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***PADANIA OR NORTHERN ITALY?*
THE INVENTION OF A NATIONAL COMMUNITY
IN THE WORDS OF THE LEGA NORD**

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requirements of London Metropolitan University for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.**

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Abstract

One primary significance of the propaganda of the Italian political movement the 'Lega Nord' in the second half of the nineties is that it posited the north of Italy as a 'nation', by grounding the claim of independence of the north on a unitary identity alleged to be common to all northerners. In order to create and communicate such an identity, the party resorted to the usual repertoire of nationalist movements -from the rediscovery and reinterpretation of the past to the adoption of new rituals and symbols. Is this to be defined as 'virtual nationalism', given that a 'nation' of the north of Italy was proposed here for the first time and did not seem to have any basis in history? Was all this just posturing, given that the project of independence was quickly adopted, and just as suddenly abandoned? This thesis investigates the process of creation of this new cultural identity -supposedly the national identity of the would-be nation 'Padania'- as it was posited in the printed propaganda of the Lega Nord. The study seeks to explore what cultural and ethnic characteristics of northern Italians (here called 'Padani') are said to distinguish them from both southern Italians and immigrants from abroad. The case of 'Padania' is then referred back to contemporary theories of nationalism and globalisation in order to find out what 'Padania' has to teach about identity-formation in the contemporary world. Although acknowledging the fundamental role of 'difference' as a discursive strategy that defines the 'Padanian' by excluding various 'others', this thesis rejects the idea that the party's propaganda was grounded on 'traditional' racism during the separatist period. Furthermore, this analysis exposes the nationalism of the Lega as one that failed to resonate due to the lack of a unitary ethnic culture widely shared in the north to which its identity-work could appeal. In addition to this, this study argues that the fear of globalisation and the specific notion of modernity which characterises the propaganda of these years can only be understood with reference to that conception of the local, 'knowable' community which made the recent economic success of the north possible in the first place.

The methodological basis of this thesis consists in both quantitative content analysis and textual analysis of a wide sample of the party's documentation. The results of this analysis constitute the basis upon which the party's 'identity-work' is discussed.

Notes

1. All translations of literature in Italian are mine.
2. References are given by following the Harvard system. A reference to Raymond Williams' book *Culture* (Fontana: London, 1981), therefore, will appear in the text as a reference to: Williams (1981). However, references to articles published in newspapers/ by news organisations appear as follows: Mauro, in *La Repubblica*, 2003; references to the Lega Nord's own propaganda appear as follows: Lupo, in *Quaderni Padani*, 1996. Full details about such articles are given in the bibliography. The bibliography is divided into two sections: primary and secondary literature.

Abbreviations

AN= Alleanza Nazionale

DC= Democrazia Cristiana

DS= Democratici di Sinistra

FI= Forza Italia

LAL= Lega Autonomista Lombarda

LL= Lega Lombarda

LN= Lega Nord

LV= Liga Veneta

Verdi= Partito dei Verdi

MSI= Movimento Sociale Italiano

MSI-TF= Movimento Sociale- Fiamma Tricolore

PCI= Partito Comunista Italiano

PSd'AZ: Partito Sardo d'Azione

PSI= Partito Socialista Italiano

PDS= Partito Democratico della Sinistra

RC= Rifondazione Comunista

SOFLN= Segreteria Organizzativa Federale di Lega Nord

UV= Union Valdôtaine

VB= Vlaams Blok

INTRODUCTION

1. Why the 'Lega Nord'?

In a crucial phase of its recent history the political movement 'Lega Nord' has challenged the existence of the nation-state 'Italy' in the name of a nation-in-waiting, i.e. 'Padania'. By proposing a new collective identity the party has challenged key elements in modern thinking about one of the most basic units of society, the 'nation'.

Studying nationalism is hardly an enterprise anyone would embark on lightly, also because of the lack of agreement on the conceptual terminology to be used within the fields that interest this thesis. The first chapter is testimony to that, as it attempts a discussion of concepts such as 'nation' and 'nationalism', as well as offering working definitions of these terms for the discussion that follows. However, in the light of a renewed impetus of nationalism in so many parts of Europe, especially since the end of the Cold War, and with 'old' national identities (such as the English, of course) arguably playing an even increased role in people's self-understanding and self-definition, it is apparent that nationalist ideology, and the ways through which the 'nation' is constructed and communicated, are worth careful academic analysis.

If 'nationalism' and the idea of the 'nation' are variously understood concepts, providing a definition of the so-called 'new' far right of Europe is even more of a challenge. As Eatwell points out 'It is especially difficult to understand the nature of right-wing thought if an *essentialist* answer is sought... as a whole, the right-wing tradition is multifaceted, far from static, even imaginative' (cited in Hainsworth, 1994: 3, my emphasis). He suggests that the right should be seen as a *variety* of responses *to the left*, and yet it is precisely the diverse and at times contradictory nature of this response that poses a challenge to scholars. To make matters worse, not many within these movements would happily define themselves as 'decisively right-wing'; in fact, they often don't see themselves as being on the 'far' right or as being at all 'extremist'. This is not just a posture, given that these definitions carry unpleasant connotations that usually scare off

the very people -well behaved moderates- that these parties at times attract -together with sectors of the working and the 'under' class. My own experience of weeks of study at the national centre of the Lega Nord -a party I regard as decisively far-right, for reasons outlined below- tells me that positions such as the total rejection of coloured immigrants, or the insistence on a definition of homosexuality as mental illness, were not perceived as extreme right-wing positions by the kind, friendly members of the party I happened to talk to. If there are two different parties in Italy that are, at present, very proud to call themselves 'Communist', the Lega on the other hand, as will be seen below, defines itself as a centre party -when it does not even refuse the left and right division of the political spectrum altogether, that is. The Movimento Sociale, on the other hand, defines itself as truly 'right-wing', and yet not as 'far-right' and certainly not as 'extreme'¹; the same can be said of the Danish People's Party² and many others.

