that comes from the past generations* (Avi) *Why only in the North?* In no *other country in the World it is like* this, because over here there was something first.
> [Someone adds] Oh, yes, entrepreneurs, they are autonomous.
> [Fulvio continues] We, on the contrary to other European states did not create industrial aggregations. No, each one had *its own business, to work on his own.* Not being dependent. It is in our DNA to be autonomous. It is in our being [*essere*]. It does not come from the state.

On the contrary, modern economics are characterized by a vertical system associated with the cash economy, larger industries, or bureaucratic work (the colonization of the south). Fulvio suggests that the local economic tissue based on small-scale industries that produce and cooperate among them is a continuation of the past hard work mentality and cooperative patterns. Indeed, Fulvio's narrative re-emphasizes that local economic practices were made by local people. With this rhetorical movement, Fulvio excludes the local from the nation state. This absence is interesting, because it is widely known that industrialization in the province (as noted in chapter two) took place after the Vajont disaster, which led the state not only to approve special legislation, but also to economically invest in the region. Both policies were coordinated by the Christian

Democrats following a clientelist logic which dictated the shape of the local industrial districts.[61]

Hence, it would be expected that with the development of capitalism and industrialization, the increased role of the state, and rationalization, old patterns would further lose their strength. By contrast, the narratives presented above show that local people associate economic prosperity (*benessere*) with their ancestors' culture of honest hard work and desire for autonomy. More interestingly, they associate prosperity not with the Italian nation state but with a modern neo-liberal idiom including economic autonomy, entrepreneurship, private initiative and the idea of the self-made man.

What is paradoxical about all this is that takes place in an already industrialized society, and that for local people economic wealth, the diffusion of high and literate culture, and capitalist and bureaucratic rationality should erode the structures which sustain ethnic feelings (Gellner 1994:36 and 46). The strong attachment to local identity thus questions Durkheim's (1964) expectations that economic change would lead people to change their models of understanding from a traditional world of mechanical solidarity based on identity, kinship and myth, to an organic solidarity model associated with economic exchange and interdependence, where the symbolical centre of the society as Weber (1968) suggested would be rationality. Therefore, the data discussed in this chapter shows that Gellner's (1983) general idea that economic rationalization and industrialization would lead people to change their identity models from the local into the national is only part of what is a highly complex phenomenon. The understanding of why this happens will be precisely the theme of the next chapter, where I investigate the relations between local economy and the rhetoric of identity.

6.5 Conclusion

Local people still link the local with an imaginary community. Not the one proposed by the Italian nation state but rather the Northern League's proposal of a northern community. In opposition to Italian nationalism that bases its claims on a cosmopolitan and modern ideology, the Northern ritual imagines a nation based on ethnos, of the rural "low culture", and dreams of a nation based on a similar ethnic culture. The local own representation of the local village as "bounded" community helps understanding the success of the League medieval model. In

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[61] As we will see more deeply in the next chapter, the same happened in Veneto.

the League ideology this northern medieval communities are represented as closed, autocratic, that would. The League's national construction expresses on a larger scale the ideal pre-existent model of village community based on kinship ties and labour cooperation that for a long time structured local individuals' cultural and social world. As Anderson (1991) noted, nations are imagined as face-to-face communities. The material discussed so far in this chapter shows just how perceptive Anderson's remark is.

The murals, on the other hand, shows that in order to be successful, political ideologies have to mobilize themes that already exist in local culture (Stacul 2003). The Northern League's ideological construction provides a more effective answer to the anxiety provoked by the breakdown of traditional social bonds. Indeed, as the artistic manipulation and construction of the ideas of tradition and modernity shows the need to return to the local is a modern attempt to resolve the contradictions of modernity. The murals constitute an attempt to do so by frame-working and incorporating tradition into the present. They establish a mythical (though believable) set of connections between the different generations, the territory and personal identity, traditional and modern economic practices.

Theoretically, the views materialized through the murals foregrounds the limitations of splitting historical time into "tradition" and "modernity". The murals suggest that we gain more by exploring the interconnections between these two temporal monoliths, and how this division is used by agents in the process of structuring their identity and sense of belonging. As we can see, agents rhetorically construct, and poetically utilize and give meaning to both the idea of tradition and of modernity within their own political and social agendas. Tradition and modernity are used politically by local agents to assert their distinctiveness in relation to other Italians. They do so by representing the return and valorisation of what was forgotten and considered "low" in the nation-state's hegemonic model. On the other hand, the interpretation of this dialectic between tradition and modernity through the murals is used by local people to transform and mythically re-enchant their social world.

In this chapter I investigate the extent by which modern economic practices imply "the performance of tradition" and explore how this performance of tradition is used and mobilized to assert the distinctiveness of "local community" in relation to the wider Italian society. This analysis of local economic practices seeks to show that former patterns of social interaction and mental schemes not only retained both their practical and symbolical function in the

modern global economy, but also contributed to local economic transformations, becoming a political and "ethnic" question when politically mobilized. The understanding of these economic practices, which apparently do not have a strict relation with politics, became the background against which politics, local\national identity, and local social tensions are debated and understood.

Chapter 6

The Economy of Identities: Reason, Romantism and Religion

> What is the economy? Among its irreducible semantic predicates or values, economy no doubt includes the values of the law (*nomos*) and of home (*oikos*, home, property, family, the hearth, the fire within) Nomos does not only signify the law in general, but also the law of distribution (*nemein*), the law of sharing or partition (...) Economy implies the idea of exchange, of circulation and return. (Derrida 1992:166)

6.1 Introduction: The Economic Reproduction of Locality

Theories of modernization predicted that the integration of peripheral areas, and the disappearance of local characteristics, would take place with the advance of industrialization and the capitalist mode of production, secularization and urbanization. Modernization, it was assumed, would break down traditional models of identity. The penetration and diffusion of market values and rationalization, would erode, and, to some extent substitute local practices (Gellner 1983, 1994, Weber 1977). The dissolution of traditional models of social and cultural integration would lead to the emergence of a national conscience (Gellner 1983, 1994). Yet the empirical evidence presented so far suggests that the re-emergence of ethnicity and local "tradition" is strongly linked with the interpretation of the modernization process that took place in some regions in the North Italy.

In this chapter I investigate the extent by which modern economic practices imply "the performance of tradition" and explore how this performance of tradition is used and mobilized to assert the distinctiveness of "local community" in relation to the wider Italian society. This analysis of local economic practices seeks to show that former patterns of social interaction and mental schemes not only retained both their practical and symbolical function in the modern global economy, but also contributed to local economic transformations, becoming a political and "ethnic" question when politically mobilized. The understanding of these economic practices, which apparently do not have a strict relation with politics, became the background against which politics, local\national identity, and local social tensions are debated and understood.

My analysis of economic practices will, therefore, be confined to those aspects that relate to the main orientation of this thesis: the rhetorical use of past rural universe, and the poetical use of identity in order to stress both distinction in relation to the nation state, and the "homogenous" character of globalization, the extent through which this identity is embedded in local social practices, and finally the need of understanding *leghismo* as a strategy used by individuals to come into terms with the social transformations and contradictions that local society is suffering. The argument will develop as follows. In the first section, I am concerned with briefly sketching the process by which a relatively poor, agricultural region became central to national economic growth. In the second section, I present two ethnographic cases in which I investigate the reasons that led small entrepreneurs to "link" themselves, in opposing the nation state, and explore the role of regionalism and northern nationalism in this process. In the final section, I try to understand, the relationship between local economic practices, spiritual values, and its connections with the League's political discourse and ideology.

6.2 From the *Meridione del Nord* to Italians: The change in the local Economic system

6.2.1 The Emergence of the Third Italy

With the help of the Marshall Plan and with the development of the big industries in the North, Italy underwent a remarkable transformation in the post-war period that became known as the "economic miracle". The economic miracle also played a vital role within the political realm. It symbolized the transition from the difficult memory of fascism into a new era. On the other hand, it decisively integrated Italy, geopolitically speaking, into the West's sphere of influence. The "economic miracle" allowed Italy to integrate into the G7 and later join the European Union as a founding member. This integration was essential for the affirmation and legitimization of the Democratic Christian's leadership. The miracle constituted the victory of a capitalist and democratic system over the communist model of development that was strongly advocated, at that time, by the Italian communist party.

In 1987, Italy's level of production overtook the UK (Tambini 2001). Notwithstanding this success, the Italian modernization process did not succeed in reducing the traditional regional asymmetries between North and South, Nord West and Nord East. Indeed, what is normally considered as the Northern industrialization was, and is not, a homogeneous process. During the "economic miracle", industrialization occurred mainly in the North West where the famous industrial triangle composed by the cities of Genoa-Turin-Milano

was situated. The area where my fieldwork took place maintained a system mainly based on agriculture. As many local people pointed out to me, "there was nothing here (in the Veneto)". The Veneto was considered the *Meridione del Nord* [the North's South]. The result of this situation was reflected in how the *Veneti* were represented nationally. Several Veneti and Bellunesi often complained to me that:

> In the past we (Veneti) were always represented in the soap operas as stupid. The women were represented as servants, because they used to work as house maids in the city and the men were represented as ignorant as *contadini* [peasants] because we spoke in dialect and did not know how to speak Italian. Instead, if it is someone from Rome or Naples it seems as part of being *furbi* [smart] and people thought of it as funny.

While other dialects are seen as part of the poetical nature of being Italian (urban, cosmopolitan, smart) and of its rich cultural diversity, the Veneto dialect continues to be thought of as a symbol of peasantness and backwardness, associated with a past that the Italians modernization process wanted to forget and overcome. This kind of grievance versus the nation state played a vital role in the League's expansion. (Diamanti 1993-1996, Cento Bull and Neville 2001).

The difficult situation in Veneto led to strong political pressures from the local DC on the state, so that the Veneto was given the status of a "depressed area" (1995:60). These pressures were translated into strong investments by the state. Through the distribution of pork barrel funds to the communes, the DC structured economic development around the idea of local community. A factory by the *campanile* (local tower bell, symbol of the community) was the symbol of this policy (Diamanti 1993-1996, Biorcio 1997). The new state investments, the local management of resources, combined with early proto-industrialization experiences were able to produce the chemistry that transformed the *meridione del nord* from an agricultural society into capitalist one.[62] An ironic demonstration of what happened in Veneto comes from a Bellunese noble landlord.

> One day my father arrived home and told me with indignation I saw our *contadini* drinking at the bar: how can this be possible! I looked at him and said, yes father it is true, but who sells them the drinks?

I believe that this sketch, though briefly described, shows how local elites were able to make the transition from land ownership into capitalism and entrepreneurship, but also

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[62] In order to contest the idea that the Veneto historically was an agricultural province, Roverato showed that the Veneto in the XIX century was already the third most industrialized region in Italy (1995:49)

demonstrates the change brought about not only in the local peasant economy but also in social habits.

The investment in the small-scale and the familiar was not an unimportant choice. The industrialization model can in fact be interpreted as an expression of the sub-catholic ideology that, in social terms, dominated the area. Catholicism viewed with suspicion what they considered to be the "alienating values" proposed by modernization and the market economy. Local elites judged the diffusion of large factories as threatening for their political power, since they were afraid of the politicization of workers and their transformation into "proletarians" (Roverato 1995). The ideological construction of work and economic practices as a factor of national unity by the DC is still present in Belluno. Former supporters of the Democratic Christians, who now vote for the Lega, often cited to me Saint Benedict's adage: *Ora ed Labora* [Work and Pray]. Sometimes, they would make harsh remarks about the PCI ideological understanding of work. For example, a small artisan and ex-DC voter told me:

> they said that they protected workers, that is ok, but what about me? I work more than 10 hours a day, sometimes even on Saturdays, but for the communists I am not a worker.

This contribution suggests an important distinction between the proletarians that work in the big companies, and the model of small factories and self employed implemented in Veneto. [63]

6.2.3 The Mythical Nord East emerges in the 'Third Italy'

Despite the fact that was radically different form in the modernization process that was taking place in Veneto, North East part of Lombardy, and Friuli, it continued the Italian industrial tradition. The new economic reality was situated on the periphery of both the industrial triangle of the North and Rome. In a pioneering effort to contextualize and understand this new economic reality, the sociologist Bagnasco (1977) coined the term that would, rhetorically, introduce a new reality in the traditional social *division* of Italian society between the industrial North and the agrarian South. He called this new economic

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[63] The narrative also helps us understand why, in such an industrial area, the PCI failed to penetrate. I am aware that a similar model works in the "red belt". However there the PCI had a strong institional presence and even after the fall of the First Republic was able to keep helping the local industrial system, the same seems did not happen in Veneto, in part because the NL radicalized the political process and the mediation system. A good discussion of the differences between both subcultures is presented in Messina (1998).

reality, "the Third Italy". The "Third Italy" was composed of a hybrid model of peasantry, industrial work and entrepreneurship. Peasant entrepreneurs combined the household economy with the new economic opportunities that still remained an important source of family income (Cento Bull, Corner 1993).

The success and emergence of the *"Third Italy"* was considered proof of continuous Italian innovation and national progress toward modernity, and contributed to the widespread perceptions that Italians have of themselves that they could live *without the state*. This feeling is similar to the *art of arrangiarsi* [the art of fixing] described by Pardo (1996) in his fieldwork in Naples. In Veneto, the *art of arrangiarsi* finds correspondence in the expression *fai da te* [do it yourself], that grounds the idea of "self-made men" used by the Veneti to describe themselves and their economic success. Both expressions, however, represent a form of resistance to formal authority and official explanations.

The debate about the causes of this economic development was reflected scholastically in discussions about the definition of Veneto as "an economic model". The debate presented two main positions: one that pointed out the premeditation, i.e. the well-designed institutional planning by the DC, and another that indicated the spontaneous character of the phenomenon, rhetorically described by the influential and "autonomist" director of the *Gazzetino del Nord East,* Giorgio Lago as "popular capitalism" [*capitalismo popolare*]. This position associated local economic development with the local hard working culture and capacity to take risks, a discourse that was also strongly emphasized by the Northern League.

Benefiting from a weak currency and from the new markets provided by the European Union, the competitive *"Third Italy"* was able to grow exponentially. For example, the small provinces of Vicenza and Treviso exported more during this decade than Portugal (Stella 1996). Furthermore, the nineties heralded the further decline of big industry in the North-West. In this changing context, this newly consolidated economic reality assumed the euphemistic nickname of "the Italian locomotive", a symbolic recognition of its central role within the Italian economic system. Its success also made the region a target of the attention of sociologists and economists. This was something that Northern League supporters often told me with pride: "people came from America and Japan to Veneto to study our system, to understand our economic model". By this time, the *meridione del nord*

transformed itself into the *mythical Nord Est*, charaterised no longer by poor peasants or the nostalgia of the ancient Venetian aristocracy for past glories, but by the great entrepreneurs, who, according to Orso Grigio,

> started with nothing, do not even had the third elementary, but with their hard work, their capacity to take risks, now give jobs to many people with degrees. Are these the people that they represent in the newspaper and in television as having low culture?

It seems, therefore, that although some of these entrepreneurs have high economic capital, they have low cultural and symbolical capital (Bourdieu 1991). Still, industrialization and modernization produced new life-style ideals. Important entrepreneurs such as *Benetton* in Treviso, *Carraro* in Padova, *Del Vecchio* in Belluno and *Geox* in Montebelluna, became the "new saints", and the symbols that contributed to the recovery of lost Veneto pride. In less than forty years a poor and undeveloped area became the economic motor of the seventh most industrialised country in the world and for many local people, economic progress and work became the "new religion"- to cite an influential local journalist (Stella 1996)-. And this begs the question: why did such "modern" Italians come to identify so strongly with the ruralist ideology espoused and proposed by the Northern League?

6.3 From Italians Into Localists: Producing Modernity, Reproducing Locality

6.3.1 Social change as a Mechanism of Social Preservation: Industrial districts and Local Economic Cooperation

The economic structure of both Belluno and Veneto is characterized by the proliferation of small, family firms that are organized in the territory by industrial districts. Many of these firms are no bigger than traditional artisans' shops and have less than five workers (Diamanti 1993-1996, Biorcio 1997, Ginsborg 2001). A good way of trying to understand this important social-economic entity is by defining "industrial district". A good definition is provided by Brusco and Paba.

> A community of persons and firms who operate *in a limited territorial space,* marked by the presence of *economies external to the firms,* but *internal to the district in question.* These economic solicit the formation *and development of a specialized productive apparatus,* in which small firms have a highly relevant role (In Ginsborg: 2001:17 my italics)

These industrial districts developed within the context of what we previously called popular capitalism. Clustering into industrial districts, these small, artisanal companies specialize in specific types of production, and either cooperate with other local firms to produce the final product, or with larger multinational firms. Although not all these small artisans and self-employed entrepreneurs support the Northern League, the Northern League is particularly strong among them. One reason for this outcome is due to the analogy drawn between the past social system of village economic solidarity and modern economic practices. What follows is an interpretation given by two *leghisti* Francesca (a chemistry graduate), and Mario (a local entrepreneur).

> Mario: The companies over here were born from the old companies. The workers (operai) that worked in these companies started working by themselves because they knew how to manage the complete operation. It was not as in the big companies where one worker cuts and the other pastes. Over here, the worker knew many operations. When the companies went into crises, or the worker wanted to be autonomous, people asked themselves why don't I start my own business?