Under the 'far-right' or 'extreme-right' umbrella find a place:

- a) parties either openly inspired by fascism or nazism, such as the many short-lived German formations of the last decades (Kitschelt, 1997: 207- 221), or otherwise related to these ideologies because of the political background of many leaders and activists alike (i.e. both the Italian Alleanza Nazionale and the re-born Movimento Sociale, the German Republicaner, the British National Party and others). The Lega Nord *does not* belong to this category, although certain similarities with neo-fascist rhetoric, together with extreme xenophobic views do play a role in the context of its discourse and are pointed out in chapters to come;
- b) movements exploiting a populist appeal to the 'people' as opposed to 'politicians', who often combine such appeal with a supposedly frank, but often openly rude, and at times even verbally violent, style of political communication (the 'pub-talk' of Bossi and Heider), as well as an anti-taxation stance (again the Lega Nord, the Freedom Party and the Vlaams Blok) and a vocal refusal of foreign, or allegedly foreign, immigrants (all of the above, plus, for instance, the Pym Fortyun list in Holland and the People's party in Denmark);

- c) parties grounding their claims for either independence or else more autonomy from a state on the ground of the distinctivity and peculiar identity of an ethnic community they essentialise. The Lega Nord is clearly one of them, and the Leagues that predated it -the Liga Veneta being the most successful- were other examples. If, in the sentence above, we substitute 'from a particular state' with 'from the EU', seen as an artificial and increasingly unaccountable almost 'super-state', then we could probably add to the list conservatives such as the Tories, the UK Independence Party and the German CSU, which also share the Lega's and Freedom Party's passion for the 'value of private enterprise', as well as their compassion for the tax-payer.

Are all these organisations 'extreme' and in what way, if they are? Elements such as anti-immigration, populism, ethnocentrism and nationalism come in all sort of combinations and what element must take centre-stage depends on the political culture of a movement and on the debate in a particular country. After all, the Lega itself changed its priorities and key words more than once. And yet, it would be difficult to claim that many of these parties do not share some common ideological features (Mudde, 2000: 2-24): the problem is clearly to define what one means with 'extreme'. In fact, this thesis points out painful similarities between the propaganda of the Lega and nazi discourses (see chapter 6; see also Escobar, 1999) claiming that the movement has visibly hardened its stance in recent years, and pointing out that this is a very centralised movement led by an authoritarian leader -all elements that play a part in defining the Lega as 'extreme'. However, as pointed out above, the Lega is clearly *not* a heir of fascism, mainly due to its drive towards autonomy and decentralisation, its rejection of the 'Risorgimento' as well as its liberal and business friendly economic policies.

In *The Guardian* Ian Black (2002) writes about the powerful aftershocks from France's electoral earthquake after the recent success of Jean-Marie Le Pen in France's presidential elections, conveying the sense of shock and confusion that was provoked by the Front's success. However, the party was not new to electoral success, and had not been the first among European far-right formations to exploit the divisions within the left

to win elections/seats on an anti-immigration, anti-politicians, anti-EU and pro-national identity ticket. For instance, Heider had entered an Austrian government in 1999, only to prompt the first EU's boycott of a member state ever. Well before him, Berlusconi had managed to become 'Presidente del Consiglio' by enjoying the crucial support of both the Lega and Alleanza Nazionale. When the EU imposed sanctions on Austria, the media tycoon was flexing his muscles ready to stage a 'come-back'.

The differences between so-called 'far-right' movements are as important as the similarities between them. For instance, if concerns brought about by immigration and loss of national identity are crucial factors in France, Holland, Austria and indeed Italy, unemployment, on the other hand, while important to explain the rise of the NF in France, is not necessarily a factor in northern Italy (as far as the Lega is concerned) or Austria. Indeed in these countries, a more fitting definition for the supporters of the 'new right' might be that of 'lap top reactionaries', as the passage below suggests:

Europe's far right knows that globalisation has losers, even in the richest countries. By linking the fears of these people with high levels of immigration, the far right is mounting a powerful challenge to the centrist consensus that has ruled most of Continental Europe since the end of the cold war. At the same time, the advance of the far right confounds the faith -which underpins progressive thinking everywhere- that democracy and prosperity ensure a liberal, cosmopolitan future... In Austria, Switzerland and northern Italy, it [the right] promotes a high-tech economy linked with the world by free trade but insulated from the legions of the poor by a ban on immigration. This is the fascism of laptops, not jackboots. Like the fascist parties of the past, the far right accepts the economic orthodoxies of its time. Today, those are the orthodoxies of the free market. (Gray, 2002, on line)

In the case of the Lega Nord 'lap top fascists' might no longer be a fitting definition, especially since the Forza Italia has started stealing urban middle-class votes from a movement, that, anyway, always performed particularly well in the industrial *peripheries*

of northern Italy. However, what the definition suggests that fits the case of the Lega (and the Freedom Party, too) is that there are movements performing well in rich and modernised constituencies that can, at one and the same time, embrace modernisation while rejecting globalisation. Thinking of the populist right 'as merely atavistic is to underestimate it. Whereas between the wars Europe's far right gained strength from poverty and economic crisis, today it thrives on the insecurities of the affluent' (ibid.).

These parties are here to stay and they have given a considerable contribution to the political debate of the end of the century in many a European country. However much one would like to agree with the former Dutch PM Van Aartsen that the case of Austria was unique, his assertion that 'Dutch sanctions on Austria will remain until rightists leave' (anonymous, 2000, on line) seem now underpinned by a confidence in the Dutch tradition of tolerance that the recent political history of Holland openly contradicts. Lega Nord, the product of very Italian conditions, as we will see in chapters 3 and 4, is, thus, not just one of the 'mirrors' but indeed one of the new political entrepreneurs (Diamanti, 1995: 13) of contemporary Europe. Such actor needs to be studied and its discursive strategies need to be revealed.

This thesis is entirely focused on the identity-work of the Lega Nord/Lega per l'Indipendenza della Padania in bringing the Padania about as a would-be imagined nation. The economic, political and social factors which provided the background for the emergence of this party and go some way towards explaining its great achievements in the nineties are *not* ignored (see chapters 3 and 4); however, the Lega is not simply the *by-product of those conditions*, it does not simply 'reflect' the problems of the country towards the end of the century and will not be treated as such. On the contrary, the party has *redefined* the northern question, offering *original* solutions to the problems of the north, and has also been able to set the agenda of political debate in Italy to a very large extent since the end of the eighties. The Leagues, and not just Bossi's, redefined a culture 'by turning interests (the house, the money, the mobile, the car, etc.) into values, into things which were intrinsically good' (Monestarolo, 2000: 150). The party:

- a) achieved, and in the nineties greatly exploited, constant media exposure;

- b) was instrumental in disposing of political parties such as the DC and the PSI, as well as the formation and premature death of the first Berlusconi government, both events constituting radical turning points in Italian politics;
- c) offered a reading of the problems of the country as deriving from 'internal colonialism' that, although amplifying already existing resentments towards the south on the part of the north, nonetheless, for the first time, grounded a completely new culture, 'leghismo', on such resentments.
- d) managed to push immigration and criminality to the top of the political agenda, turning them into THE problems (Smiley, 2001), admittedly helped in doing so by epochal changes in the fluxes of migration, as well as changing sensibilities on the part of the national media. Arguably, in the last few years -a period which falls outside the scope of this thesis- the Lega has also been instrumental in turning the so-called 'war on terror' and ethnic tensions in the north of Italy into a 'war of religions', with Christianity on one side of the barricade and Islam on the other.³

If the Lega did not just 'mirror' the feeling and the frustrations of the north but created a new culture that even the left had to reckon with, then this culture, and the discourse that created it, should be studied carefully by Communication theorists. In particular what interests us in an epoch of great debates on the nature of 'national identities' and their survival in a 'globalised' world, is how the virtual nation of Padania made its appearance through the Lega's propaganda.

2. The focus of the analysis

Lega Nord was created by various regionalist movements led by the Lega Lombarda, developed into a federalist movement (Lega Nord), and then eventually into a nationalist, separatist party (Lega per l'Indipendenza della Padania) aiming at the creation of an independent nation in the north of Italy. Although at present the party has again shifted towards more moderate positions and speaks of the necessity of 'devolution', the question can still be asked as to why they thought they needed to turn

into a *nationalist* movement in 1995/1996. What is in the 'nation' that is not 'in the region', or rather in the 'macro-region', so to speak? Also, how do you replace a national identity that you do not recognise as your own with a 'new one'?

Some of the studies this thesis often refers to had simply been written too early to provide an account of how the Lega turned to nationalism in 1995/1996 and what image of northern Italy, renamed as 'Padania', their propaganda put forward (e.g. Mannheimer ed., 1991; Allievi, 1992; Savelli, 1992; Mazzette and Rovati eds., 1993; Cartocci, 1994; De Luna, ed., 1994; Iacopini and Bianchi, 1994; Diamanti, 1995). Other texts do indeed provide some discussion of the identity-work of the party and of the construction of Padania as a *cultural* entity (Diamanti, 1996, especially chapter 5 and Biorcio, 1997: 107-210), however the analysis of the 'Padanian identity' is here, again, necessarily limited, as both books aim to provide a very wide-ranging discussion of the Lega *as a political party* by considering the political and social factors underpinning the emergence of the 'northern question' in Italian politics and by further looking at the organisation of the movement. For these scholars, the identity-work of the party is *one* aspect of its activity that has to be explained among others. Not that it is played down: In fact, Biorcio is at pains to point out that the ability to re-define territorial identities is crucial to the understanding of the success of the Lega (1997: 52). This notwithstanding, these books could not have provided a detailed picture of the invention of Padania until the de-facto abandonment of the project of independence anyway because, once again, they were published well before September 1998, when the project of an independent Padania was *de-facto* abandoned (see chapter 4).