> Francesca: Here we built a network [rete]. The ones who make shoes, knows Toni that produces soles and Bepe who makes the laces, over here we created this mechanism, this network. As result, we still have the sense of community. This sense is lost with the great companies. Here the small companies were strong and this helped to conserve and fortify the feeling of local community. Now it is the wrong season, but if you come during summer, you find a lot of popular season (sagra). That is a characteristic of the Veneti, and it is a strategy to find each other. Who sponsors it? The ones that have small factories that in this way give something back to the community and make publicity for their factories. If instead there were big industries we would not have the peasant mentality. But when the small entrepreneur returns home he still works in the fields. It is because of this that the local identità did not change. If the entrepreneurs remain small, they feel the need to defend their community, to remain *padroni a casa nostra*.

As Rogers (1991) suggests modernization does not always overcome existing social structures. Indeed, her ethnographic study of the Ostal system in south of France, (stem family farm) describes how principles by which the local society were organized became stronger with the passage from a household economy to a capitalist economy. Rogers (1991:151) ethnography shows that when economic possibilities render them feasible pre-modern practices can reassume both practical and symbolical importance. In Francesca and Mario's narratives it is important to note how aspects of industrialization resemble the relation with traditional forms of cooperation presented in Igne, or in the Padania public rituals. This happens due to the "mechanical" character of the process of these economic practices. They correspond, on the one hand, to the dream of being self-employed and

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autonomous that I noted permeates local culture, on the other, to the processes by which these factories operate. As opposed to bigger factories, small family-run factories resembled the artisan shops or small farms of the past. Workers learned, how and to managed *all* the processes of production. When production increased, or the companies entered into crisis, an *operai* would become entrepreneur, and open his own factory where he would specialize himself in a specific part of the production, integrating in this way the local economic exchanging process.

Also important in Francesca and Mario's narratives is the emphasis given to the idioms of autonomy and local agency. In her narrative, Franscesca often refers to local people (she uses the plural pronoun "we") as the creators of these networks, which were important in maintaining people's attachment to the territory. This emphasis on local cooperation seems to contradict social change theories which argue that local models of self-identification decay during the industrialization process. For example, the functionalist explanation of nationalism presented, for example, by Gellner (1983, 1994), considered that modern industrial economies would undermine local village patterns of cooperation because these would inevitably become an obstacle to economic development. In other words, industrialization and modernization, due to their wider scale of operations, would oblige people to cooperate within wider economic spheres, and in this way to change their models of social identification from the local to the national.

Instead, as is evident in the discourses of Francesca and Mario, the local model of industrialization strengthens local social networks and feelings of local belonging (Diamanti 1993-1996, Wild 1997, Biorcio 1997, Cento Bull and Gilbert 2001). Francesca interprets the local economic transformation not as a consequence of modernity, or of integration in the nation state, but as the reproduction of the traditional ideal-type peasant system. As described by Cento Bull and Corner (1993) in the industrial districts on Lombardy the appeal of the Lega was particular strong among traditional productive systems, such as shoe making and textiles (see also Wild 1997:96 and Cento Bull 2001). As a result, past practices of village cooperation among different houses are now reproduced, and to some extent reinforced, by modern industrial cooperation, which recreates their imagined models of communitarian self-identification. I think this system of economic distribution, reciprocity, and circulation has some resemblances with Marcel Mauss's (1974) classic discussion on the economic and spiritual value of the "gift". The local

division of labour involves not just material and economic exchanges, but also "spiritual", since it involves the ideas of hard work, risk, morality and sameness.

The local exchange practices contributes to reinforce local solidarity, and given its key symbolic role in how the community is imagined, provides further understanding of why Italian national unity is not important for many *leghisti*. National economic cooperation between North and South, relies, (at least as far as public culture is concerned) on the redistribution of the economic resources through taxation, and therefore does not comprise the "spiritual" exchanges (common culture) and the social solidarity practices through which the community is reproduced. Furthermore, the need to export on the international market, especially the North of Europe, suggests that many local entrepreneurs cannot rely just on national-state markets. The less they integrate and are dependent of the national economic market, the less they are concerned with national politics or national integration, and more with an idea of state as an economic developer.

6.3.2 Economy and Ethnicity: From Entrepreneurs into Localists

Like many local entrepreneurs, Giuseppe's grandparents emigrated and then came back to the "territory". Leaving the school earlier because "he wanted to start earning" Giuseppe started working with fourteen years old in one of the first lamps factories that were installed in Belluno. After his military service he returned to the village and with a friend decided to start his own lamp factory, because as he explained me "I did not want to be a *dipendenti* [dependent-worker]". Without starting capital he asked his family for help:

> When I came back, I started my own factory. I did not have any money, and my grand father gave 4000 lire. For me it was a loan, for him a gift. However, he did not tell me that it was a gift. Still, it was enough to buy the two machines that I needed, and I started a small factory with a friend in my garage. When I wanted to return the money, he told me that at the beginning it was a loan, but now it is a gift.

With two industrial machines, Giuseppe produced and exported lamps mainly to the German market. However, with the increase in international competition, Giuseppe's small firm began to face difficulties. Although they were able to guarantee a high rate of production, the province and regions' infra-structures were not adequate for an industrial system in such fast development. The infra-structural problem played a vital role in Giuseppe's decision to vote for the Northern League:

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> We work 10\12 hours a day, we improve the machines just to gain three or four seconds, and then if it snowed the roads are impassable. Often there were immense delays in the consignment of the products. The Lega paid attention to these local practical problems. We are not intellectuals or artists, we are practical people. The Lega cultural discourse was important but it was secondary. The Italian politician instead does not understand local reality. The Lega represents the problems of our territory. And that was the most important thing.

For someone whose commitment was mainly local, the absence of the state was a sign of political weakness. Giuseppe became a localist not because he wanted to refuse the state, or exclude the Veneto from the Nation-State, but because of the *absence* of the state. The absence of the state led small entrepreneurs such as Giuseppe to "rebel" against the state, and to see the Northern League as a local, and therefore inevitably, better solution to what are perceived as local economic problems. The League was the movement that was able to collect and voice these local industrial demands (Diamanti 1993, 1996, Woods 1995, Biorcio 1997, Diani 1996). Its strategy to voice these demands was to emphasize the cultural differences between the "North that produces", the South judged as unproductive and inefficient and the Roman politicians that "cannot be trusted".

6.3.3 Reason against Romanticism. The Rationalization of the State

Giuseppe's story signifies a particular understanding of the role of the state. For Giuseppe the role of the state is not that of a grant provider, but an element that should help the development of local industry. To some extent, this image of the state is represented metaphorically in the grandfather, who, as Giuseppe described, did not give, but loaned him the money. The money became a gift, only after Giuseppe was able, through his hard work, to return it. Giuseppe's story is, therefore, an important moral fable to talk about the relation between the regions and the state, and to the policies that the state should use to promote the different regions' development.

> The Lega is composed of people who worked, who lived the problems of work, of the local companies. We are a liberal party which is neither grant dependent nor statist. A party that proposed that the economy should be left to the free market, that the state should create the structures so that everyone had the same opportunities, but then they should work, and then let the best one win. This is something that I always believe, if one wants to work and works more, if he deserves it, we should get it. (League activist, entrepreneur and former secretary of the League in Belluno)

The construction of a regional ethnic identity was used by local industrials its demand liberal reforms. This "disintegrative ethnicity" was used to demand the federal reform of

the state, more administrative autonomy, and to attack the political parties' control over both economy and state, the *consociationalism* Cento Bull (2003:48). The federal reform of the state was presented rhetorically as providing the possibility of not only enhancing fiscal justice, but of modernizing and rationalizing the inefficient and corrupt Italian public. Regionalism would mean more legislative and economic autonomy, and would further boost the local economic system, that in the Northern League's rhetoric was threatened by the state and the South, and today by globalization (Diamanti 1993, Giordano 1997).

> We arrive at federalism by establishing a comparison with world political realities. Now, I see that in the EUA, Germany and Switzerland that are modern and developed countries things work, while in Italy things do not work. Now, what is the system? It is federalist one, and the Italian? A centralist one that does not work, therefore I am federalist. It is instinct, you do not need to study it, even women who are only concerned with shopping can become federalist and that is enough. Federalism can be for example a system of economic grants (similar to a, bank system). The richer regions make economic resources available to the poorer regions in a solidarity spirit, instead of a subsidiary one, in a horizontal sense and not a vertical one. As a result, federalism should be presented uniquely as a comparison of models that works or do not work, and here the citizen can clearly choose. (Former NL Leader in Belluno)

The key point in the former NL leader interpretation is the link of the institutional reform of the state with the more developed European countries. Federalism is associated with the central metaphor of modernity: progress. Indeed, the countries mentioned are notably close to the Italian Alpine northern border. On the other hand, the claim for federalist reforms represented a significant cultural shift in the way national solidarity was imagined. League ideology corresponds to the structural myth of a society with (almost) no state presence, based on a segmentation system, where the different regions as independent units would make economic agreements without state interference. Therefore, at the core of the federal reform was clearly a pragmatic and rational view of the state. This rational view contrasts the romantic imagination of the Italian state as united community, rhetorically appealing to reason as a justification to change the political and administrative decision-making process from the centre into the periphery in order to better address local socio-economic problems.

In the above passage the contrast between the rationalization of the resources, and the idealism of a united nation, is persuasively argued regarding the *"nemein*, the law of sharing or partition" of the economic resources. The new mechanism of resource distribution for the League's MP should be based on a mechanism of "solidarity" instead of

"subsidiary". The subsidiarity system comprises the central collection and a central re-distribution in a vertical system characterized by Polanyi (1945) as central and characteristic of extensively traditional agrarian societies. This system was implemented in Italy after the Second World War, with the objective of modernizing the Italian economy. However, soon this mechanism of redistribution was influenced and manipulated by political parties to guarantee votes (Ginsborg 1996, 2001, Golden 2003).

The subsidiary system proposed by the Northern League implied management grounded on a horizontal system. This system of horizontal distribution is metaphorically described as similar to the bank system. The richer areas would loan money to the poorer regions, which would then be obliged to invest it properly, in order to return it. Institutionally, this would mean bypassing the interfering state (vertical system). This change in the policies of taxation and distribution would cause a major dislocation of Italian political and economic life, from the centre (Rome) into the (richer) regions of the North, and would oblige the Southern economic structure to modernize itself. In other words, the political decision-making process would pass from the centre to the periphery, which in Northern League rhetoric would strongly benefit small-scale firms in the northern industrial districts (Biorcio 1997, Cento Bull and Gilbert 2001).

6.3.4 Romanticism against Reason: From Localists into Padanians

As Cento Bull and Corner (1993:5-6) argued in their work in industrial districts in the North of Lombardy, past peasant workers families were characterized by a very flexible nature, and therefore "adaptable to opportunity, and in turn increasingly entrepreneurial in spirit" in the search of new economic resources to the household. In Belluno Giuseppe is a good example. He reacted to international competition in the lamp production sector by taking advantage of the economic opportunities that were becoming available in the province, in particular the expansion of spectacles manufacture. Relying on his industrial know-how, Giuseppe opened a small factory to assemble spectacles, becoming what in the region is known as a *terciste*. The *terciste* can be compared with tenant farmers working for landlords. They own their own means of production (machines\space normally in the house) and their labour force comes mainly from the family and a few extra-workers. However, they do not have direct contact with the external market, since they are contracted by major companies' wishing to overcome difficulties with production.

Giuseppe's spectacles factory is now managed by his older son (Luigi). I often visited Luigi's house in Vas, a small village situated in the boundary between the provinces of Belluno and Treviso. His factory was located on the top floor of his apartment building. Luigi had three employees (all women). The work consisted in fitting the spectacles' arms to the frames. During the time I was there, one of his employees called him to sort out a machine problem. He rushed over and fixed it there and then. Demonstrating his autonomy and self-reliance he explained:

> I learned how to use these machines by heart with my father. I did not need to go to school; This is the value of practice and experience. I do not need a mechanic. I can do it by myself. Because I learned this way, I also was able to introduce small improvements that make these machines work better and faster.

Industrial knowledge is part of the family heritage. The small factory is a place where the body is schooled. Where a set of "dispositions" as Bourdieu would say (1977) is inculcated. The process of inculcation serves to sediment a set of bodily structures of power *(habitus,* in Bourdieu's terms*)*. The relation that small entrepreneurs\artisans have with their machines provides further strength to this argument. Luigi and Giuseppe is a common case in the area. They know their machines to the extent that they are not only able to fix it, but even introduce innovations that allow them to increase their productivity (an expression of bricolage of the *fai da te* [do-it-yourself]). Their control over their machines is understood as a reproduction of their own selves, of the domination of local values (of the *bricoleur*) over high cultural ones (engineer). This domination of the machines is assumed in particular by *leghisti* as part distinctive selves, functioning as a motive for social pride.

Yet, although Luigi considers himself an autonomous entrepreneur and controls his production, he actually has a relatively low level of economic autonomy. Often entrepreneurs as Giuseppe and Luigi do not have enough flexibility or knowledge to change their productive activity and adapt to the market, which leave them in a precarious situation given the emergence of new countries where the labour is cheaper. I asked Luigi about this and he told me: "we do not have problems yet". Nonetheless, Giuseppe reacted to the problem by diversifying his economic investments. In this way, his family is not entirely dependent on the production of spectacles. Nevertheless, Giuseppe told me during an informal conversation that despite the development of closer personal ties with local major firms, the fear of losing their market to newly emerging economies is real:

> In the past we were able to develop our machines and be more competitive because the knowledge would only reach other countries later on. Today with globalization the Chinese learn about these developments the following day. This, together with the lower wages and the absence of labour laws in China, makes competition harder. We should send our trade unions to China, [he said, laughing]. We have to sell our traditional knowledge because we produce quality instead the Chinese have mass production. This is very important, but might not be enough to keep the major industries in the region from moving abroad in order to maximize their profits.

Luigi then invited me to go with him to distribute some of the daily production of the factory. He loaded the spectacles into the boot of his car and distributed them to factories in the local industrial district. It took him no more than 20 minutes since the bigger factories were not far away from his own place. All these operations took place in a climate of great informality. A good example of this informality was the use of the local dialect as a "local business language". The dialect is an excellent example of how "traditional" principles kept their symbolic and practical role in modern life practices. The use of local dialect increases the ethnic connotation of the local economic practices (Diamanti 1993-1996, Cento Bull (2003.

Luigi gave the spectacles and chatted with the factory personal before collecting more work. Late, we stopped at his father's house (15 minutes away from his house), in order to provide his mother with spectacles parts for assembly. He then did the same with his grandmother. The mother was primarily a housewife. The grandmother and the brother help the family company when there is too much work to do, which reinforces kinship relations. Luigi told me:

> We all started producing specs at home and they know the processes, therefore everyone helps. In our family there is just one wallet, therefore we work together.

When we were driving back we talked about one of Luigi's favourite themes: the dangers of consumerism. Luigi judges modern society as a society in which individuals are "manipulated by great financial corporations and freemasons". He considers local social life in modern societies as largely dependent on an "immoral and uncontrolled consumerism." He notes that this disrupts the natural flow of sociality and community life, since it enhances "avidity and greed". Avidity and greed are considered to be anti-social forces, comparable with the idea of envy and rivalry so common in the Mediterranean

societies (see for example Herzfeld 1985, Cabral 1989) but also Alpine Arc literature (Heady 1999, Stacul 2003). These destructive characteristics are thought to strike at the heart of local traditions based on work, family and religion, qualities that Luigi and other *leghisti* identify as the right and proper characteristics of local life.

Later on in our interview when we discussed the idea of Padania, Giuseppe told me that "as people can choose to be Italians, we can choose to be Padanians. I am Padanian!" This statement contradicts his initial political reflections where romantic cultural and ethnic factors were played down in relation to practical and rational economic ones. Why? It can be deduced that now Giuseppe is primarily concerned with the defence of the Padanian culture, identity and traditions due to the fear of economic competition and market rationalization. As many local artisans, Giuseppe knows that working as a *terciste*, he only assembles the spectacles, and that even if he his able to alter his machines to make them work better, he remains unable to compete with emergent countries regarding labour price. This is expressed in is fear of losing the family's economic stability. The same happens with worker's in these productive sectors, and others small artisans, for example in the areas of shoe and clothing manufacture, that as described in the Padania ritual presented their products as *Made in Padania*.

As Cento Bull (2001) noted in the manufacturing and productive sectors, the League has a strong number of supporters. Other Bellunese spectacle producers do not have the same problem. For example, Luxoptica and Safilo also started as two small factories; however their marketing strategy led them to achieve a dominant position in the market, where they now not only control, but are able to create and innovate their products. These companies contract entrepreneurs such as Giuseppe to work, but if they see advantages in outsourcing their units of production, they will leave small entrepreneurs in great difficulty. As result, the state is no longer seen as a development helper, but as a protector of the market, and consequently of local *identità* and "community".

So, while at first regional and northern nationalism was used by the most industrial and advanced areas against what were perceived as backward areas, and the inefficient state (itself accused of jeopardizing the progress of the modern industrial North), now it is used not only to defend the North from the encroachment of powerful outsiders, but also to contest "progressive values". As the Northern League Euro Parliamentarians attack on

Ciampi clearly shows, identity is mobilized, exchanged and used rhetorically as part of the attempt to contest the state incapacity to protect the Italian market, its unhelpful detachment from broader social and political issues, and its support the internationalization/globalization of the economy. A process that as Cota remembered us in chapter four, is "strangling local families and entrepreneurs".

6.3.5 Producing and Selling Tradition in a Modern Family Farm

The second example I will consider is that of a peasant entrepreneur. Despite the fact that in Belluno agricultural exploration is in serious decline, in the neighbouring province of Treviso this is not the case. Being a fertile province, local peasants saw in new possibilities in exporting and selling local "traditional products" an attractive economic activity. In April, Tiziano, an extroverted and extremely gentle local bank manager, invited me to come to Valdobbiadene, a small rural area (known for strongly supporting the League) in the province of Treviso to buy the local traditional wine. In contrast to the mountains in Igne, in Valdobbiadene the hills and the landscape were humanized and ordered through the presence of vineyards. The vineyards are used to produce the Prosecco, a famous traditional sparkling wine.

As we drove through the iron farm gates, an old peasant passed us in a tractor. Tiziano identifies the owner of the farm and greets him in the local dialect. The man in the tractor smiles and replies in dialect: "I will be in my grave before I rest" and motors off in direction to the fields. Tiziano tells me: "you see, despite his age he is still working. This is the Veneto!" We parked the car and were greeted by a woman in her thirties. Tiziano said hello to her and shook her hand with a smile. "This is Dr Fernandes, he came here to study how we think!" I smiled, embarrassed, and Maria gently shook my hand. Both her arms and her face were a little burned from the sun. She apologized for greeting us in her working clothes. "I have been labouring in the fields". She then led us over to the old barn. I observed the farm. Two modern Audis were parked on the drive; to the North, the vineyards spread gently across the landscape; beautiful roses grew up next to the vines. Maria explained that the roses protected the vines from diseases. Everything was extremely organized and rationalized. Maria saw my fascination for the place, saying:

> My father started with a small property after the war and only produced for the house, but with the development of the local economy we started producing to sell to the outside. Then we bought more land.

[Tiziano adds in dialect] Yes, I remember coming here when he was a small producer and still produced traditionally. We have been friends for a long time.

Today, Maria manages a large scale commercial production. Despite the modernization of the farm, the labour structure continues to follow the local traditional familiar peasant model. Maria works and lives on the farm with her bothers and her parents. Knowing this, Tiziano asked who answered the phone that morning. She answered with resignation:

We had to hire someone from outside to work part time in the administrative office. It was the first time. We cannot manage so much paper work and I prefer to work in the fields.

Maria walked ahead and opened the barn as Tiziano commented to me: "they are a beautiful family, they all work together". Maria's family has a similar structure to Giuseppe's family. The labour force comes mainly from the family. There is also a strong link between the unit of production and the house, and the preference for keeping work inside the family. The message is that the family (as the village in Igne) has to be both physically and morally strong enough, and should not depend on external support. However there is also an important difference. Maria's brother has a university degree in wine science and Maria has a degree in economics, and a Masters from London. Nonetheless, after concluding her degree, instead of looking for a job "outside the family" she told us: "the nostalgia of the house and of the territory caused me return home, to my roots, and help my parents to develop *la azienda di famiglia*" [the family business]. Again, Maria's case is an excellent example of social reproduction in the northern region. As with Firmino's family, we can see how family education strategies were built around the possibility of further developing the household economy.

We arrived at the old barn, which now houses a modern industrial facility and which took me by surprise. Maria explained, smiling:

The time when we used to produce with my father's methods is over. But as you could see he is still the one who takes care of the fields and of the vineyards; me and my brother take care of the commercial and economic part.

Their wine production is completely mechanized and the process of production, of "tradition", is now monitored by a modern computer system. Tiziano showed his fascination for the place, "I used to come here when her father started. It is incredible; well

done Maria". We went on and entered a modern wine tasting room. While Maria talked with Tiziano about the different properties of the wine, she poured the wine carefully into perfect crystal glasses, displaying her knowledge of the process. She followed all the necessary procedures to guarantee that the wine could be tasted at its best. In so doing, Gabriella displayed a mastery of high modern commercial culture. I looked around the room and noticed several black and white photographs of people doing traditional jobs and dressed in traditional clothing, the old house, the barn and traditional tools. They tell the visitor the history of the family, recording the successful transition from peasants into "peasant entrepreneurs". A successful story that is reflected in the several medals and awards won in regional and national wine contests on display.

In contrast with her mother and father who did not feel comfortable talking with either me or Tiziano, Maria was perfectly relaxed during the conversation because, for her, this was business, while for her mother it was a service to someone more powerful, which I think to some extent reproduced what in the past was the relationship of local peasants with their patrons. Tiziano asked how Maria managed to modernize the production unit:

> It was a very difficult process. It is difficult to obtain credit for industrial investment from our banks. They are too small and do not respond the demands of small entrepreneurs like us. I work everyday and I take few holidays since we invested. With the high taxes and with the bank bureaucracy it is difficult to support our investments.

She also complained about the high taxation levels and the indifference of the state towards local producers. "The Roman politicians are all the same. They do not understand local realities and our economic system". It is important to note, in Maria's words, the contrast between "Roman politicians" and "our economic system" as a relation of differentiation and distance. Tiziano corroborated her anti-political discourse accusing politicians of "not working and not helping local economy". Then he offered his support, by inviting her to "come for a chat" at his bank. While we were talking, I took the opportunity to ask whether her business was being threatened by globalization.

> No. Our wine is a specific regional product and we have a local and national market. For us globalization has been an important opportunity to expand our production. However, it is difficult to introduce and promote our products abroad, because we are small producers. The euro is not helping us either because it raises the price of the products to export is more difficult. What we would need is more institutional support.

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As we can see, Maria's family's demands are different from those of Giuseppe and Luigi. Indeed, when I interviewed her a couple of weeks later, Maria told me that Padania "was a provocation". By this I think she meant that being Italian is part of the commoditization of identity, because in the global hierarchy of value being Italian is an important label in itself. Furthermore, and contrary to Giuseppe and Luigi who produce traditionally and are dependent of the value labour. Maria's products depend on the value of rarity. This helps explain why Maria's family saw in the Northern League's emphasis on the territory and local cultural heritage an advantage. The Northern League is also used, pragmatically, as a local network since the League:

> makes it easier to have a direct link with the centres of power and to understand several problems, regarding for example: roads, the environment, economic decisions etc. Therefore it is an element of advantage.

Maria told me that she was informally invited to become a local member of the party by the local leader of the Northern League. She saw the Northern League was the "right vehicle" for her reintegration on local society, but also to try to influence the local political decision making process.

6.3.6 An economic Advantage: The Social Production of Tradition

Local small farmers and entrepreneurs need strong institutional support to promote and market their products, for example, in national and international expositions. In other words, local entrepreneurs need institutions that fabricate, bureaucratize and invent tradition, so that what Maria and her family produces acquire an extra value in the market. Thus, Northern League promotion of local identity and local traditions, which comprise a strong emphasis on the local food heritage (which is considered by League exponents to be "part of a strategy to resist globalization") is for Maria's family and other local artisans and producers, an important economic resource.[64]

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[64]Luca Zaia exponent of the NL, former president of the province of Treviso, and now vice president of the region Veneto told in a interview: We have to teach the new generations that in our farms (nelle nostre aziende agricole) we produce quality, fruit, vegetables provide excellent material for the conserve industries. For the Veneto it is a great patrimony that is reflected in the typical productions DOP (original production) and IGP that do fear competitions. But if we are brave in producing, we are less brave in presenting ourselves to the market, where we not able of imposing ourselves. From this fact the need of making marketing campaigns that come together with the economy of hospitality and the tourism, and that of opening a dialogue with consumer of every age. www.regione.veneto.it/Notizie/ComunicatiStampa/maggio2007/842.htm

For me, it is very important the emphasis on the local products and traditions, the idea of keeping the dialect. The gastronomic culture essentially depends on the territory. Every territory has its culture and the food culture comes from the territory. Over here we eat polenta because there is the culture of corn. We eat rabbit because there is rabbit. We do not eat deer because there is no deer. Therefore there is identification between the territory and what we cook. It is not like Mc. Donald's which is equal everywhere. Local food is an important cultural heritage.

Food is part of an identity system and it can be used as a mechanism of social distinction and community solidarity. Appadurai (1981:495) noted the key relationship of food, identity, social hierarchy and politics among Hindu society. He called this relation gastro-politics that he defines as: "conflict and competition over specific cultural and economic resources as it emerges in social transactions around food". While their marginality to the nation-state economic system is confirmed by Maria's remarks about national politicians' agricultural policies, and the banking system, for the Northern League, these producers are rhetorically invested as the keepers and reproducers of local social identity, a role that empowers them socially.

As suggested by Appadurai the emphasis on maintenance of local food is however an expression of political conflict. It shows the struggle for the classification between the different "local cuisines" (Treviso rabbit, Belluno deer) and regional, national and global traditions (veneto- corn-polenta, Italy-cereals-pasta -global MacDonald). This is not just a conflict about keeping local tradition but also of social identity structures, and hegemony, since it express a relationship of distance and similarity between the different social areas: local, province, and regional, national, global. In addition, thinking about food and "local products" in these terms also reflects the past peasant mentality with its emphasis on the auto-production for the household, the exploration of the local environment resources, and the imagination of the community based on a segmentation system.

As Cento Bull and Corner (1993:7) argued, peasant entrepreneurship in the North of Lombardy combined the need "not exclusively maximizing the income but also the - typically peasant- attitude of minimizing outgoings. According to these authors this attitude further explains the common symbioses between the attachment to the land, house, and factories, and the emphasis on the family autonomy. The family, as much as the region, should be able to rely on its own forces. The relation between this peasant ideology and the Northern League ideology shows the relevance of the habitus as an "internalized scheme"

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through which individuals make sense and categorize their social world. On the other hand, it shows how the League ideology is used and adapted by agents. The promotion and revival of the local products represent an attempt to react against what is often perceived as the disintegration of local identity provoked by market economy and mass culture.

Ironically, this reaction to global values, represent the perfect manipulation of the logic they want to combat, for is not local identity, heritage and traditional culture part of the complexities of globalization in itself? The commoditisation of tradition shows the importance of national and European bureaucracy in the production and bureaucratization of "the local". As present in Zaia's discourse, labelling local products as DOP, that is, as traditional and "hand-made" rather than mass-produced depends on European laws. Therefore the contestation of the global becomes in itself a strategy to survive in the global market. Local farmers and producers do not control the criterion that defines and provides value to tradition, but they have to negotiate with the institutions that permit and ratify it. They are marginal to the system, but they often personify the virtues of that system: innovation, creativity, efficiency, hard work. For that reason, the Northern League see in these producers the exemplar of local virtue and tradition. While, for many of them the Lega is "like a family" because:

> the Northern League's politicians are extremely concerned with the issues
> that do not benefit our the economic system.

Hence the passage from being "Italian" to "local" is not just related to a nostalgic desire to return to the past. Nostalgia, itself, becomes the object of great economic and symbolic investment. Local artisans embody and symbolize local power in an age of global values, where the local is in itself an important economic resource. Hence, localism and a rural ideology are not just related to provincialism and backwardness, but also to the new opportunities that global markets can offer. The League's investment in the notion of tradition and heritage associated with local values becomes a resource that sustains complements and protects local people's household production.

6.4 Traditional Practices and ideologies in a Modern Industrial District

6.4.1 Learning and Reproducing Locality through the Body

It has often been suggested that a model of work based on rational and quantitative premises would be adopted after the industrialization process (E. Weber 1977). However,

in both ethnographic case studies in the earlier sections, work is not represented as a commodity that is sold, or integrated into a high culture meta-narrative, but as a moral obligation toward the family. This understanding of work reinforces economic role of kinship.[65] Indeed, some analogies can be suggested between the small family factory systems of production and the traditional peasant world. Particularly important is the association between values of sacrifice and hard physical work, traditionally associated with working in agriculture and artisan\small entrepreneurs factories. Maria apologized for presenting herself to us in working clothes, but that was in itself a statement and an affirmation of a moral-political ideology, that led me to identify her as being a *leghista* (an intuition that proved to be right). In spite of the fact that Maria has a higher education and applies it in the practices by which the wine is produced, the farm is managed, the wine is served, and the cars they use, in publicly presenting herself to us in her working outfit, she shows that the enchantment of work is in working in the fields.

The ethnographic material discussed, therefore, seems to contradict the idea that the industrialization process provokes the discontinuity between body and work. E. Weber (1977:483) described that "internalized myths of labour would be replaced by learned skills and norms". Instead, local culture is reproduced through the inculcation in the body in and through industrial productive work. Despite the fact that all small industrial and artisanal work involves new "high technological" skills, the practices by which they were learned, recall the traditional passage of knowledge characteristic of the local peasant universe. New industrial skills do not depend on higher education, but are learned by heart in the factories, and then passed from father to son. Industrial practices are understood as local collective property that is transferred from generation to generation. This seems to be a characteristic of artisans. Herzfeld's ethnographic research among Greek artisans also calls the attention to the "authority of the embodied experience", of the superiority of body over the mind (Herzfeld 2004:6). Herzfeld's reflections recall the League activists' idea that "the value is on practice, experience not on university degrees".

Not all artisans are able to cope with technological innovations. When my car broke down, I took it to Orso Grigio's garage. Although he is extremely gifted with engines, the problem was electrical, and could not be solved without modern technology. He protested against the negative outcome of globalization, complaining that modern cars engines "are more

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[65] Not all local entrepreneurs fall in this model. However, I found this model particularly important for NL activists.

complex in order to make the people more dependent of them". This short story also shows how technological advances question the authority of locally constituted "embodied knowledge", but also local artisan's self pride in manipulating and cheating the system, by fixing things themselves. Yet, because he was not able to fix the car, he told me: "I have a friend that can fix it. You don't need to go the car dealer". He took me to his friend -also an artisan-. His friend was able to fix the problem, saving me a substantial amount of money. When I paid, no *scontrino* (receipt) was given to me. The garage owner, who was introduced to me as a *leghista*, told me in dialect: "I have to feed my family; the state eats too much, if there is a problem you know you can trust me". I trusted him because not to would be to question the honour of Orso Grigio.

The Northern League's "politicization of the body" contributed to the reproduction of the past peasant model as a kind of superior moral philosophy. For the *leghisti,* past peasant practices and values of hard work, sacrifice and their desire for autonomy are not linked with marginality as in the past where the sweat and tiredness resulting from hard physical work found expression in low body positions, which denoted low social position. In contrast, the *leghisti* attribute to these aspects a high moral value and the root of their economic success. In so doing, the *leghisti own* the symbolic and cultural capital which they use proudly to distinguish themselves from the core values of Italian and global society, based as they are on the bourgeois and cosmopolitan model.[66] As Bourdieu (1977) suggests, agents do not just enact culture, but represent and recreate culture in their own ways. For example, once Francesca told me:

> If you passed by the richer man in this *paese*, you will not notice because he looks like a *peasant*, but he has so much money that you do not even understand. Obviously he votes for us.

Francesca's narrative is an interesting example of how local people use political ideology to empower their own practices. Economic success along with Northern League ideology allows *leghisti* to represent rhetorically their modern adaptation of peasant values not as an obligation (low culture), but as an honourable choice (high culture). As a result, in empowering the body's sacrifice, the Northern League made these already diffused local life-styles part of the cultural debate about what it means to be Italian and not to be Italian, and what it means to be Veneto.

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[66] This separation is clear in the distinction between learning through practice and state education. As Keating (2001:28) noted, "education is not merely a mean for economic and social advance. It is an instrument of state building".

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Too great a focus on agency, however, can blind us to the importance of institutional structures. Indeed, it could be suggested that in so strongly combating, and assuming their marginality in relation to the national model, *leghisti* are reinforcing these structures as part of the structuration of their own everyday life, and as a consequence, Italian social identity. In other words, they are reproducing and reinforcing the power structure that in the past classified and represent them as marginal. "The body that rejects those forces" wrote Herzfeld (2004:27), "so often succumbs to their dictates".

6.4.2 Searching for the Whole: The Catholic Spirit of Capitalism and the *Leghismo*

There is a final question that I would like to address is the relationship between local economic practices and local spiritual\religious values. To what extent is the Northern League localist, and northern nationalist ideology, a modern re-interpretation of the past hegemonic Catholic model? It is important that we try and answer this question if we are to understand how the exchange and understanding of identities reflect not only political tensions between local and the national, but also tensions regarding the structuration of local society, an issue that is rarely addressed in previous Northern League studies. In this sense, in this last section, I explored the League's ideology as a mythopoetical attempt to link reason and romanticism into coherent symbolic model. The *leghismo* can be interpreted as a revolt against catholic values (Ginsborg 2001:107), *leghisti* also use re-interpreted diffuse catholic and familiar values in their attempt to link modernity with tradition. Luigi's interpretation of work and its relationship with the family, I believe, provides us with a good starting point:

> Work is linked to the sense of responsibility, to the respect of what has to be done. To the memory of our grandfathers who with work brought us out of poverty and hunger. The new generations grew up with the example and learned how to give value to work and to the community. The working culture is also linked with the Christian culture. In Christian culture, it is important to accumulate and create. To increase [household prosperity] is the natural instinct of continuity, an instinct that leads to the desire to leave something better of what they have received.

Luigi's narrative indicates a strong relation between work ethic, community, and a symbolic structure dominated by Christian\Catholic values. There are some interesting correlations between Luigi's narrative and the idea of work presented, for example, in San Benedict's teachings. Unlike contemplative orders, Benedictine monks were obliged to make a vow to spend their lives in the same monastery. This was part of the philosophy

which held that the relation with God emerged by working the land and remaining in the territory. For Saint Benedict, work and action in the world were the deepest form of meditation and community prayer. Moreover, as described by Magli, Saint Benedict's teachings are concerned with "producing fruits for God". That is, it is a means of guaranteeing men's adoration of God (Magli 2003:86-91). One could go on to suggest that this relation strongly contributed to the development of popular capitalism, since it provided an ideological support for the transformations from peasantry into small scale entrepreneurship. Small scale entrepreneurship was seen as resource to support the key social unit: the family. As argued previously, the Northern League achieved their main success in areas where, in the past, the dominant political party, the DC, emphasized small private property considered as an essential for the development of the family autonomy, and a "rural ideology where peasants were seem as the repositories of authentic tradition" (Stacul 2003:163).