Rumiz (2001) offers an interesting account of the appearance of a 'Padanian race', and he means that many northerners have actually started to 'think Padanian' nowadays. However, apart from lacking the rigour which is required of an academic study (not surprisingly, as Rumiz's work is not, after all, targeted at the academy) this text observes northern Italians, but not the propaganda that has turned some of them into 'Padanians'. Of the three books on the Lega recently published in English, Cento Bull and Gilbert (2001), based on a series of interviews with northern businessmen and politicians such as Cacciari and Formentini, and on a thorough analysis of some of the

party's publications, distinguishes itself for its focus *on socio-economic explanations* of the rise of the Lega. The great ability of the party to 'recreate a collective identity' (ibid., 4) for northern Italians is not denied by the authors, and discussions of publications of the party are indeed on offer here, however the issue of 'identity-formation' hardly receives the attention granted to it by Tambini (2001) and Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro (2002). These works have a focus which is partially similar to the study presented here - perhaps indicating an increasing attention to the issue of identity-formation in neo-nationalist propaganda in recent times. However, what distinguishes the research that follows are the research methods employed, as well as partially different interests.

First of all, the claims made here on the relative predominance of certain themes in the party's propaganda of a specific period (see chapter 5) are *not* grounded on the writer's perception of what happened back then, nor on interviews with members of the party, but rather on a *content analysis* of a large sample of political propaganda. As explained below, this research is interested in what the party *said*, not what the leghisti *thought* they said, or how they would interpret *now* what they said many years ago (which, incidentally, would depend to a large extent on contingent political strategy). Secondly, issues of a supposed common history of northerners and the re-invention of the past on the part of the movement are neither dismissed as irrelevant, nor just mentioned as an absurdity, but analysed and discussed in some detail. Thirdly, for the purposes of this thesis 'Padania' has to be seen as a *case-study*, the ultimate aim being to discuss what the case of Padania has to teach to theorists of nationalism, i.e. scholars dealing with the re-emergence of this political ideology in the context of an ever changing, modernising and globalising Europe.

3. Aims and objectives of the research

This thesis investigates the process of creation of a new cultural identity, which is supposedly the national identity of the would-be nation 'Padania'. The study seeks to explore the alleged cultural and ethnic characteristics of the 'padano' (i.e. the 'Padanian') as posited by the printed propaganda of the Lega Nord in the 'nationalist'

period and further explores what can be learnt from the case of Padania in terms of theories of nationalism and conceptions of national identity.

Such aims are further specified in the following research objectives:

- a) discovering what themes dominated the propaganda of the Northern League in the 'nationalist phase', as far as the definition of the putative nation of 'Padania' was concerned. In particular, this research addresses the question of whether Padania was largely defined in negative terms -i.e. as the 'other' of either southern Italy and/ or of other (various) 'souths', or whether it was predominantly defined in positive terms (through its culture, history, language etc);
- b) analysing how the themes that will be revealed to be dominant in quantitative terms (i.e. 'difference' and 'history') are talked about, explained, valorised and proposed as foundation of the putative nation of Padania by the Lega itself;
- c) highlighting any contradictions, inconsistencies or other problems that might hinder the effectiveness of these themes as tools of nationalist propaganda;
- d) understanding what the specific case of Padania, and the failure to establish a nation in northern Italy -both in actual fact, and as a community a majority of northerners came to identify with- has to teach those who study nationalism and national identities. In particular the thesis will explore the notion of Padania as a 'virtual nation' and consider to what extent 'Padania' is a reaction to, or rather a product of, the effects of globalisation on the life of provincial northern Italy.

4. Why printed propaganda and why *this* propaganda?

Chapter 5 will justify the choice of those specific papers and magazines which provide the main corpus for the present analysis and explain why they are indeed significant and representative of the Lega's discourse. However, a question that is not addressed below is why we should look at printed propaganda at all (including books by leaders and 'leghisti intellectuals') with the exclusion of radio programmes, given that the Lega owns

a radio station, or even TV programmes (the TelePadania)? Finally, if printed publication had to prevail, why focus only on those produced by the centre, instead of collecting a sample of local and regional publications?

The last question can be easily answered. Firstly, this thesis explores a cultural identity that was indeed put forward by a 'centre' (the leadership of the Lega Nord) not just and not simply in opposition to a southern, or rather an 'Italian' identity, but also to counterbalance and reduce the importance of what were seen as *divisive* local and regional identities, such as the 'identità veneta'. Internal struggles will be discussed at some length in chapters 3, 4 and 8, however the study of the strategy of construction of Padania as a unitary nation required a focus on the main source of this 'virtual' nation, i.e. the media *directly* controlled by the centre. Naturally there is some mileage in the idea of comparing what was produced locally with what was produced centrally, although striking similarities are likely to emerge, as the Lega is a very centralised political movement (Biorcio, 1997: 210- 221). As a matter of fact, and curious as it may seem for a movement claiming decentralisation, the leaflets and the political material used in the north are often sent *to the periphery* by Milan (Gangemi, 1999: 53 and 54)⁴.