This argument is very appealing. However, it gets into difficulty over the fact that during my fieldwork, local priests also placed strong emphasis on brotherly love, respect for a unified state union and the shared of material goods. Often strong anti-materialist positions were voiced. In the homilies I had the opportunity of witnessing, it was common to hear priests asking people "not to accumulate treasures on earth but in heaven", which to some extent calls to mind various Christian values, and especially that of individual renunciation and sacrifice. I interpreted this anti-materialistic stance as the church's recognition that they are now facing a more secular society, where "new social landscapes in which hard work and opulent patterns of consumption describe the horizons of the world" (Ginsborg 2001:46). In other words, individuals' economic success, and technical rationality seem to become the symbolic core of the society. Luigis's narrative seems to confirm Ginsborg's analysis. His social status is related to the economic success of his family and work is not explained in terms of "producing fruits for God", but more closely related to the need to perpetuate the family, to "accumulating" and "guaranteeing" a safe future to the household.

The emphasis on enterprise and accumulation explains why the Northern League rhetorically linked the 'North' with a protestant ethic and the South with a catholic ethic. Although suggestive, this identification is a misleading ideological construction. The Northern League supporters imagined themselves as part of the Northern industrial countries, but they see themselves as Catholic and reproduce Catholic models. As the

ethnographic data discussed suggests, work is not just seen as an individual activity, but more importantly a social and cooperative practice. The local economic model is based on the competition among different family households which enhances rivalry and competition, but it is also dependent on cooperation in order to be competitive in the global market, which reinforces the idea of "community". Hence, economic exchange becomes part of the process by which the sense of local community and identity is socially reproduced, but also that rivalry and anti-social behaviour is played down (see Heady (1999:118) for a comparison with Carnia past models of village solidarity).

On the other hand, both Catholicism and *leghismo* show a particular concern with the individualization of social relations and the spread of consumerism, that they consider weakens the whole idea of public, shared collective values, threatening the idea of "community". Maria told me that people today "are more egoistic and do not participate as much in local voluntary activities". Enrico, a catholic voter, who coordinates the local voluntary associations, complained to me often in the same vein. Luigi's vigorous defend of the family and its modern pattern of consumption, often complained how modernity was threatening local community traditional values. A good understanding of the tensions between reason romanticism and the use of religion value as a mediator between both is presented in Orso Grigio's work. His two crucifixes pictured below (Images 7.1 and 7.2) show a tension between the ideas of individual accumulation and the values of sacrifice and renunciation in the constitution of the "community".

Image 6.1 Work of Orso Grigio: "Why so much greed? You will never leave alive". [Avidità tanto non ne uscirete vivi] This representation is a re-elaboration of the danger of accumulating treasures on earth and not in heaven. The piece describes Jesus climbing the cross in order to die, in an act of renunciation of the self for the others. When explaining this piece to me, Orso Grigio told me that is was a critique to greed and individualism that in his opinion was destroying local values. "At the end we all die, what do we leave behind? Where do you want to go? He asked me.

Image 6.2Work of Orso Grigio "Destroyed by false values and hypocrisy". [sciacciato da falsi valori e da ipocrisia] Modern society is represented in the press which is slowly destroying traditional community solidarity values. With reference to this artwork, Orso Grigio remarked "Christ taught us the values of altruism, something that in the age of consumerism we are losing".

After a period where the Northern League defended animistic religion and the cult of the territory, and identified itself with the protestant ethic described by Max Weber - in part as a strategy to contest catholic cultural and political hegemony- the League today represents itself as the paladin of the European Christian roots. This happens because the new southerners are often Muslins, but also as shown in Orso Grigio's *bricolage,* the return to Catholicism is an attempt to compose a modern myth that allows linking modernity with local ideologies. Indeed, there is more in common between these two "religions" and their cult of the territory and "community", and family values.

> Maybe the church did not understand us. In the Church the family founded on the matrimony, the hard working culture (*laboriosità*), the criteria that the richness of the nations comes from work, from our hands! [he shows his hands to the crowd] Not from the *toto calcio,* from the financiers, it [richness] comes from work, the richness of the nations! We want the crucifix where our Avi (grandparents) put it. We predicted all these great values, federalism, honesty, but why don't you understand us? It was my protest. Also the church can be wrong, as it was with Galileo Galilei three hundred years ago. I claim the right of being *laico* but deeply Christian. (Federal President of the Venetian League)

It seems therefore that the church thinking on modernization and *leghismo* encompass each other. Both theories are uncomfortable with both modernity and modern forms of scientific governance, economic speculation, as well as with the mass market culture and globalization. So, what makes these understanding of modernity differ? I think a convincing interpretation can be found in the tension between two moral models systems, which as we will see in more detail in the next chapter in the past overlapped, but that now are increasingly separated: masculinity and Christianity. Moral values of self sacrifice and hard work are linked with the assertive masculine values of reproduction, continuity, and protection of the house. Valter a former DC voter and now a *leghista,* was clear when we discussed the relation between masculine values and religion:

> My wife is a Christian and believes in the ideas of brotherly love of giving and helping the poor, of life in community. As a man I know that men have the obligation to go out there and compete in a difficult and harsh world to gain for their families.

As in Luigi's narrative, more important than either religion or the state, the sacrifice of work and competition is an inalienable right to be transmitted to the family, to actual kinship more than to some spiritual version. The reader may like to consider which moral system prevails and gains hegemony over the other. Based on empirical evidence, it is

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likely that people, who support the Northern League, do so partly because of the support the party lends to their sacrificial relation to work to family and kinship, justified primarily in terms of their masculinist ethical code. Indeed, Luigi and several others *leghisti* militants preferred the "traditional" Christian movement of the French Bishop Marcel Lefevre. Lefevre's movement is strongly anti-modern. It advocates the clear primacy of the family and community over the state, and conceives the relation between man and woman as a pyramidal patriarchal structure.[67]

The choice of the masculine model also helps to explain the support for the Northern League's disregard of possible obligations toward the rest of Italian society, which is not considered as part of the family, or the local small *patria*, as much as not sharing the same practices of community. Yet, although *leghisti* desire for self-assertion seems to have partly freed them from obligations of national reciprocity, it has not been freed from all social ties. Undeniably, the attempt to reconstruct these social ties is one of the factors underlying the fabrication of Orso Grigio's crucifixes, but also the *leghisti* emphasis on the importance of local cooperation, and of the sacrifice for the territory, which bring to light the problem of renunciation.

Renunciation and sacrifice in Christianity is associated with purity and altruism, i.e the priestly vow of chastity and poverty. Furthermore, Christian values also see passion, egoism and individualism as dangerous to the unity of the "community". Socially, as Heady (1999) sharply noted in Carnia, Christian values of renunciation were vital in downplaying local rivalries between families, but also to involve the different segments of the society into practices of collective action. We have seen in this chapter how *leghisti* often emphasized collective practices of renunciation. These practices can take place in the form of popular parties where everyone contributed with goods to the community (note that Francesca mentions this in her narrative about the ideal-type peasant entrepreneur who is ready to throw parties, a practice that she identified as typically Veneta. the murals are another important example). These parties, given by the richer entrepreneurs are a strategy through which local people attempts to transcend modern values and affirm their commitment to locally rules and traditional forms of community self identification. This

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[67] On the other hand, the movement strongly repudiates the reforms instituted by Vatican II. This group performs its Mass in Latin, does not accept Vatican II's innovations, and often refuses the existence of the shoah.

local diffuse practice strongly echoes the Northern League public rituals, with its emphasis on the popular environment, and its objective of adoring "the people" as a strategy to play down local rivalries and unify the "community".

Giordano (2001) pragmatically argued that with the creation of Padania the Northern League represented "the losers of modernization". This is partly true, given the climate of economic fear in the region. Yet, it is clear that for the *leghisti*, northern nationalism, and the adoration of territory, is not just an attempt to protect economic assets, but also has to be understood as a need to recover the religious value of sacrifice and renunciation, as central in the structuration of modern culture and society. In other words, it is an attempt to mythically reconstruct the community as whole that encompasses and informs local people's social life.

6.5 Conclusion: The Economy of Identities
In this chapter, I started by asking to what extent did the process of industrialization contribute to the reproduction of local models of social identity. With the fact that labour was mobilized in novel ways, it should be expected that the models by which social identity was imagined would change between local models into national ones. Indeed, many of the participants in this extraordinary and continuing upheaval seem to have passed from being localists into Italians, then once again became localists and later northern nationalists (Padanian). The production, exchange, circulation and creation of identities, however, are closely related with the interpretation given by some local agents to economic practices. The economy is importantly linked with internal family organization and with the house, but also with the relationships between families and local society. Small entrepreneurs integrate tight local economic networks in order to be able to compete in the world market. Local cooperation and exchange with international markets makes this economic process "autonomous" of the nation state intervention. Indeed, I suggested this local cooperation resembles past patterns of village solidarity, and in so doing it reproduced a model of "community" identification similar to Durkheim's notions of mechanical solidarity.

The new social division of labour and the needs of the local productive system were used to claim more autonomy from the nation state. In a time, where the global economy is becoming increasingly local (Herzfeld 2004), the local networks find in the League's federal proposals an important attempt to adapt to the new global economic challenges

either regarding modernization and technology, the bureaucratic production of tradition, or the protection of the local economic structure from new economic competitors. In this sense first ethnicity and then the northern national identities were important mechanisms of political struggle, and expressed the need to adapt to new practical and economic realities. Yet, as the ethnographic material discussed in this chapter shows, the construction and understanding of local identity through economic practices is not just an expression of the struggle for material values, but also one of the most critical instruments through which individuals attempted to deal with their own social contradictions. This contrasts with Holmes's (1989) analysis of peasant workers in Friuli Venezia Giulia, where tradition and local identity was used as a refuge from modernization and bureaucracy. It seems to me that the *leghismo* is seen by individuals as a strategy to integrate new material practices and principles, past practices of economic cooperation and spiritual values into a new community "mythical" whole.

This need of a new community, and the economic transformations should have set the scene for the re-emergence of Italian nationalism. Nationalism is normally seen as "response to modernization" (Keating (2001:3). However, as we have seen, it seems that local economic practices for the *leghisti* are not interpreted following the Italian high code model, but following a re-creation of Northern League model based on what was traditionally thought as "low culture" (dialect, learning through the body, catholic family values, attachment to local symbols (food)). The ethnographic data discussed shows that in being confronted with different external models of identity that attempt to replace and address the possible disruption of old patterns of solidarity and collective identity, *leghisti* choose, and use, the ones that better reflect their cultural universe and their social needs. The Northern League's construction of northern ethnicity and their national paradigm based on what was previously perceived as "low and rural culture", socially empowers individuals, who although they have economic capital and are able to acquire symbols of modern prestige (cars, houses etc)- are perceived as marginal within the Italian "high" culture-.

In this sense, the League takes advantage of the national state's incapacity to capture and embody the existent values of local communities. The rejection of Italian nationalism however can be seen in a two fold way. On the one hand the state is eroded by global and economic change, and is not able to provide adequate answers. On the other hand, it is not

able to propose a model of that is similar to local people's pre-existing culture and practices of imagining the "community". In not being able to do so, it is unable to provide a comprehensive symbolic answer to a society in fast transition and change. The rejection of Italian nationalism is not related to the fact that Italian nationalism was "imposed" coercively on local people, but with the need of keeping a "pre-modern" symbolic system. Ironically, this model, as the art of Orso Grigio's shows, is not able anymore to guarantee local society from entering into anomie, given the fact that this anomie is provoked not by Italian nationalism, but by local people's own responses to new economic realities.

Chapter 7

Padroni a Casa Nostra: Masculinity and Political Authority

The government of a house is a monarchy, since one governs the whole house, while the political government is exercised by those who are free and equal. (Aristotle 1998:6)

The father is the Law. Our country has never succeeded in identifying with the law. [Italy never found a] paternal image [but remained] a confederation of uncles, with an indulgent mother, the church. (Umberto Eco in Borneman 2004:19)

7.1 Introduction

In this final chapter, I investigate the relationship between local men's *habitus* and Northern League political ideology. I am primarily concerned with what leads local men to see in Borghezio's and Bossi's contestation of the Italian political system (Ciampi), the projection of their own voices, and the representation of the need to reorder both local society and the nation state. During my fieldwork most of the Northern League supporters that I interviewed, or had the opportunity to discuss politics with, were lower status men in their forties and up to their seventies. These mainly included manual workers, small scale artisans and small entrepreneurs. Discourse about politics and the territory normally pervades the lives of these men and their belonging and affiliation to the Northern League is considered a motive of pride and public empowerment. The League's emphasis on autonomy and control over the territory reflects local men's own perceptions of themselves as autonomous, free and wild. When talking with local men in the bar, they often emphasized their will of not submitting their autonomy to any external authority, of not being "*dipendenti*" [dependent]. The political debate often did not reproduce any classic ideology of left or right that local men associate with an external national code. "The Northern League is not for the left or the right, we are for the territory".

The starting point of this investigation, however, was the discovery that many local men see in the League a northern, nationalist rhetoric, and Bossi's strong, authoritarian and patricentric leadership as an attempt to link local pre-modern structures of authority with modern political power institutions, such as the state or the region. The League's masculine and virile rhetoric on the other, is seen as an attempt to address the erosion of local male traditional authority and control over both the house and the territory. The need to recover control over the territory is related to the idea of the past society as "ordered" and "stable",

where the status of a "good man" was affirmed through his hard work and strength, but also where "community" boundaries were controlled by local men (Heady 1999, Stacul 2003).

The key metaphor, *padroni a casa nostra* (masters in their own house), epitomizes the need to recover political control, and guaranteeing local social cohesion by reestablishing authority over local and national society. As in Gorale in South-Western Poland studied by Pine (1996) also in Belluno, the house is an important metaphor for "correct social order". Indeed, the discussion in the previous chapter on economy echoes Pine's findings in Poland. She (1996:445) describes a double representation of the house. One is a "timeless moral economy, based on kinship and reciprocity, and reinforced through ritual." The other "situates the house economy against the state economy, and the ritual of the house against those of the Church and the State is sometimes complementary but more frequently antagonistic". The ideology of the house for the *leghisti* expresses the conflict between the imagination of the community as an expression of localized social values, and the passage into a more complex society based on official and bureaucratic norms. As Pierre Bourdieu (1998:130) wrote:

> The idea of a little differentiated and stabile society, noted Hegel, corresponds to the "concrete liberty of being-in-its-house", in what it is, on a deep relation between habitus and habitat. Between a vision of the world and the myth that constitutes that vision of that same world. (my translation)

The house provides an alternative model of political authority and social identity, which is seen as an important response to external changes. For the *leghisti* the desire to "become, again, boss in my own house" and to "be free" is an attempt to reconstruct the "wholeness" of community lost with modernization. This, along with the villages' bureaucratic integration in the nation state significantly changed the locals' relationship with the territory. In this sense, the ideology of the house is not just an important symbol of social order, but also a powerful metaphor of political authority. As Stacul (20003:165) pointed out, male dominance in the household comprised also the political responsibility for a unified community. Among the *leghisti* that I had the opportunity of interviewing there is a strong conviction that the return to more traditional forms of authority would guarantee order and unity. By contrast, there is a commonly held view that further integration in the modern Italian state, and the increase for example of bureaucratization and immigration, will increase social anomy and disorder. Thus, in these terms it is possible to understand the Northern League's action as a movement that tries to defend the community's (house)

boundaries against the state's incapacity to guarantee the security of the territory (Cohen 1985).

Hence in this final chapter, I continue my exploration of the interaction between Northern League identity construction and local practices by focusing on the relationship between the party ideology, local masculine idioms, and the metaphor of the house as a model of society. I start with the description of the idioms and symbols that local men, in particular *leghisti*, use to define themselves as men. I then analyze the role of traditional authority and the territory as an extension of the house, by focusing on the figure of the father. Finally, I indicate the connections between local men's perceptions of domestic authority and the League's exclusivist ideology and rejection of the other.

7.2 The Pantheon of the *Leghista*: The Artistic Representation of Manhood

Perhaps the most appropriate way to start this exploration is by looking at the idioms, and symbols, that local men use to define their masculinity and their connection with *leghismo*. The local masculine universe, as elsewhere in the Alpine Arc, consists of the separation between household control and public domain. The household is associated with trust and affection. The outside world is linked with competition and rivalry (Heady 1999, Stacul 2003). An interesting representation of these masculine idioms, and their association with being *leghisti*, is presented in Orso Grigio's garden outside his house. The statues blend political interpretations with traditional masculine ideals.

Imagine 7.1 Orso Grigio's Statues and panoramic view of his Garden

On the left side there is a statue of a grey bear [Orso Grigio]. The inscription reads in local dialect: "*Libertà, Al Gen Dur Ti Daghe na Man*" [trans: Libertà It is Hard and comes\is inscribed in your hands]. In the middle there is a column. The column is composed of a piece of concrete, and in the middle, there is marble plaque written in Italian that reads: "Column to the defunct *Buon Senso* that was the pillar of our ancestors' lives, will it ever Ressurrect?" [trans: Colonna alla memoria del defunto BUON SENSO che fu pilastro di vita dei nostri avi 'RISORGERA'?]. On the top of the column there is an iron statue of Jesus Christ fabricated by Orso Grigio. The statue represents Jesus Christ carrying a cross on his back [as in episode of the passion] and on the top of the cross there is a candle. On the bottom of the column there is an old plough. The statue on the right represents a winged lion (symbol of the former Republic of Venice) that holds a she wolf (symbol of Rome) by the neck. On the back of the Lion there is rusty sword inside a stone, a representation of the fable of Excalibur and King Arthur. In one side of the sword is written "Padania where the brave cry, Veneto where the cowards laugh".

7.2.1 The Idioms of Masculinity: Hardness and Closeness

Local men see themselves as *dur* (hard). Hardness is related with the memories of living and surviving in an ecologically difficult and harsh environment: the mountain. The idiom of hardness is also related to the understanding of personal and moral qualities. In Carnia, Heady (1999:75) noted that a man is *dur* "if he resists the criticisms and sentimental appeals of others and concentrates instead on looking after his own family interests". However, hardness should not just be understood as a local characteristic, but also as a relational idiom. For example, the polenta (maize dumpling) is understood as a hard food, when in contrast with the *pasta* that is seem as soft, and is linked with *Italianess*. Being hard is also used to differentiate local models of masculinity from national ones. Local League activists tend to think of themselves as less intellectual and sophisticated than Italians, but more autonomous. "We are not intellectuals; we are practical people who work hard."

The concept of being tough is symbolically related with a second important local idiom defining masculinity, and the Bellunese in general. Local men are *chiusi* [close]. In the local symbolic universe the bear is the animal associated with the idioms of closeness and anti-social behaviour (Heady 1999:163 Stacul 2003:106). The bear is associated with closeness because it lives autonomously in the wild woods. Being a bear is also associated by local men, and in particular *leghisti*, with the fact that they do not have "fine manners" (Stacul 2003). Closeness, however, has other meanings. In Carnia, Heady (1999:76) notes that closeness is related to the men's need of protecting their houses and property from

competition (see also Stacul (2003:50-51) on Trentino).[68] Moreover, to be close is also associated with their apprehension toward strangers and is often used to differentiate local from Italian identity: "We are Italians, different though, we are more closed", Valter told me.

The bear as a representation of the wilderness and closure of men is normally contrasted with the ideas of domination and hierarchy associated with domestic animals, such as sheep, which living in a flock are "controlled by and dependent on" the shepherd (the Catholic metaphor is not a coincidence), and the pig - associated with the domestic domain. In the Carnian context, Heady suggested that pig-killing is associated with male domination over women and nature (1999:162-163). In the Portuguese context, traditional pig-killing obeyed a strict separation between men and women. While men collectively fight, kill, and then open and process the pig meat (opening the pig contrasts with the closeness of the bear), the women clean the interior part of the pig such as the intestines, cook it, and prepare it to make ham and salami. It is common during the pig-killing ritual, to see men constantly bossing women and accusing them of being slow and incapable, practices that Heady also describes in Carnia. While the bear is associated with wild nature, with the attitude that men should have in confronting the outside world, sheep and pigs are associated both with the symbolic understanding of domestic life and with the prevalence of male hardness over women's softness, and with the control of nature.

Image 7.2 Paintings presented in a Northern League party in Treviso. The painting on the left represents the lion of Saint Marc, symbol of the Liga Veneta. The picture of the right represents men dominating and preparing to traditionally kill a pig.

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[68] Outside Orso Grigio's house there is a plate that clearly expresses the idiom of closeness: "God Bless the ones that think in their own facts." [trans: Dio benedica coloro che pensano ai fatti suoi].

The association with the bear can have other interpretations. In Belluno, as in almost all the Alpine arc, there are no more wild bears. The bear became a symbol of the ordered and well structured past, of the "old days". Its disappearance could symbolize the passage from an ordered and closed world where nature was integrated with society, to one where nature has become appropriated by society. In Trentino local people associated the beginning of their village to the death of the last bear (Stacul (2003:72). He pointed out that "when the last bear was killed men (…) appropriated nature; which symbolizes the end of the state of "wilderness". Thus, the death of the last bear was seen by local men as the founding myth of the village.

Local male identification with the bear, may symbolize something different. The bear is understood as a memory of local tradition and heritage. It is associated with the traditional representations of manhood that link male identity as closer to nature and to the territory than to society and the (high) nation state culture. I recall an Italian literature lesson during which the professor commenting on the fact that the majority of the audience was composed of women, told me: "local boys prefer to go to the mountain and hunt *camoccio* (mountain goat)". With this affirmation he was linking the local village men to nature, and to the rough wilderness (low), while Italian literature was associated with the civilized nation state (high-society). In addition, the bear could be understood as a metaphor to explain local men's gain of political conscience. The bear hibernates, which is seen as a representation of the time when local men "lost their identity". Indeed, many local men that support the League refer to their becoming *leghisti* as a "waking up to reality", "returning to be what they are" or "gaining conscience". As a result the bear symbolizes the past with the appropriation of men over nature, but it is also the expression of the desire to return back to the time when the territory was closed and therefore controlled by local men.

7.2.2 Defending the Territory: the Lion and the Celtic Warrior

The animal which embodies the quality of waking up and demanding control over the territory is the lion. The image of the lion of Saint Marc is often presented on monuments and buildings in the main cities in Veneto, memorializing the old domination of the Republic of Venice. In Orso Grigio's pantheon the lion is a representation of the historical time when the Veneto was a bounded territory, and was "governed by Veneti". The lion, on the other hand, is also a representation for local males of virility, hardness and courage. During my first meeting with League members in the party's office, a supporter pointed to

a picture of the Padanian lion (green winged and with an aggressive look), and miming a lion with his claws opened and ready to attack, told me with irony in dialect: "*Il leone magna il terron*" [the lion eats the southerner]. Thus, the lion is also associated with the local men's perception that they must defend their private property (territory) and community boundaries against invasion by both Southerners and the nation state (represented by she-wolf, immigrants), and today by immigrants that local men believe "separate themselves from the community, and do not respect the native rules".

The League's exclusionary view owes much of its appeal to the need that locals feel to "close down" the territory (to immigrants), in order to protect local communities and intimate group identity. In excluding the other and presenting itself as the defender of the local identity intimate boundaries, the League seem in this way to echo past models of community life, where locally born and bred people fully dominated the territory. We can see these ideas ironically articulated in the following mural painted on the outside wall of Orso Grigio's house, where he depict himself as a Celtic warrior.

Image 7.3 Mural outside Orso Grigio House. Orso Grigio is represented as a Celtic warrior with a shield with the Sun of the Alps (icon that represents Padania). Below the shield is written: "live for your own and others' freedom" [vivi per la tua e altrui libertá].

The exhortation of "live to be free" for Orso Grigio- as for many Northern League supporters- is understood as an expression of the need to liberate their territory from outside interference. The Celtic warrior does not just correspond to an evocation of a past historical period that anticipates the emergence and expansion of the Italian nation state. Celts are representatives of the Germanic tribes that fought the Romans, but also in the imagination of northern men as part of the Nordic Germanic races. The association of this

Celtic autonomous tradition with the North contributes further to the structuring of the division between the Northern tradition of autonomy and community self management, the lazy southerners and the civilized nation state.

In depicting himself as a Celtic warrior Orso Grigio, shows how social actors see political ideologies through the prism of their own personal experiences and ideologies. Symbols, as Turner (1975), Kertzer (1989) and Habermas (2004) have observed, are not something that can simply be imposed. They gain meaning through a process of association of ideas and categories. In Carnia, Heady put up a strong case against those who insist on understanding nationalist constructions just in terms of imposition of inauthentic images or inventions. Instead, he followed a theoretical understanding similar to the one I have been proposing in this thesis, by drawing attention to the link between local ideologies and the symbols proposed. Regarding the Celtic imaginary in particular, Heady (1999:222) argued that the Celt was associated by local men in Carnia with local ideals of assertive and hard masculinity, and self representations as self-sufficient, free and wild. These representations of masculinity are common in other mountainous environments, for instance among the Gorale in the Polish mountains. Pine (1996:444) described how local mountain people, when in contact with outsiders, consciously perpetuated these stereotypical images as wild and autonomous (see also for example, Herzfeld 1985, Stacul 2003).

The differentiation between Celts and Italians is clearly present in the Northern League's ritual practices. One would expect that being a "right wing movement" that places strong emphasis on order and authority the League parades should have a geometrical and (serious) military quality. As described by Giardina and Vauchez (2000) and Mosse (2006), discipline-as-virtue was incorporated through the Fascist and Nazis march. The Fascist march was intended to create a feeling of compactness, representing the union of "the people" around the key national symbols and leaders. The Northern League organization and ceremonial performance, however, is grounded on the idea of spontaneity, and as more playful and ironic touch to it. As noted in chapter four, League leaders and militants seem to have fun depicting themselves in mainstream representations as "barbarians", wild and low. In so doing, League ritual performances reflect local men's self representation as independent and free, and their quest to reorder the state, but also to defend their homeland, their small patrias (village, mountain) communitarian organization. The slogan of Pontida:

"brothers under the free sun", clearly represents this cult of individual freedom that so well fits with local men's perceptions of themselves.

7.2.3 The Politics of Manhood

Northern League medieval (Celtic) and chivalry mythology (honour, strength, autonomy) is to some extent "truer" to local men's own view of themselves, than the alternative appeal of "high" Italian culture. Indeed, the League does not ask local men to change their models of identification, or ideology, but instead asks them to wager on their own strength, to be hard, and autonomous. Yet, the representation of the Celt does not owe its appeal solely to its historical value and to the embodiment of assertive masculinity. It also emphasizes the idea that northern men are racially (meaning culturally) different from other Italians due to the fact that they live in a harsh and hard environment. (Heady and Stacul each describe a similar use of the idiom of race as a metaphor for "the local").

The Northern League is able to draw on this deep-rooted understanding. In fact, I would argue that Umberto Bossi bases part of his political charisma and leadership precisely upon the manipulation of these local ideas. His harsh and crude voice, aggressive body language, use of phallic and sexist language, and the feminization of opponents, created a style known as *celodurismo* (ce-lo-ho-*duro*\ I-have-it-hard).[69] As result, League representatives have to be hard and strong, which means being immune to cosmopolitan ideals of modern democracy and society (Ciampi).

Image 7.4 Poster of the Northern League. In local dialect is written: Do not give up be hard. [*mai mula tegn dur*] Against Rome the Thieve. Note the explicit use of the idea of *dur* and the cold aesthetic of the warrior.

During the protest against Ciampi, Borghezio's rude manners, wild gestures and crude vernacular language, corresponds to a successful and convincing performance of (Celtic)

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[69] The sexual anology (the hard penis as a sign of toughness, power and determination) is obvious here..

wildness. Borghezio does not just have to be a "hard" man and a Northern League leader, but has to be good at both. This empirical reality has strong resemblances with Michael Herzfeld's (1985:11) definition of the poetic of manhood in the Cretan mountains:

> A successful performance of personal identity concentrates the audience's attention on the performance in itself: the implicit claims are accepted because their very outrageousness carries a revelatory kind of conviction. It is this self-allusiveness of social performances, and in the concomitant back grounding of everyday considerations, that we can discern a poetics of social interaction.

Not every Northern League member recognizes itself in this type of political performance. Indeed, many see these performances with irony. When I asked League members about Borghezio's and Bossi's blunt communication strategy, they described it euphemistically as "colourful language". For them the use of "colourful language" is generally interpreted as a symbol of authenticity and purity. On the other hand, such talk is also understood as a powerful desecration of the façade of power. Their understanding of the Northern League's emphasis on masculine performance, therefore, is similar to what Bourdieu called inter-practical comprehension, since: "each individual finds in the other's behaviour the legitimization of his own behaviour" (Bourdieu 1998:128).

Performances of manhood are also important within the movement itself. Being a politician and having power strongly disrupts the local ideal of equality and "community" solidarity so important among *leghisti*. *Leghisti* see politicians as representations of corruption and deceit. Thus, manhood has to be performed and exhibited in order to guarantee the mystification and legitimization of power. The politician that is hard places himself on the same level as the militants, which avoids more delicate issues of social or class hierarchy, which the majority of the *leghisti* insistently denied during interviews. The greater the risk, the challenge and defiance towards, for example, state institutional representatives, the more popular is the politician among the *leghisti*. Therefore, if they fail to consistently, actively and publicly represent this ideal type, Northern League leaders can lose part of their political authority. A good example of this loss of power is shown by the leader of the Northern League in the province of Belluno. Vaccari, an educated man and president of the Rotary Club, was elected Mayor of Feltre, and later expelled from the League after failing to support the "hard" leader Bruno, when the party asked him to stand as MP in Vaccari's constituency.

After losing the elections Bruno resigned and Belluno was without a provincial secretary. Yet, after having being expelled from the party, Vaccari was invited to take Bruno's place as provincial secretary. For a large number of *leghisti*, Vaccari represents an insult to the League's masculinist ideal type of Northerner. They express a profound distaste by calling him an "infiltrato" (mole). Sometimes during our dialogues they asked me with disdain: "who is he"? Orso Grigio who does not often forget Vaccari's political betrayal asked me: "does he look like a real *leghista* to you?" I think the idea of "look" emerges as clearly important for the identification of and with the leader. "A *leghisti* is one that makes noise *(fa casino)*, that bangs with his fists on the table. These ones that we have in Belluno are they really *leghisti*"? Giovanni asked me. As Bourdieu argues in his use of the term "hexis" (Bourdieu 1977), correct gesture, posture and movement is very important – especially in the context of a movement where authority is grounded on the idea of identification.

The contradictions of Vaccari's leadership were exposed during a lunch with Northern League militants and a League national MP. Vaccari kept a low profile during the day. In the middle of the lunch, he left the restaurant in order to support the Rotary activities in favour of immigrant children. League members ironically told me that "he has identity problems". For these supporters, Vaccari's hexis, his fine manners, his cosmopolitan style, the fact that he speaks very correct Italian, as well as the way he walks and carries his body are perceived as non-hard, as the opposite of *dur*. Furthermore, Vaccari, in contrast with Orso Grigio and other Northern League politicians does not visit the local *osterie* (bar).[70]

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[70]The president of the province of Treviso told me: "Do you want to understand the Lega? Then go the bar -- that is the Lega! The bar allowed the creation of a strong empathy between men, and reinforced the idea of a movement of equals, of people that are "like us". Normally frequented by low class men, the bar is place of leisure. The body, tired from work, is now able to relax and release pent-up emotions. Men normally sit with their legs open, bang the tables when arguing or playing cards, and rest the body against the bar while waiting for a drink. The discussions are sometimes held in exuberant gestures, about who is going to pay the next round of ombre [small glass of wine]. All these behaviours are normally excluded from the national cosmopolitan ethos, and reinforced an ideal of local cultural intimacy. Cultural intimacy is defined by Herzfeld in the following way: those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provides insiders with their assurance of common sociality. It consists in those alleged national traits that offer citizens a sense of defiant pride in the face of a more formal or official morality (Herzfeld 1997:3) In the past, it was also the place where local problems were discussed among men, and decisions were taken. Yet, although the osteria express an ideology of equality, the central ideas that compose manhood, but also a true *leghista*: hardness, closeness, strength are permanently questioned. As Almeida (2000:189) argued masculinity is a competitive and hierarchical model, and because of it includes the aspect of femininity on it. For example often men try to feminize other men, or question their strength, by trying to invade their intimate physical\moral space. While the spectrum of homosexuality puts into to question the idea of hardness (homosexuals are normally called *froci*, which is the opposite of hard). The invasion of male physical space puts in question the idea of closeness and the strength required to defend their boundaries from unwelcome outsiders.

His absence from the local "male house" increases his distance from the grass roots. Thus, it is not a coincidence that Vaccari is related with both the feminine and domestic universe, and also with the national values of intrigue, corruption and compromise that the Lega stands against. The man that is good at being a *leghisti* is considered to be closer to nature and to the territory, than to culture and the Italian national hierarchy model. The life of the bar, the use of the local dialect, the hard and harsh voice, and body posture symbolize this self-representation as a *leghisti*. This explains why, for Orso Grigio, with Vaccari, "the Lega in Belluno was domesticated".

The following ethnographic story illustrates the perceived moral superiority of a League MP. Despite being a Roman parliamentarian, through the use of masculine performance and the contact with the militants, Dozzo was able to renovate his political authority. After a meeting where I briefly met the president of the Treviso province and some regional counsellors, League leaders had dinner with the militants in a small local restaurant owned by a *leghista* Some *leghisti* explained to me that their MP came to "report the activities that were taking place in the parliament, and what had been made for the territory". Their understanding of the situation suggested a control over their representatives' work. Importantly, it also implies their understanding of their representative as equal, as a direct expression of themselves.

The dinner took place in an atmosphere of great informality. Dozzo took the central position on the table the other people sat around him. This centrality was not a simple choice. While the group was eating he increasingly became the centre of the attention. He did so by telling stories about the Northern League's activities in parliament and giving hints of Bossi's state of health. Strong sarcasm was used to make fun of the Roman politicians and some secret stories about the parliament backstage were told to the audience. The shared confidentiality and his harsh and crude commentaries show that he was good at being "a normal man", one of "the people". Laughing at others successfully created a sense of group intimacy. As Almeida (2000) notes in the Portuguese context, men with humour have a higher status. Through this performance Dozzo was able to reaffirm his political authority and power, and in this way, to renovate the *fides* that Northern League militants gave him.[71]

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[71]The fides, as Bourdieu (1991:167) indicates, implies the total delegation of power, by which the militants give the party an unlimited credit For example Luca Zaia and the Mayor of Treviso Gentillini, known as the xerife, are often presented in the local parties, or making security rounds with people. In so doing they reaffirm their authority as the direct expression of the people's will. This capacity to embody and perfume these ideals is what

Dozzo was, therefore, able to deliver a convincing and strong male performance. The dinner passed noisily, almost frenetically as the men drank, ate and laughed together. The central participation of Dozzo was encouraged and reinforced the feeling of community, of equality. The conception of equality has interesting links with Papataxiarchis' (1991:172) analysis of *kefi*[72] in the Greek village of Mora:

> The kefi represents a point of view and a rationality that is different from, not to say antithetical to the rationality of status and role; it is part of the anti-structure, especially appealing to lower class men, who experience as impositions the hierarchical structure of state, work and domesticity.