On the question of concentration on printed material, two reasons can be offered. One of the objectives of the research was to find out how the 'identità padana' had been constructed; for this to be accomplished, a *quantitative* analysis revealing what themes the Lega had insisted upon in its work was needed. Although not being restricted to printed material, content analysis is certainly particularly suited to the study of large samples of it. Here practical considerations had their place, too, given the size of the sample that was necessary in order to claim validity, and given that there were no other coders available apart from the writer. Furthermore, while the daily paper of the party and the magazine *Il Sole delle Alpi* were all easily available to any northerner who wanted to buy them⁵, and while the posters reached all areas of Padania thanks to the Lega's organisation, Radio Padania could only reach parts of the north in the period studied by this thesis⁶. The same can be said of Tele-Padania: firstly its signal could only be received in some areas of the north; secondly, they only started transmitting in October 1998, right at the end of the period that interests us here. Finally, there is no

doubt that ideas central to the definition of a 'Padanian' identity were given special attention in publications such as the *Quaderni Padani*, edited by the Ministry of Culture of the self-appointed 'Padanian government' Gilberto Oneto, or in the official organ of the party, true mouthpiece of the secretary, *La Padania*.

5. Defining the nationalist phase

One (hardly original) claim of this thesis is that between the abandonment of the centre-right coalition in 1994 and the subsequent rapprochement of 1999 there has been a period in the Lega's history in which the party played the nationalist card. This research thus disagrees with Tambini (2001) who sees fundamental continuities between the stance of the Lega of the end of the eighties and the beginning of the nineties and its propaganda in the second half of the decade. According to the writer of the present study, although there are continuities with the Lega of the origins, the 'nationalist' period is characterised by specific claims and a specific rhetoric (chapters 5-7).

What period should be defined as 'the nationalist phase'? The problem with the Lega is not the lack of emotionally charged, policy defining events, but rather the opposite: there are indeed too many, all the time. The nationalist phase could thus be taken to start just after the abandonment of the first Berlusconi government, as many agree that such phase was underpinned, first of all, by the willingness of Bossi to differentiate his party from that of the media tycoon (see chap. 8). However, this would bring in too rich a catch, as Bossi did not start talking about 'independence' straight away, just after having split up with Berlusconi.

In June 1995, near Mantova, the Lega gave birth to the self-defined 'Parliament of the North'. This was attended by *leghisti* elected in the national, regional and local assemblies who were allegedly coming together to discuss reformist policies, however the main function of the Parliament was a symbolic one: the Lega had just started 'stealing' state prerogatives from Italy at an imaginary level (see chapter 4). Nonetheless, and importantly, in the very first session of the 'Parliament of the North'

Bossi's key word had still been *'federalism'*, and not *'independence'*, nor *'separation'* (reprinted in Bossi, 1996b: 109-113). On the other hand, Padania was formally 'declared' independent by the party only in September 1996 (chap. 4), and this could also be regarded as the watershed after which the Lega started thinking in terms of separation. However, this would be a mistake. In order to bring the party's supporters on to the banks of the river Po to witness his attention-grabbing performance, Bossi needed the drum beat of radicalism to start *well before*.

An analysis of the propaganda of the party shows that it is since October 1995 that the differences between north and south of Italy (in terms of culture, social attitudes, economic performance, etc.), and the alleged unwillingness of politicians to reform the state are insisted upon with renewed vigour. One of the means of propaganda which the Lega itself claims as central to its strategy of communication, the poster, gives us another indication of when federalism was dropped by the leadership and the notion of a 'right of independence', which had been lurking behind the surface for some time, fully adopted. In October 1995 the term 'nation of the north' (although not called 'Padania' yet) appears repeatedly in Lega's posters, and in November the party 'comes clean' with yet another poster, this time representing a big, red heart underpinned by: 'There is a road in our hearts: independence of the north' (both reprinted in Lega Nord ed., 1996: 81-83). In speeches delivered to the 'Camera dei Deputati' on 21 December 1995 and 10 January 1996, Bossi, talking about how the country should move forward after the experience of the short-lived caretaker government of Lamberto Dini, openly threatened the Chamber. His message was clear enough: either the deputies agreed to a reform of the Constitution, thus choosing federalism, or otherwise they would make the separation of 'Padania' from Italy inevitable (both reprinted in Bossi, 1996b: 127- 135).

In his 1996 speech the leader also mentioned the 'Padanian Pole', led, he said, by the parliament in Mantova. The electoral campaign that followed was fought by the Lega on its own, against both the centre-left and the centre-right coalitions, and saw the Lega differentiating itself from its competitors on the basis of the claim for independence. This is why the content analysis presented in chap. 5 regarded February 1996 as a

watershed. At the beginning of the new year the new strategy, no doubt already decided since the autumn, was 'taken into the open'.

Explaining why this thesis considers October 1998 as the end of the separatist phase is somehow less complicated. While in March 1998 the Extraordinary Federal Conference of the Lega had still been dedicated to celebrating the idea of 'independence', the Extraordinary Federal Conference of October 1998, following just a few months later, was characterised by a very different tone (see chapter 4). Bossi normally presents his radical turns and changes of strategy as clever manoeuvring aimed at confusing the powerful and at times hidden forces threatening the very survival of the party. Not this time, though. In a rare display of political humility, Bossi here declared that the radical strategy just had not worked, that the Lega was still isolated and that wider alliances were badly needed⁷. *La Padania* had worked at preparing the ground for his speech by presenting the reader (and the delegates) with the apparent choices of: a) not backing the leader, and thus suffer the indignity of a Lega which would have inevitably become irrelevant, or b) supporting the leader and thus moving to a new phase of victories. Given the choices (or rather the lack of them)⁸, not many dared to oppose the change.

Bossi claimed that he wanted to ally himself with a variety of social and productive forces of the north (the so-called 'Blocco Padano'): what he meant, and this would become clear a bit later, was that the party needed to knock at the door of the centre-right once again. The Lega is still, at the time of writing, a very controversial movement, and its project of 'devolution' does not go down well among the Italian left. However, there is no doubt that the party has started the new millennium by leaving on one side its projects of a 'consensual separation' between north and south of Italy and has become, in many ways, a vocal and noisy appendix of the Forza Italia movement.⁹

6. The structure of the study

An extensive and exhaustive literature review of concepts such as 'nation', 'nationalism' and 'ethnic group', interrelated, partially overlapping and variously understood as these

concepts are, was far beyond the scope of a thesis with an empirical focus. However, it was felt that a discussion of how the nation has been theorised by contemporary writers within various fields (such as history and cultural studies) was essential to achieve the objectives of this research, i.e. studying the invention of a nation through representation. Chapters 1 and 2 thus define my theoretical framework, by considering those writers who have redefined the discussion of national identities in the last few decades -scholars A.D. Smith calls 'modernists'- and by exploring the relationship between the local, the national and the global. Here a working definition for terms central to this thesis -such as 'nationalism'- is arrived at and a grounding for later analyses of Padania as a 'virtual nation' is provided. After all, the role of the media and of ritual behaviour in bringing about the modern nation in Europe is indeed the main focus of 'modernist thinkers'.

Chapters 3 and 4 provide the background information which is essential to the exploration of the propaganda of the party. No claims of originality are made here, the intention being that of providing an overview of the following issues:

- a) the economic situation of the country in the 1980s and 1990s;
- b) how Italian society, and particularly the north, developed throughout the period and what were the specific unresolved problems that constantly re-emerged to haunt the political class;
- c) how the Lega became a main force in Italian politics;
- d) who were the other protagonists of the political drama -some of them approaching their end, some of them new- and what were their (various and fluid) relations with the Lega.

If chapters 1 and 2 help place the enigma-Padania in the wider context of discussions of nationalism and globalisation, chapters 3 and 4 put the Lega, as a political movement, in the context of Italian society and Italian politics.

Chapters 5-8 are grounded on the writer's own study of the party's propaganda. Chapter 5 justifies the choice of quantitative content analysis as a research method which is seen

as appropriate to identify the themes which dominated the propaganda of the Lega in the 'nationalist' phase and presents the results of such analysis.

In chapter 6 the author reflects on the limits of content analysis and makes clear why qualitative textual analysis was also deemed necessary. As a consequence, the discussion and justification of the methodology employed by this project spans both chapters 5 and 6. Having seen how quantitative and qualitative analyses complement each other, chapter 6 then discusses the themes that had been revealed to have dominated the propaganda of the party in the chosen period (i.e. 'difference' and opposition to the 'other'). This chapter insists on the internal contradictions of the party's rhetoric, highlighting changes in its strategy.

Chapter 7 focuses on the second theme revealed as fundamental to the definition of 'Padania', i.e. historical events and figures which are alleged to provide a common past to all northern Italians. This part of the research argues that the Lega made a very creative use of alleged common ancestors in its propaganda, and does so by offering a further textual analysis of the Lega's own publications.

Chapter 8 brings together the analyses of chapters 5-7 with the discussion of nationalism and globalisation of chapters 1 and 2, also grounding its reading of 'Padania' on the information provided in chapters 3 and 4. The focus here are the holes in the Lega's arguments, the failure of 'Padania' to impose itself on the imagination of a majority of northerners and the possible definition of this specific 'virtual' community as a 'response' to globalisation. The thesis points out how some of the perspectives on national identity discussed at the beginning seem to have been vindicated by the trajectory of the 'Padanian' project.

Notes:

¹ The leader of the party declares: 'siamo la sola vera destra social-nazionale popolare' (we are the only true social, national-popular right) to distinguish the movement from the re-born, 'no longer fascist' Alleanza Nazionale (see Romagnoli, 2003 *on line*). Nowhere is the party defined as 'far right', 'radical' or 'extreme' on their website, however the movement openly advocates the fascist organic state of the Corporations as a model for the future (incidentally, the graphic and visual style of the party is again openly inspired by fascist art – see posters on their website). Globalisation and immigration are rejected on exactly the same basis as in the Lega Nord's propaganda (see chap. 6), however immigration is very rarely the reason underpinning the creation of a poster or the calling of a demonstration within a movement that does not want to be seen as racist. Because of its lack of historical connections with the fascist regime and its rejection of the very idea of a unitary state, it has been easier for the Lega to exploit anti-immigration and anti-Islamic feelings that it has been for the MSI.

² The documents available in English on the party's website are, at the beginning of 2003, quite limited. However, a 'Full Fundamental Political Programme' of 24 pages that was posted on the website in 2001 (see anonymous, 2001 *on line*) gave great relevance to the party's immigration policies, presented at the beginning of the document once the centrality of the constitution and the importance of the monarchy had been reiterated. The position on foreigners seems to have softened a little now, as the party has become the third largest in Denmark. The movement's website even suggests that a very limited number of foreigners could be given Danish citizenship, an idea certainly not very consistent with the 2001 programme just mentioned.

³ See, for instance, Mauri, in *La Padania* 1998a, or anonymous, in *La Padania on line*, 2000. The list could continue for quite a few pages: after all, in a survey of the end of September 2001, 31 per cent of respondents representing Italian public opinion admitted they felt more diffident towards immigrants because of what had happened in New York (see anonymous in *La Repubblica on line*, 2001).