Sharing food, talking and drinking in such intimate environment represents therefore a contrast with "modern" forms of political organization, based on ideas of formality and social stratification. The local group identity, but also the process of political legitimization based on status, is therefore internalized in the process of social interaction. In a more intimate party that took place in Treviso, I observed that Bossi adopted similar practices. After he gave a public speech using a microphone, Bossi left the stage and sat down at the table speaking and drinking with other *leghisti*. Roland told me that:

> Bossi is strong when on stage but when he is among the supporters he is like a friend in the bar, if he were in good health he would sit down close to you and tell you what you needed to know. In the past he would stay for hours talking with us after the speech, sometimes until four or five am. This is why Bossi is not like the other political leaders.

As suggested in chapter four Bossi's authority is grounded on this capacity of being one "the people", of being among "the people", and these practices legitimize him to be the one guides "the people" (Biorcio 1997). On the other hand, Bossi's model of patricentric authority, a central ideal of *leghisti* solidarity, is based on fictive kinship models. This "shared relationship" echoes local mens understanding of local models of equality and solidarity and the definition of political authority based on status. For local men this is also a strategy to control the politicians. As the example of Vaccari's performance shows, impersonal and bureaucratic practices of power (he is the provincial secretary) does not grant him the legitimacy "to rule", and can actually reinforce political dissent and competition. The contestation by Dozzo and Bossi of modern hierarchy codes through the

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makes in part the Northern League so strong in Treviso, and concurrently so weak in Belluno. In Belluno the figure of Bossi is more important than any of the local leaders.

[72]*Kefi* is a word that is hard to translate. However, it can be understood as meaning the spirit of joy, passion, enthusiasm, high spirits, or frenzy.

hard and wild practices on the stage and friendly practices on the bar is capable of reinforcing the intimacy of the group.

7.3 Strength, Self-Sacrifice and the 'Death of the Father'

7.3.1 The ideology of Strength and Self Sacrifice

Hardness and closeness combined are also an expression of the idioms of autonomy and self-reliance. Among *leghisti* a "true man" is one that has the strength to make his "own path," and that is "free". In Orso Grigio's pantheon, strength is symbolized by the plough and Jesus carrying the cross. The idiom of strength is reminiscent of the traditional local status and honour model, where the male status is associated with the local men's capacity to support hard labour (Heady 1999, Stacul 2003). Yet, the idiom of strength still pervades the life of local men. To define someone as a good man, local people say that he is *forte* (strong) which is in contrast to the Italian idea of *bravo (capable)*. The association between strength, hardness and autonomy is evident in the title (in dialect) of statue of the bear: "freedom is hard and comes\is inscribed in your hands". For local men that support the League, autonomy is strongly associated with working "with their hands" and not depending on outside help or "friends". In fact, Orso Grigio, Vincenzo and other *leghisti* often showed their hands to me and said: "You see I have calluses on my hands". For them, this hard skin is the embodiment of masculine strength and it is interpreted as a link between personal and political identity.[73]

However, the change in the local economic infra-structure is perceived to have diminished local male honour code, based on strength. Both Vincenzo and Orso Grigio strongly criticized young males' dependence on factory work. Young males are often accused of not being strong and hard enough to start their own business or to survive on their own. Vincenzo told me "I worked in the factory for a while, but I don't like receiving orders, I prefer to be autonomous and so I opened a small business". Both Vincenzo and Orso Grigio are small artisans that after some experience as dependent workers [*dipendenti*] decided to open small artisan shops (as carpenter and mechanic). The characterization of friendship and *leghismo* imply therefore *an* independence from any "favor".[74] Thus, for

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[73] I recall here Cota intervention in chapter four where he claimed that it was work "that made then strong!" On the other hand, in the previous chapter when comparing the church and the leghismo the League leader showed his hands to the crowd, saying that the richness of the nations "comes from hard work".

[74] Indeed, often *leghisti* told me with pride that the Northern League was self funded, and that in order to belong to the party the titles do not matter, what was important was to work.

them strength and hard work are linked with the cultivation of their masculine autonomy. Marco, who was presented to me by Orso Grigio as "true *leghista*" told me:

> When I closed my business I could use my contacts and my friends. However, because I am *leghista*, I preferred to work with my hands, to sacrifice myself as a metal mechanic. I work hard [faccio il culo pero giro a testa alta]. However I walk with my head high. If I had used my contacts then I would not be a true *leghista*. You must move forward with your strength, you cannot be "recommended", I would be ashamed. I would have behaved as the ones we criticized.

A more cynical interpretation of Marco's option might associate his older age and absence of modern and high skills as the reason that forced him to work as a metal mechanic. However, as Orso Grigio highlighted Marco kept his honour as a "true *leghista*". His decision to work as a metal mechanic demonstrates his strength of character. This does not mean, however, that several other *leghisti* do not use the League as a service or a patron. For example, Marcelo's brother was kidnapped in Venezuela. Through his contacts with party members in Rome he was able to have his brother's situation discussed in parliament, which contributed to a successful resolution of the problem. A more ambiguous situation took place in the case of Andrea. Andrea entered the Lega at a later stage because at the beginning "the Lega was not mature enough". He was able, through his contacts with League parliamentarians to gather resources to construct a local facility for children with disability (his son suffered from it). Despite the humanitarian cause, it was often suggested to me by other militants that Andrea was "using the Lega", and that he had became "dependent, because he was not able to rely on his own strength". As result, he lost his autonomy in relation to those in power.

Hard work and strength are, therefore, related to another important masculine idiom: that of self-abnegation. Although, as suggested in previous chapters, men consider themselves as godless, the idioms that they use to define themselves have strong correspondence in Christian mythology. This relationship is impressively embodied in the figure of Jesus presented in the *buon senso* column. The piece shows the identification between local men and the notion of Christian self-sacrifice (see Heady 1999). In addition, it confirms the relationship between the notion of purity, strength and the sacrifice of the body. Hence the heavy cross that Jesus carries on his back symbolizes not only the weight of representing tradition, but also moral strength.

When we were discussing the meaning of the piece, Orso Grigio told me to look beneath the statue's clothes. Under the skirt there are two iron testicles. He told me in Italian "it means *non rompere le palle*" [do not break my balls]. In the Portuguese masculine context, the testicles are the place where masculinity is corporeally grounded and symbolized (Vale Almeida (2000:92). In Belluno a man that has *contro palle di sasso* [having balls like a stone] is considered to be hard, coherent and self-sufficient. The embodiment of masculine values on the testicles, on the other hand, suggests that honour and coherence are heavy to carry. This difficulty relates to the way *leghisti* describe themselves, given the fact that they have to be capable of resisting the society's modern temptations, but also strong criticism and incomprehension.

7.3.2 House, Sacrifice and Male Reciprocity

The representation of the episode of the passion gives rise to an important paradox. As we have seen, being *dur* and *chiuso* is associated with male individualistic attitudes, with the need to blaze their own trail and to support their families. In Carnia, Heady (1999) links these values with the need of local men to compete in a difficult environment to provide to their families (see also Stacul 2003). Yet, the idea of self sacrifice also symbolically represents local men as placing energy at the disposal of others. A good example of this paradox was the process by which houses were constructed in the past. Local men think and talk a great deal about owning their own house. When I discussed with local men their experience of emigration, *leghisti* often emphasized hard work because of what they called the local "cult of the house".

> Hard work was very important because of another particular aspect: the culture of the house. We inherited the culture of the house of our *avi* (grandparents.)- *Guai dimenticare!*- [It is important not to forget it!] The fields let us say, gave us 80% to live. So when people used to come back [from migrations] they would prepare to build the house. They would prepare the rocks, the sand, they would talk with the other men to help them. The culture of the house, so, their main objective was to live (eat) and to have a roof. His own roof though! (tetto sopra la testa... Suo pero!) My father spent his whole life working for the house, his father lived for it (the house). They all worked during the day to save the little money that they made for the house. Let's say that... that 97% was for the house. (Alberto)

> The thought of the male and family chief is to build a house. You know it is not as it used to be. There is not the solidarity of the past. They would say in dialect. Will you make me the house a *Piodec*. *Piodec* means that so many friends that probably worked abroad, when they would come back they would help you construct the house for free. One colleague would build you the house, and then you would help him building theirs. This is something

that today does not exist, that united the family and friends. Today we are
becoming egoists. There is not the brotherhood of the past (Eros).
[Then his wife intervenes] Not that the local civil parish (commune) would
help, no that was between friends. Today I build, tomorrow you build. I will
help you. Do you understand? We exchanged labour time.

Pine (1996:444) suggested that the house ideology was a useful mechanism to understand the shifting relationships between European peripheral and marginal rural areas and political centres. As in the Gorale, also in Belluno, the stress put on economic reciprocity and work cooperation is channelled through the house, and is imbued with a powerful sense of morality. The house is also used as a symbol of the conflict with extra-local institutions such as the state. The following story is particularly relevant. When explaining to me the difference between the North and the South, Valter noted that due to the difficult environmental conditions in the North the house was central, and this impelled local men to work harder and self-sacrifice. In the South, Valter argued, the warm weather made the house less crucial for survival. The metaphor of the house is therefore used to justify the difference between North and South, but also the understanding that more political and economic autonomy by the state should be given to the (Northern) provinces.

The practices, through which the houses were constructed in the past therefore operate as a metaphor for the conflict between the state and local communities. Indeed, the construction of the house is presented as a symbol of the "local community autonomy" in relation to outside forces (civil parish in Eros' wife narrative). The guarantee of this cooperation in the past was men's friendship and solidarity. In this sense, the discourse about the house places emphasis on local group boundaries. It symbolizes the need to reject the state in order to reinforce group solidarity. Today, however, the house is mainly the symbol of individualism, closeness and economic improvement. As Antonio, a *leghista,* told me during an informal conversation "Over here we do not rent. There is no such thing! One has the pride to say, I broke my back, but I built my house. It is a cult". There are then, two ways of understanding male moral and physical strength in connection with the symbolism of the house. One is assertive and individualistic and is concerned with the men's ownership, command and defense of the house. The other is sacrificial and collective and is associated with the ideas of social solidarity, group alliance and community boundaries. I will explore the political consequences of this paradox in the following section.

7.4 "The Death of the Father": Traditional Authority, Sacrifice, and Bureaucratization

7.4.1 The Distinctive Local Rationality of the "Limited Good"

Stacul (2003:62) notes in his fieldwork in the Alps how "the idea of "locality" reflects largely local men's views "especially these days the idea that masculinity is asserted through the protection of one's own boundaries (private property)". In this section, I will describe how the changes in the local idioms of strength and sacrifice relate to the practices of working the land and the ways in which both symbolize for local men their loss of power and control over local territory. For that, I will analyse the symbolism of the column dedicated to the death of the *buon senso* and then the image of the father. I start with Orso Grigio's interpretation of the column:

[Why a column to *buon senso*]?

> The majority of the social problems could be solved without politics, without political leaders and especially without political parties. 90% of the social problems could be resolved with *buon senso*, which is the synthesis of other words, like objectivity, reason and logic.

[why is *buon senso* dead?]

> I considered it dead because nowadays to do a simple thing in the territory, there are levels of immense complexity. This complexity would make our *Avi* to turn in their graves, seeing that to dig a simple hole to irrigate, it is necessary to get the opinion of a geologist, the work of an engineer, a project of an architect and the benevolence of a water magistrate. These problems could be solved with some simple drills. In my grand's father age there weren't these problems. The resources had to be used carefully. The thing degenerated when people started valorising the titles of study, not the capacities.

[What does the plough means?]

> In doing manual work one learns the significance of sacrifice and getting tired and this develops the *buon senso*.

Modernization and bureaucratization are normally seen as processes that imply passing from A into B. Often the problem with this type of account is that it neglects the ways in which social actors imbue this process with meaning. Herzfeld (1993) argued that rationalization as a social process should be understood by the way social actors link it with belief. He noted that when discussing "rationality" one can understand how individuals perceive the process of incorporation in the nation state. The column of the *buon senso*, it

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seems to me, represents the local incorporation into the nation state bureaucratic structure as a failure, by depicting it as "irrational". In contrast to modern bureaucratic culture, the culture of the *Avi* (ancestors) was structured around the logic of practice, "I know how to do it" (*buon senso*) instead of theory\bureaucracy (experts\titles of study).[75]

The *buon senso* obeyed a process of social schooling learned through the sacrifice of the body (plough). The body is exposed to the world it receives emotions from, and therefore needs dispositions that favour it. The relation of the body with habitat formed the *habitus* (Bourdieu1998:119). Thus, to work in the fields was a rite of social institution. Through working in the fields, the *habitus* was formed and reproduced and local society values structured and embodied. However, as Bourdieu argues, the *habitus* is invisible in situations where the field is strong, yet when the social field desegregates the *habitus* becomes more visible while trying to readapt to a new social reality. Becoming a *leghista* is part of this attempt to link *habitus* and a mythical structure that gives meaning to it.

One could at this point ask if the ideology of strength and bodily self-sacrifice were not related to the need to survive in a traditionally difficult ecological system, as suggested in Igne. One should note how, in Orso Grigio's interpretation, traditional rationality is linked with the concept of the "limited good" (Foster 1965). The "limited good" was a characteristic of traditional peasant society (Bailey 1981). The "limited good" explains peasant individualism with the need to manage scarce resources. I would like to suggest, however, that the "limited good" is not just related to the administration of scarce economic material resources. It is rather part of a local moral ideology that pervades Orso Grigio's and other local men's understanding of the society. Body strength and energy are also understood as a "limited good", and in the past forced local cooperation (as in the example of the house). To express this traditional rationality Orso Grigio often told me: "To make good hay is tiring, to make bad hay is very tiring". [trans: *per fare buon feno se fa poca fatica, per fare cativo fieno si fa tanta fatica*].

Working the land, however, was also symbolically linked with spiritual values, with cult of the territory. As described in Igne, working the land was also associated both with order,

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[75] The *buon senso* can be understood as wisdom. As Weber (1977:480) in his study of French *Peasants into Frenchmen* noted: "wisdom was doing things the way they always had been done, the way they were suppose to be done".

but also with the moral and political control over the territory. As described by Heady (1999:172) in Carnia working the land "was an act of assertion, both against neighboring villages (...) and against the land itself". In other words, sacrifice is both moral and voluntary, but it is also a relational idiom through which symbolic boundaries of the house-property-community are defined. Consequently, it contributes to the definition of the other, of the outsiders (an aspect that will be further developed in the last section). It is therefore not a surprise that Orso's Grigio's column represents the political conflict between local traditional forms of territory management and new forms of bureaucratic organization.

It is interesting to note that what makes the traditional forms of territorial management "rational" and simple (less complex) was "the absence of resources". Herzfeld (1985) noted that in the Cretan mountains, memories of poverty and hunger as metaphors of the past were used rhetorically by local men to distinguish between the local ethnos and national identity. Hunger was metonymically associated with Cretan people and was used to negotiate the identity with the nation state. I would like to suggest that the notion of the "limited good" operates in a similar way. Men that support the Lega seem to think that scarce material conditions impose moral and rational behavior. Indeed, *leghisti* such as Orso Grigio often link the bureaucratization of their social world as a consequence of a society that is "well fed", or that "has a full stomach". Both metaphors show how *leghisti* understand the lack of rationality of the nation-state management of community resources, and the need of retuning to traditional forms of community management (*padroni a casa nostra*, more autonomy). On the other hand, they are also important metaphors in affirming their cultural difference *vis à vis* the nation state and its politicians (Ciampi). The implicit (and ethnocentric) idea is that not having to be hungry, to sacrifice their body, or to live in difficult economic conditions, modern managers and politicians, but also southerners, do not have *buon senso*, neither they developed a strong autonomous conscience, since they were "fed" (the she-wolf and their children).

As a result, the tension between local people and both the state and modern forms of management, is intense because the people that represent the state (and high culture), the bureaucrat, the magistrate, the architect, the geologist etc. are outsiders to the community, and therefore see them as competitors for both the control of community resources and for the territory. Furthermore, state bureaucratic management is an expression of a new

paradigm of knowledge, where as noted by Orso Grigio the authority of knowledge is certified by the school system, which "disenchants" and subverts local traditional practices.

This match between the League's ideology and local men's perceptions, however, is not just symbolical or affective. Their success, I believe, lies in the fact that that it is presented as a clear and practical solution to local societies problems such as the management of the territory, and the maintenance of local identity. In grounding its political appeal in the need to recover the popular "common sense", in the economic strength of "the north" as a bounded territory, and on the need of being autonomous in the management of the territory, the League represents proposals are seen as: "the resurrection of the *buon senso*".

> You see this piazza [square]? It has to be constructed in a specific way so that when it snows it has to be cleaned. So, what does Rome understand of our needs to reconstruct and project this piazza is a certain way. It is better to have autonomy, to administer ourselves because we always had a tradition of managing our resources and taking care of our territory. We live here we know what is better for our territory. We do not need the Roman bureaucrats or engineers to tell us how to build our Piazza. That is what it means to be *padroni a casa nostra.*

"Rome" and bureaucratic management is therefore interpreted as the violation of the almost "sacred" character of local men ownership of their private property (territory-house). In this sense, the League's proposals of autonomy do not just mirror local men's own perspective, but are used by social actors as an attempt to recover the central status lost as a result of bureaucratization and the centralization of the political decision making process.