⁴ This obviously applies to the crucial medium of posters, too, always printed by the centre and sent to the periphery where they are distributed among militants willing to cover the city with them (personal conversation with Mario Cavallin, responsible for the graphics at the national centre of the Lega Nord, Milan, April 2000).

⁵ Soon after its foundation, *La Padania* has also been made available on line.

⁶ The radio was created in 1997 and could only reach a few provinces of the north in its first year. Given that the present research focuses on the period 1996-1998 (as explained below) the radio can safely be considered as secondary to our purposes. In a personal conversation with Gilberti of the Administration of the Lega Nord, in April 2000, the author learnt that there were three regions which at that stage were quite well covered by the radio: Lombardy, Piedmont and Veneto. The average daily listeners' reach was 58, 000.

⁷ In his speech to the Conference (available at the national centre of the Lega Nord, Milano) Bossi said he was sorry he had failed to create the Federal Republic of Padania, adding that no-one could have accomplished such a project in such a short time by democratic means (p. 7). His change of strategy, already announced in the preceding month, was widely interpreted as a return of the Lega to mainstream national politics through the *de facto*, necessary abandonment of the separatist rhetoric (see Passalacqua, in *La Repubblica* 1998: 14).

⁸ In the by then traditional (in Hobsbawm's and Ranger's 1983 sense) political rally of Venice on 13 September 1998 Bossi had already announced that the way forward was that of an alliance of the Lega with the 'Blocco Padano'. In the following days, while another internal split was consummated (see chap. 4) *La Padania* presented the choice the delegates to the Conference had to make as one between 'Padanismo or Berlusconi' (e.g. Marchi, in *La Padania* 1998a; Marchi in *La Padania* 1998b). In reality, as this research discusses in chap. 4, it was precisely the strategy of the 'blocco' which took the Lega back into the centre-right coalition.

⁹ The author is here thinking in particular at the volte-face of the Lega on issues of legality in Italian politics. After having exploited the popular excitement with the judiciary that followed the investigations into political corruption of the beginning of the nineties, the Lega has now turned itself into a faithful servant of the actual Presidente del Consiglio by constantly attacking the judges who are still digging into Berlusconi's past (see anonymous, in *La Repubblica* 2003).

CHAPTER 1

The nation: 'natural', 'imagined' or 'invented'?

1.1 Introduction to Chapter 1

Given the concern of this thesis with a contemporary nationalist and separatist movement such as the Lega Nord it is useful to take the 'modernist' approach to nationalism as a starting point for the discussion. This is not only because such approach is still dominant in academic literature and rarely challenged¹, but, more importantly, because Padania is essentially an example of a *consciously* invented (if perhaps already 'aborted') nation. In Smith the modernist paradigm is defined as that approach to nationalism which insists upon 'the political nature of nations and active role of citizens and leaders in their construction' (1998: 19 and 20). Furthermore, modernists claim that 'nations... were built up through a variety of processes and institutions' (ibid.: 20) thus opposing what Smith calls 'perennialist' perspectives, which see the nation as ancient and immemorial -almost as if it was a natural phenomenon.

Our starting point, therefore, will be the modernist paradigm. Moreover, since this thesis looks closely at the Lega Nord's symbolic 'construction' of the nation of Padania in order to find out how the identity of this would-be nation has been communicated through this party's publications, it must be preceded by the analysis and discussion of 'what a nation is', and how we can define it.

First, one needs to consider the theory of nationalism and national identities and the relationships between these and the process of globalisation (chapters 1 and 2); second, the history of the Lega must be considered (chapters 3 and 4). These chapters will provide the necessary grounding for an analysis of Padania as a cultural 'construction'.

1.2 Nations and capitalism, a modernist approach

Ernest Gellner's work undermines essentialist and 'perennialist' notions of national identity through his insistence on defining nations as the products of a particular phase of development in human history, indeed a *necessity* of capitalism. 'Having a nation', we are told, 'is not an inherent attribute of humanity, but it has now come to appear as such' (Gellner, 1983: 6). This notion is consistent with a materialist and anti-idealistic reading of history, and rightly associated with Marxism (Connor, 1994), although Marx did not show a keen interest in discussing what 'makes' nations, and indeed seemed to take nations for granted more often than not². Moreover, some of his remarks about his contemporaries seem to be based on the assumption that 'national characters' rather than being the product of an education based on national cultures, are in a way 'innate'; even 'race', perhaps not surprisingly in a man of that period, appears at times to have a strong influence on people's character.³

However, if the 'essence' of the nation is not questioned in Marx, the state and nationalism (the ideological movement advocating the coincidence of state and nation, as we shall see below), on the contrary, certainly are: they appear to him as 'a peculiar outgrowth... of the rise of industrial capitalism' (Smith, 1998: 47). Indeed, for Marx, the state provides the necessary basis for the establishment of market capitalism, because it offers a secure internal market where goods and people can be moved and exchanged and a 'protected' social system based on the exploitation of proletarians -where 'protection' is not only protection from external factors, but of course, and primarily, from any uprising of the exploited (e.g. Althusser, 1971).

Gellner proposes a definition of the state which summarises the above:

The 'state' is that institution or set of institutions specifically concerned with the enforcement of order (whatever else they may also be concerned with) (Gellner, 1983: 4).