7.4.2 The "Death of the Father"

It seems, therefore, that Orso Grigio's column to the *defunto buon senso* symbolizes an important moment of rupture. With the expansion of modernization and the integration of the local into the nation state, and the change in the means of production, male traditional authority and control over the territory was substantially dissolved. I call this moment the "death of the father". According to Borneman (2004:1) the death of the father means to "reconstruct the dissolution of authority as both liberation and loss".[76] During the conversations with *leghisti* I realized that the "death of the father" was represented, first, as the loss of autonomy and control over the local territory (house); and secondly associated

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[76] Although Borneman uses the idea of the death of the father to understand the end of authoritarian regimes on Western Europe, I think that the idea symbolizes how many Northern League supporters understand their current situation in relation to the state.

with a nostalgic view of an ordered and stable society where male sacrifice and physical strength were central. The *leghismo* represents, in this way, an attempt to recover from this feeling of loss. An excellent expression of the feeling of loss and identification with the father is presented outside Orso Grigio's house.

Image 7.5 Mural painted outside Orso Grigio's house representing his father. On the left side there is small phrase saying "ciao grandfather". Orso Grigio told me: "The mural represents my father from whom I learned so much". The reader should note the association between the biological father and the spiritual and eternal father [padre eterno] symbolized in the church. Also important is the relation between the father, the Bell tower (campanile) and the territory. They are important idioms of continuity, authority and belonging.

Anderson (1991:143) argued that belonging to the community is linked with the idea of naturalness; it is linked with the beauty of *gemeinschaft* which is often translated into the vocabulary of kinship or that of home. The depiction of the father's homeland corresponds to an imagined world where local people lived in harmony with nature. The representation of the Church (as in the Titian painting of the Three Seasons) could be associated with salvation, but also with the spiritual blessing of this traditional "communitarian" life. It reflects the link between transcendent order, the communitarian and domestic one. In other words, it is an expression of the link between spiritual goods, salvation and the cult of the territory. The mural suggests that respecting and learning with the father and keeping the territory in order was a strategy to attain spiritual salvation. In this sense, this mural is similar to the ones in Igne that I discussed in chapter five, in that it retells and celebrates story about the local traditional way of life.

The figure of the father embodies three key symbolical elements: transcendence, national-territory and domesticity (Borneman 2004:10). The "father" represents a model of political authority based on an almost transcendent gerontocratic system that is exposed in the murals through the connection between God, grand-father, father and son. The father's authority was part of the enchantment of the world and his power was linked with what Max Weber called "traditional authority". In the recent past in the region the father retained authority over the mother, the house and family. The father's authority derived from having more strength (Heady 1999). Older males often told me that when local society was strongly patriarchal, parental authority was stronger and more pronounced than now. "There was more order" Giuseppe told me. Additionally, the "limited good" reinforced the father's control over the means of economic production, normally property. His sacrifice to gather resources and to compete against nature and rival men to provide for their children was an important source of moral obligation and reinforced the man's authority within the domestic domain.

The authority of the father over both the territory and domestic domain found important correspondence on the dominant Catholic ideology where the representation of the father is central. The authority of the Catholic father is related to the maximum sacrifice: the sacrifice of his own son. The sacrifice of the son is interpreted as an unconditional source of authority and love. Yet, in contrast to local men's sacrifice, that is strongly associated with rivalry and competition to provide for their houses, the Catholic central ritual drama of the mass emphasises reciprocity and exchange, purification and inclusion. In the mass the sacrifice of the father is interpreted as the fulfilment of the need to provide spiritually for their sons. The son's sacrifice involves and is lived through the body (passion, crucifixion, and physical death) and the most sacred substance: blood. In a culture where self sacrifice and suffering plays a central role in the understanding of life, the ritual enactment of the maximum sacrifice (the loss of a son) and the shared of sacrificed body creates moral obligation and strong unity through identification. As a result, it is not a surprise that the church (house of the lord), the place where this sacrifice is ritually enacted, and the *campanile*, the part of the church where this sacrifice is announced to the local "community", became the primary local symbol of community unity and belonging, since is transcends local men's suffering and rivalry into a whole.

Although I had difficulties in exploring the domain of local women, I noted that in the city of Belluno women often understood and represented the "death of the father" as a moment of liberation from their traditional Catholic roles as "mothers" and "wives". The same phenomenon was observed by Stacul in Trentino. In a study of manhood in a Portuguese rural community, Almeida (2000) notes that women take advantage of the opportunities provided by school, to break the traditional bonds and move upward on the social scale. Indeed, a local communist militant often asked me with surprise: "How, despite modernization, could women support a male-dominated and traditionalist movement" such as the Lega. The answer partly lies I believe in the local economic infra-structure. In the environment of the small, local artisanal and family factory that we explored in the previous chapter, the strong hierarchical patriarchal family structure is to some degree reproduced and reinforced (Cento Bull and Corner 1993). In this economic system women are often economically dependent since they work for the family. As an important local entrepreneur told me in these factories the reluctance to modernize and the parental control over children is stronger: "The man is the one that controls the wallet", he told me, bluntly.

Still, as described in Igne, the level of control of the "father" and senior generation is decreasing due to the longer time that children spend in school. This lengthening of formal education often means that children do not want to develop the family company or work in the fields. It seems, therefore, that with the relentless integration of local society into the bureaucratic state, the authority of men and their control over their house have become open to question.

> Today I saw O.G. in his garage reprimanding a mother that was teaching the name of the objects to her children in Italian. When I asked him about why he reacted like that to the mothers' action he told with emotion: "I lost clients in my garage because I criticized mothers who talked to their children in Italian. I tried explaining them that *we were in our house* and that talking in dialect is part of who we are, of our *identità*. It is the language of the *Avi*. Unfortunately the mothers have an inferiority complex and were convinced that in order to advance intellectually, they had to speak in Italian with their children. They did not understand that this was a trap to lose our *identità*".
> (Fieldwork diary)

Orso Grigio metaphorically associates the territory with the house (expression of private property). He links his garage and the territory surrounding it with the domain of the father. Additionally, Orso Grigio's actions demonstrate his understanding of men as closed and women as open, which we can associate with the separation between the bear (close-wild-

autonomous) and the pig (open-domestic-dominated). The episode shows that for local men, in particular *leghisti*, not only are women less hard but are also less strong – that is, more easily seduced by modernity, a modernity that frees women from the familiar and more intimate control of the "group" (Douglas 1970).[77] Indeed, it is not a coincidence that Orso Grigio associates the loss of local *identità* with the encouragement that local women gave their children to "advance intellectually". To "advance intellectually" implies valorising the socialization through the state as "higher", over the local socialization through traditional passage of the *buon senso* ("capacities"). As one local research participant told me, "religion was passed through the womb". The empirical data discussed here suggests that, for *leghisti, Italianess* passes in the same way.

7.4.3 The "Other" in the Domain of the Father: Playing Host and Guests

The evocation of the father is also related with the feeling of social dissolution. This concern is well visible when discussing immigration with local men. I already described in chapter one how the Northern League rejects immigration on the grounds that it destroys "local ethnic identity". In this sense, the League discourse fits its categorization among right-wing and post-modern, populist and xenophobic movements that have proliferated recently in Europe. These movements use ethnicity and otherness to defend the passage from social into group identity. A strategy that has been often related with the need to address what is perceived of as the dissolution of traditional community ties (Hobsbawn and Kertzer 1992, Betz 1993, Biorcio 1997, Diamanti 1993, Woods 1995) However, my contact with local men that supported the League, suggest that the League's exclusionary appeal rests not so much with its xenophobic content, but with the representation of the other as a "guest" and to the need of respecting "local rules and laws". The problem for these men is how to integrate people into a local model of community wholeness, community that, as we have seen, is still imagined as traditional and intimate.

Alberto's analysis, I believe, synthesises this position:

> We are unable of imposing our culture to the foreigner. We are decadent. Integration is impossible. One has the *identità* from where one comes from. People who come to Veneto try to reconstruct their micro cosmos which they have in Albania or Croatia. In Veneto, we are the decadent *etnia* this is a reality. (Alberto, police officer)

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[77] Mary Douglas (1970) distinguishes between two types of socal control: the group and the grid. The group is common to primitive and mechanical societies Instead the "grid" is characteristic of modern and industrial societies where the social bond is primarily based on the social contract and social control based on impersonal strategies

Alberto's analysis of immigration displays an essentialist view of identity. This essentialist view of identity comprises the central idea that different identities will always struggle for hegemony and superiority, which makes social integration in his opinion "impossible". However, what seems to justify this pessimist view is the fact that, for Antonio, "we" (the natives) are able to impose the local rules to the foreigners. The idea of providing of imposing the local culture to the foreigner appeared in different expressions during interviews with *leghisti*. The majority of them denied being and were offended by being called "racist". Indeed, what was often emphasized to me in the interviews was that immigration was actually a problem caused by poor state organization and control. What was in question was the need to keep "order" in the community. Flavio, a former leader of the League in Montebelluna, when questioned about the relationship between the expression *padroni a casa nostra* and the discourse about immigration, explained the problem to me in this way:

> We could have met at the café. However I decided to invite you to come to my house. In my house I am the *padrone* (master) and you are the guest. If you do not respect me and behave properly I can throw you out. In my job, I travel around the world. When I am abroad I respect other peoples' rules and traditions. In other to live together it does matter if you have blue eyes or are black or white, I am citizen of the world in order to work we have to have rules.

Flavio's account echoed many other interpretations given to me by *leghisti*. In fact, the majority of research participants that I interviewed had some direct experience of emigration. The presence of this traumatic past is made public in even the smallest villages, where one can find monuments and tributes to the local emigrants that were constrained to leave their house and patria in previous decades (see also for the mural of Igne).

Image 7.6 "In memory to the MonteBellunese emigrants". This monument represents an emigrant in the departing act with a hand forward asking for help. He does not have a well defined face because when he leaves his country he loses part of his identity. The face that looks behind leaves sentiments and past. The wounds on his chest symbolize the pain of leaving the Patria, because departing is a little death[78].

What follows next is one of the many testimonies given to me by two *leghisti* in an interview.

> Our emigration was something different. I did not give any trouble to the institutions in Germany do you understand? If you have to rent a house, you had to pay the rent since the first day. Did you understand Vasco? *Then the lady intervenes*: we had to stay on their rules, not our ones. Even if you had a business, the permission to stay was renewed for the next 5 or 6 years. You had to prove that you paid the taxes and that you had followed local regulations and were responsible . (Fulvio, local entrepreneur)

> Emigration then was much harder than nowadays. Before we went to France we had to go to Milano for a health check-up. My mother used to say that when we emigrated they would control us, and nowadays they just come in and no-one controls them, and then we complain regarding certain diseases. Emigration was much more controlled. When you ask for the health records of one person, they say that you are violating their privacy, do you understand? This new world order that wants to make us… Each year we had a medical test.

Herzfeld (1993:43) suggested that state bureaucracies and nationalism have analogous functions to organised religion in pre-modern societies. It is by basing its principle of identity on the same God (nation state-father), that nationalism can claim transcendence

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[78]Questo monumento raffigura un' emigrante nell'atto di partire con la mano protesa in avanti come per chiedere aiuto. Non ha un volto ben definito perchè lasciando il suo paese perde parte della sua identità. La testa rivolta per metà all' indietro che lascia affetti e passato. Le lacerazione nel petto simboleggiano il dolore di chi abbandona la Patria e che partire è sempre un pó morire. Roberto Poloni.

over both individuals and local differences, and in this way to unite all citizens into a single unitarian conscience. The members of the nation are elected and exclusive. Externally, the state is responsible for guaranteeing the purity of the nation through the protection of the communities' sacred land, territorial and household boundaries. Bureaucrats, as high priests, have the authority to interpret the law, to purify, include or exclude, reaffirming in this way the teleology of the state (ibid 1993:37). It is interesting to note that the experience of emigrant is described as one of self sacrifice and submission to the host nation's rules and impositions. The host state treats them as "dirt", "as matter out of place" that as to be purified and controlled before entering and sharing the "new community", its sacred soil and benefits (Douglas 1966).

From a liminal state where the emigrant was seen as an "outsider", as a possible polluter, they passed through practices of ritual purification, such as health exams, good behaviour, and state control, through which the host state authority is "imposed" in the body. These experiences are then used to explain the support they give to the Northern League political proposals to control immigration: such as taking fingerprints when immigrants enter the country, expelling the clandestine, not giving medical care to clandestine, and not letting emigrants have access to subsidised housing. We can see in this way, the "persuasive power" of the League's discourse is precisely the capacity to mobilize and explore these local classifications and experiences, into a coherent and pragmatic political ideology.[79]

What makes the league rhetoric so successful, therefore, is the characterisation of the immigrant as in the liminal position of "guest". Flavio's interpretation of the expression *padroni a casa nostra*, clearly emphasized it. His hospitality, (just like that offered to Italian immigrants by the German or French state) was an act of generosity, as much as a strong system of control since it implies the moral obligation to respect the "host's" rules. In the European context Herzfeld (1993) argued that hospitality is powerfully linked with ideas of inclusion and exclusion. To grant hospitality is linked with the ideas of equality and sameness. Therefore, the power to refuse hospitality writes Herzfeld (ibid:177) implies

[79]Local families' past experiences of emigration and the metaphor of hospitality is also used by other political groups. They defend a culture of hospitality where the immigrant is symbolically linked with the figure of Jesus Christ. Often people that voted or supported Catholic political movements described to me these practices of control as "humiliating". People more linked with left wing sectors tend to represent the "immigration question" as a consequence of the "irrational fear" about the "different other". Their integrative rhetoric is marked by the idea that the immigrant is a "resource" to the country, or even a victim of the global economic system. When we discussed immigration problems they used as a counter discourse to the perceptions that the "other" had of the Italian immigrants. This argument is present for example in the best seller by a local influent journalist Stella called "the Horde, when we were the Albanians".

"the denial of common substance". The idiom of hospitality emerges as the basis of solidarity among equals and it is seem as crucial to form moral obligations within the "group boundaries" to use Douglas's expression. The idiom of the group boundaries can however emerge in societies which have not developed a fully integrated capitalist system, where modern and impersonal apparatus of social control, defines the criteria of inclusion, and "grid" control and belonging to the community (citizenship) (Herzfeld 1993). As Borghezio declared in Venice: "the Padanian person is a noble people, it welcomes everyone, but it demands respect for its identity, for its laws."

Herzfeld (1993:43) suggested that when the state fails to materialize at the local level, the emotive symbolism of blood and kinship is emphasized, since they "congeal into a single rhetoric the very real differences and strains that divide the state from more intimate social entities". The League's appeal owns its strength because it evokes these pre-modern models of solidarity and inclusion, against the modern impersonal notions of bureaucratic inclusion and "global" citizenship. Hospitality recalls interpretation of a Moral Law where the "host" (or native) has more rights over the "guest" (or immigrant). This interpretation echoes an understanding of society based on status rather than on contract (as in modernist discourse). Ironically, the League ideologues always emphasized and provided cases of the immigrants breaking or not respecting Italian state law, questioning in this way the state's capacity to protect their territory and house. On the other hand, the League points to immigrants' disrespect of local "laws customs, ("our rules", our identity) to differentiate the local from the national. For many local men, the League's hard and strong position is, therefore, a reaction against the state's incapacity either to incorporate or to protect local communities' traditional forms of "group" identity. It implies an "ethnic" reaction against the recognition by the state of the privilege of "foreign" identities over local laws.

Therefore, what is in question is not only the monopoly of the criteria by which to define hospitality and the inclusion on the house (the protection of the land and its resources), but also the incapacity of the state to form and incorporate a transcendental model of group unity that compensates the transformations that are taking place in local society. This incapacity takes many local men see in the League's appeal to close the boundaries and increase bureaucratic control a strategy to keep their traditional models of group identity. Otherness, such as hospitality becomes, in this way, the mechanism through which power relations, and the inclusion of the local in the nation state (house) is negotiated.

It is not the cultural diversity that should interest anthropologists but the political meanings which specific political contexts and relationships endow cultural difference. Peoples becomes culturally entrenched and exclusive in contexts where there is domination and conflict (Stolke:1995:12)

7.5 Conclusion: The Return of the Father

The ethnographic material discussed in this chapter indicates that Northern League political ideology is closely linked to the local, traditional system of male honour. Clearly, there is an important connection between how men represent themselves and Northern League rhetoric. For these social actors *leghismo* is mobilised as a political act to demand more autonomy to address local problems. More autonomy implies the blending and integration of pre-modern forms of territorial management and constitution of group identity within modern forms of rational domination. The expression that epitomizes this political "program" is *padroni a casa nostra*. The house is a matter of boundaries and group identity. The father, the *padrone*, was the one that controlled group boundaries and guaranteed the authority of the Law in their small patria. As E. Weber (1977:96) noted, with the expansion of modernization and the disenchantment of the world these traditional models of group identification should have being incorporated within the nation state ideology (having the state assuming and concentrating the traditional function of the Father). In his words:

> The land of one's father can mediate between private society (the family) and official society (the nation). And the concept was extended as the fathers realm itself was extended beyond the natural limits of the *pays* or *petit patrie*, to a broader, much more mobile world.

The ethnographic data presented in this chapter, however, suggests that the process is not as straightforward as E.Weber described. When the state fails to incorporate and represent local ideologies, a problem of identification between the local and national can arise. When this happens the idiom of the house, the control over private property, and the evocation of the father are used by social authors to contest state authority. This is not an uncommon process in Europe. As Pine (1996:455) witnessed during fieldwork among the Gorale, despite the fact that state power was becoming more pervasive and local traditional structures started losing their practical strength, the ideology of the house was used by social actors as the place where local identity was structured and reproduced. The house was therefore used to resist state power. It seems that the same is happening in Belluno. The material discussed showed how *Leghisti* draw on the memories of the patriarchal family and of the father's authority over both the house and the territory as a site of

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resistance (but also as a demand for a new form of political mediation between local and national). It seems, therefore, that the emergence of northern nationalism and Northern League populism can be interpreted following classic nationalist and populist theories, in their contention that both political phenomena emerge as a reaction against the breakdown of traditional social order and authority (Gellner and Ionescu 1969, Gellner 1994, Keating 2001).

Yet, in order to understand the complexity of this process, we have to operate with individuals' stories, practices and representations. The statues of Orso Grigio, along with his own interpretations, have provided an intimate glimpse of the ways in which local men perceive this process. The lion, "teaching the she-wolf that in order to feed her cubs the wolf has to work", evokes the notions of men as "closed" and hard and women as "open" and weak. In so doing, it also represents the League not as opposed to the state, but as an attempt to reorder and discipline state-permitted positions. On the other hand, the evocation of the father represents not only traditional knowledge, but also a well- ordered society. In this sense, for local men such as Orso Grigio, *leghismo* is seen as a strategy through which a feeling of loss of social cohesion is elaborated. Indeed, if the traditional father is "dead" then Bossi is alive. Bossi's patricentric model of authority and the League's strong and clear political position represents a reaction against the dissolution of a man's control over his private property. In this sense, Bossi's (and therefore the League's) appeal to close down the territory to others (and especially to state bureaucracy and modern rationality, and to immigrants) is not only reminiscent of local men's ideas that one should be able to sustain one's self, but also that a strong group identity is built precisely on the accomplishment of this independence from outside agents.

As Stacul (2003:116-117) also noted, the emphasis on self-reliance and the evocation of an ideal, autonomous community is an attempt to react to the dissolution of community ties provoked by late modernity. The *leghismo* is seen by social actors as a strategy for retaining and adapting traditional structures, to models of group identity and to modern practices of bureaucratic organization. In other words, the strength of the le*ghismo* does not just lie simply in the rejection of modernity and modern forms of rational domination. Its persuasive character comes from the fact that social actors see it as the possibility of redefining modernity and modern forms of governance from "below" (that is, in relation to the local). *Leghismo*, as an encompassing ideology, is therefore a more suitable or

appropriate response to social, political and economic changes for men such as Orso Grigio. The possibility of returning to the *padrone a casa,* to local autonomy, implies the recreation of an intimate relationship between local practices and ideologies and a "modern" organizational structure that permits the reproduction of local identity. In other words, to agree with Bourdieu, *leghismo* represents an attempt to link the *habitus* with the myth that gives meaning to that *habitus.*

Chapter 8

Conclusions

This thesis has drawn on ethnographic material primarily collected among the Northern League's activists in Belluno in order to address two main issues: the role of "pre-modern" cultural and social models in the understanding of modern political action, and how these reflect the understanding of *leghismo* as a social identity. The intention was, therefore, to look at the relationship between the social practices and the local cultural models that social actors employ to make sense of their lives and the *leghismo* through a consideration of ethnographic data. I argued that the collective imagination of a common identity is not just constructed (invented) or used by political agents as "fuel for action" (Appadurai 1996:7). In order to understand the economy of identities, its production, exchange and circulation, identity has to be related with the social actors' experience of the immediate world. For this reason, I argued that *leghismo* ought to be understood not just as a subject of political representation, but also as a strategy through which local actors both make sense of and try to transform their social world.

In this concluding chapter I intend to bring issues already discussed to bear on the theme that was central in the local's people interpretation of *leghismo*. I argued that at the heart of the understanding of the Northern League's construction of the notion of identity, was something that appears to be experienced by *leghisti* as a fundamental existential dilemma: the tension between the practical need to combine modernization and individualism with the desire of maintaining social cohesion. The fact that so many people see the League's regionalist appeal to return to the local as the best way forward, led me to query the process through which local identity was historically integrated in Italian national identity.

As Anderson (1991:149) noted, "nationalism thinks in terms of historical destinies". So, in chapter three I explored how ritual and history were used to play down local rivalries and feelings of ethnic attachment by attempting to transcend the "local" group identities into an imagined collective community. The chapter concluded that the politicization of the events that took place during the Second World War prevented the creation of a shared, post-war historical memory that secularly linked local and national identity. Then, I pursued the idea that the Church's proposal that Catholicism has and will continue to provide both the cultural and historical fundament of both local and national identity was losing support.

During the post-war years this vision was effective both practically and symbolically. However, the end of communism, the national corruption scandals that discredited the traditional role of mediation exerted by the Christian Democrats, and the expansion of modernization and secularization put into crisis the Catholic hegemonic model, opening the space for the re-emergence of "local identity".

The incapacity of local traditional forces to construct a strong feeling of social identity that was able to link the local and the national was the starting point of the understanding of the local success of the League, for it set the background against which the issues discussed in the following chapters could be better understood. In chapter four, I turned to the analysis of how the Northern League's paradigm of identity is represented as a strategy used to defend the social cohesion of the Northern Community from the encroachment of powerful outsiders. This hegemonic operation is clear in the elaboration and construction of the concept of "the people". The exploration of the League's ritual construction of the concept of "people" showed that "the people" is seen as a modern continuation of local, pre-modern peasant practices. For this reason, the League's rituals are inspired by traditional popular parties (sagra). This popular environment (amounting to a self-representation of "low" culture) strongly emphasizes shared, face-to-face relationships and mutual fellowship among activists. The stress on mutual fellowship is combined with the northern tradition of strong, civic communitarianism. The values of hard work, civic practices, and economic entrepreneurship are used to assert on the one hand the autonomy of the North. On the other, they are used rhetorically to contrast the rational, impersonal, bureaucratic and mercantilist models proposed by the State, the European Union and the processes of globalization that are accused of destroying this precious socio-economic system.

In contrast with the Italian and European political models, where strong emphasis is placed on transcending the local, the League's idea of the northern "people" proposes a return both to the land and to the ethnos, as primary sources of personal and collective identity (represented through a variety of natural symbols). The use of natural symbols, however, is not simply an attempt to assert cultural difference, and therefore establish boundaries between "us" (Northerners) and "them" (Southerners, the State, Europe). The imagination of the community, as grounded on the ethnos is, similarly, an attempt to redefine post-modern concepts of identity, where identities are becoming de-territorialized, unbounded, and liquid (Bauman 2007). Its power derives, therefore, from the fact that it represents an

alternative vision of the society. Thus, chapter four concluded that, in attempting to redefine the principles through which individual and collective identities are imagined, the League attempts not only to change the criteria through which political and normative action are conceived, but also to create an identity paradigm where traditional social practices are used to deal with the inchoate nature of modernity.

The idea of returning to the "local" elaborated by the Northern League raised two important questions that I addressed on chapter five. Firstly, is the appeal to return to "local" group identity just a "modern and rational" political invention, or is it a reflex of practices and models that local people already use in their everyday life instead? Secondly, to what extent is *leghismo* used and manipulated by local people to attempt to transform their own social world? The study of locally produced artworks allowed us to address both questions. The artistic interpretation of *leghismo* reveals the importance of understanding how individuals use identity in order to address their own social agendas. Such works indicate how the return to the "local", to the roots, is understood as a better, more pragmatic solution to address the disruption of local cohesion provoked by mass culture and globalization for local people. In this sense, it is through art that local people attempt to transform their world by re-constructing the village (along with the territory), as the core of local personal and social identity.

The data presented in relation to Igne showed, on the other hand, that boundaries are not just rhetorical, and especially that they cannot be constructed from any old material as Cohen (1985), for example, suggests. In order to be effective and persuasive in marking identity, boundaries have to reflect the social practices through which people already understand their social world, and imagine "community". This relationship between local practices and outside discourse, calls our attention to the importance of the *habitus* as a means of understanding the League's discourse.

> The habitus is the principle of a selective perception of the indices tending to confirm and *reinforce it rather than transform* it, a matrix generating responses adapted in advance to all objective conditions identical or homologous with the (past) conditions of production; it *adjusts itself to a probable future which it anticipates and helps to bring about because it reads it directly in the present of the presumed world*, the only one it can ever know. It is thus the basis of what Marx (...) calls 'effective demand' (as opposed to 'demand without effect', based on need and desire), a *realistic relation to what is possible, founded on and therefore limited by power.* (Bourdieu 1999:64-65) (my italics)

The murals, as a representation of the League, correspond to the "effective demand" of local people. They are a realistic attempt to transform their world, and to adapt their models of identification to modernity. In this sense, *leghismo* is seen by the people in Igne as the possibility of linking their *habitus* with a social ideology that ensures its reproduction. In other words, although it could be argued that the League "re-invented locality", the ethnographic data seems to suggest that local people see it as a continuation of practices that already shaped their identification with the local.

Thus, the appeal to the "local" is not just effective because it is accommodated to local level discourses, but because it is *anchored in social practice*. Chapter six represents my attempt to understand the extent to which the local economic system could explain how such strong ideas of local group identity were sustained and even reinforced. Traditionally, modernization theories predicted that industrialization would dictate the passage from traditional and mechanical group identities (*gemeinschaft*) into a system of social identification based on rational organization and social contract (*gessellschaft*), as a slow but unidirectional process (Durkheim 1964, E.Weber 1977). Chapter six demonstrated that local industrial productive practices, based on family and household cooperation, were crucial in the practical and symbolic maintenance of local group cohesion and, therefore, in the reproduction of group identity. The emphasis given by the Northern League to the importance of private initiative, self-sacrifice and the value of autonomy, empowers local people and, in particular, local entrepreneurs. These entrepreneurs that often have high economic capital are often disregarded by the Italian nation state's "high" and intellectual model. On the other hand, *leghismo* offers the attractive possibility, according to supporters, of combining modernization and protection of the local economic fabric, with the possibility of keeping traditional practices of village solidarity.

For these entrepreneurs, the appeal to the "local" means closer and more effective decision-making centres, fewer and less onerous taxes, and a more efficient and rational state. The Northern League is perceived to be a better vehicle for the protection of the local socio-economy against economic competition than the Italian state. The preference for the League as a protector of the local economic fabric seems to confirm the re-emergence of the local, as a consequence of the difficulties of the nation states in addressing and reacting to the post-Fordist model of economic production (Keating 2001). Indeed, it is possible that the local demand to bound and protect the "local community" together with the emphasis

on local identity will increase, given the new challenges that local industrial districts have to face from globalization. On the other hand, the fact that immigration has been seen as an important resource by local industrials to be more competitive in the international market will increase the feeling of loss of group identity. If so, the League will further sediment and strengthen its political positions not only in Veneto but also in similar industrial districts across the North of Italy.

However, the main difficulty in understanding *leghismo* merely as being grounded on economic and rational premises, is the emphasis placed on the search for a model of symbolical coherence by *leghisti themselves*. This search is clearly present both in Igne but also in the work of Orso Grigio. Their emphasis on the notions of self-sacrifice, individual renunciation, and the desire for emotional and group solidarity is all too obvious. The League vigorously attempts to reconstitute these feelings in ritual terms through the re-invention of local popular traditions, the emphasis on the politics of the bar and an egalitarian male ideology. The Northern League's construction of a regional nationalism (Padania), with its animistic and magical practices, is a political strategy to force the state to address political questions specifically relating to the North. The success of the idea of Padania, however, comes from the fact that it is perceived to be an attempt to create a symbolical model where individualism is linked with strong social communitarian ties.

This raises another tension. While *Leghismo* seems to be an apology for modern individualism, the movement also represents a demand for a strong social structure that guarantees social cohesion. In Chapter seven, I argue that the appeal to the symbolism of the house, the emphasis given to the small patria and male dominance as well as "wild" performances comprised a range of strategies which serve to counter what is perceived as the dissolution of the group's identity. This is not just common in Belluno or even in Treviso. Stacul (2003:190) concluded his ethnography in the Italian Alps by noting how the return to the idea of the bounded community represented an extension of local ideology. Herzfeld (1993) noted that the local people's antistatist ideology was not related so much with grand political theories, but with everyday life symbols "that are the most powerful, because of their connection with ideas about something familiar". For Stacul, the most important political symbol in the Alps was that of privately owned land. Stacul affirms that the defence of private property comes to represent, and assume, not only the idea of local, but also that of the background "against which national and regional boundaries are

perceived and understood" (Stacul 2003:191). He argues that local people imagine the community as an ordered and segmented mosaic of "bounded fields". The same could be said about the house. The house (owned and occupied by the householder and their family) is a symbol of the prevalence of social order and therefore a powerful political symbol. It denounces the state's incapacity to assume the function of the "father's" authoritarian characteristic.

As described in chapter seven, the "death of the father" represents both the loss of local men authority over their private property (territory), but also the loss of social cohesion. This is reminiscent of Durkheim's notion of anomie, which he used to characterized modern and industrial societies. As Borneman (2004) argued, in modern societies democratic institutions have more difficulty in providing order and social cohesion than pre-modern societies where kinship, religion and ritual intertwined. Bossi's charismatic authority with its emphasis on the need to protect the territory from outsiders, its virile appeal to be strong and self-independent, and the emphasis on hard work are seen by *leghisti* as a strategy to address the lack of social cohesion provoked by modernization. This is not uncommon in patricentric leaders:

> try to arrest this particular crisis in symbolic identification by addressing the deficiency in the paternal function- speaking in the name-of-the-father, reaffirming the symbolical Law, reclaiming the lineage, denying generational conflict or gender conflict, and monumentalizing national "landmarks". (Borneman 2004:24)

Bossi is seen by many *leghisti* as the man to reform and bring order into the state and, consequently, into the house. Thus, to become *padroni a casa nostra* means not only to defend the bounded field, but also the recovery of a model of symbolic coherence based on hard work and local autonomies. As a result, the League, with Bossi, is considered the vehicle for delivering state reform, (federalism, in which pre-modern local models are adapted in the constitution of a new modern Italian nation state. In this sense, the concept of local identity emerges as the corner stone of the research for new forms of community wholeness, where pre-modern forms are linked with modern and bureaucratic structures.

It seems therefore arguable that the strength of *leghismo* is not just linked with the political proposals made by the movement, but with its capacity to manipulate powerful local symbols and practices. It is by emphasising the need to be strong, autonomous and hard

working, along with the energetic defence of private property (house), which provides the League's Federal, regional and Northern Nationalist proposals with the necessary appeal and concreteness. The appeal to an ordered and self-sufficient past is not just nostalgic re-presentation, but it appears as a possible political and practical solution to address the political and social problems of the present. I hope to have made clear in this thesis that to base explanations of political action simply on strict economic and rational premises, fails to understand other powerful systems that individuals use to make sense of politics and ideas of identity. Indeed, *leghismo* is not just about political representation in itself, but it is part of the complex ways in which local individuals experience and make sense of the changes in the world in which they live. In this sense, outside political identities are conceived as an extension and legitimization of individuals' own rooted ideologies. On the other hand, as bricoleurs, individuals use and manipulate such elite constructions to transform and give meaning to their own social world.

The League's ideology is becoming stronger in the region. Yet, the valid criticism of the League nationalism is not that it is "invented" since this is common with almost any social identity, including Italian nationalism. The real issue is that if it makes sense to build a supra-local identity grounded on a model that although appealing ceased to practically function at the local level. On the other hand, the law of the house, the predominance of the laws of the ethnos, and a "modern" view of the state and political authority based on traditional authority, obscures a recidivist model of patriarchal authority based on obedience, exclusion and control of the economic market, which fails to address the real causes of the loss of solidarity and social cohesion. This loss of solidarity and "community" cohesion on the one hand is related to the incapacity of the Italian nation's state to create a strong and effervescent social identity that links individuals and institutions. Yet, the most important factor – to explain the loss of social cohesion - is a consequence of local actors' reactions to new economic opportunities, and their adaptation of "modern" and "high" cultural habits. As a result, the need for a new way to structure and give meaning to the new economic and social practices still remains, and I think it will always be an unsolved tension not only in Veneto, but also in modern European societies, (as we can see by the recent emergence of other populist and patricentric movements in Europe).

The last political elections that took place in April 2008 dictated the return to power of Silvio Berlusconi, this time without the help of the former Christian Democrats of the

UDC. The League had a significant electoral result collecting more than 8% percent of the national votes. I assume such a result will make political specialists talk about the "third wave" of the League. In Veneto, the League received more than 30% of votes and in Treviso and Belluno more than 20%. These impressive results seem to suggest that the return to the "local group identity" as a strategy to address local problems and react to transformations that are taking place in local society, is now understood by many people as a sound, and therefore desirable political strategy. The electoral results of April 2008 show that this area of study is still open for future research. Looking back at my experience in Belluno and to my fieldwork notes, I realize that the difficult passage from a model of group identity, into a class structured society, is probably the road to follow in future ethnographic explorations in European regional studies. Indeed, the League can also be understood, in this way, since it is particularly strong in small and rural peripheral societies that resist the passage from status to contract. I believe that future ethnographers can keep exploring these tensions, not only from a broader and more comparative point of view, but possibly from the actors' point of view, a perspective that I could not fully develop due to the difficult conditions I faced in the field. On the other hand, the exploration of the women's role was left largely unexplored in this thesis. This is also a general flaw in the literature about the League, which I hope will soon be seen addressed.

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