This thesis will use this definition throughout in order to distinguish between *state* and *nation* -the definition of which follows below. Although definitions of the state vary,

there is, in fact, widespread agreement on the idea that this is a political entity established by means of military force, which nowadays -although not necessarily in the past- claims an absolute monopoly of legitimate violence. However, Gellner's definition of the state, by building on Weber (1948)⁴, implies further functions of this 'set of institutions'. For example, the creation and supervision of a centralised education system.

What distinguishes Gellner, in fact, is his insistence on unified, would-be homogeneous high cultures as *necessities* of the new (albeit self-defined as old) community of the nation:

Modern society is one in which no sub-community, below the size of one capable of sustaining an independent educational system, can any longer reproduce itself. The reproduction of fully socialised individuals itself becomes part of the division of labour, and is no longer performed by sub-communities for themselves (Gellner, 1983: 32).

A socialised individual is thus created through his/ her incorporation into a shared high culture. In Gellner's terms this means, first of all, a shared language as an industrialised society requires

both a mobile division of labour, and sustained, frequent and precise communication between strangers involving a sharing of explicit meaning, transmitted in a standard idiom and in writing when required (ibid., 34).

In reality, language is only part of the problem (or rather part of the solution). What is needed is a unified culture, providing a 'common conceptual currency':

The level of literacy and technical competence, in a standardised medium, a common conceptual currency, which is required of members of this society if they are to be properly employable... is so high that it

simply cannot be provided by the kin or local units, such as they are (ibid.).

This is what Gellner calls 'exo-education': a high level of competence in a high culture that cannot be provided by the local units of a supposedly 'traditional' society, not only because in such a society the necessary skills would often be wanting, but because capitalism needed big communities of the size of the European states that emerged since the 17th century, if it was to succeed. How else could people living in what will eventually become the various nations learn to share information and communicate, if not through the means of a unitary language and a unitary culture?

Gellner continues:

The employability, dignity, security and self-respect of individuals, typically, and for the majority of men [sic] now hinges on their education; and the limits of the culture within which they were educated are also the limits of the world within which they can, morally and professionally, breathe. A man's education is by far his most precious investment, and in effect confers his identity on him. Modern man is not loyal to a monarch, or a land, or a faith, whatever he may say, but to a culture (ibid. 36).

Culture and the willingness to 'stay together' as a group become the catalysts of the formation of the national community.

The cultures now seem to be the natural repositories of political legitimacy. Only then does it come to appear that any defiance of their boundaries by political units constitutes a scandal (ibid., 55).

In a modern age, and *only* in this age, nations can be defined in terms of will and culture:

Polities then will to extend their boundaries to the limits of their cultures, and to protect and impose their culture with the boundaries of their power. The fusion of will, culture and polity becomes the norm, and one not easily or frequently defied (ibid. 55; cf. Gellner, 1987)

In the modern age, nations can be defined in terms of *will* (the willingness to form a group with other people who are perceived, rightly or wrongly, as similar) and *culture* (the necessary 'way of life' which allegedly characterises the different groups, one nurtured -or perhaps created- by a centralised education system). In this age -but *only* in this age- any defiance of the boundaries of culture and will by political units is seen as a scandal: it is thus the aim and function of nationalist movements to make sure that political power reaches as far as the allegedly 'natural' boundaries of a culture. That is to say: it is the aim of nationalists to make sure that 'nation' and 'state' -an independent, sovereign state- coincide.

The means used by nationalist movements to keep the nationalist spirit alive (or indeed to build up the idea of a nation) may well be artificial (as we will see below), 'but in no way does it follow that the principle of nationalism itself... is... in the least contingent and accidental' (ibid., 56). The fact that dead languages can quite artificially be revived so as to endow the nationalist goal with a sacred *aura*, or that traditions can be invented (Hobsbawm and Ranger eds., 1983), does not mean that nations *in themselves* are anything but a *necessary* answer to a particular phase of human history. Nations are necessary and indeed inevitable, *given the particular historical context created by industrialisation and capitalism*. Therefore, nationalist movements- historical forces which have been vital in the building of nation-states and in making us see nations as an inherent attribute of humanity- have been necessary, too. To put it in slightly different terms: the 'creation' of Switzerland can be looked at closely so as to expose how the legend of William Tell, now an important symbol of national union, was indeed radically 're-interpreted' from a nationalist perspective (as we will see soon). However, this does not mean that the nation of Switzerland has been anything less than necessary, especially at a time in which two aggressive nationalist movements were turning big

neighbouring areas into modern nations (Italy and Germany). Thus the nationalist principle, Gellner claims, has very deep roots in our current condition.

To conclude, by focusing on the historical reasons behind the creation of nation-states (the necessity of homogeneous, standardised high-cultures for a new economy based on industrialisation to flourish) one implicitly rejects all essentialist conceptions of the nation; however, by treating these products of the evolution of human society as 'inevitable' (given a particular historical phase) one avoids using 'constructed' as synonymous for 'not real', 'illusory' -and thus 'replaceable'.

1.3 Desperately needing the nation: religion, death and national identity

Rousseau is one of the first theorists of the nation (Cobban, 1964; Smith, 1979). It is in the writings of the French philosopher that one finds an analysis of the notion of 'national characters', an idea that he took from Montesquieu, but to which he gave a political dimension: '[Rousseau] made the idea of 'national character' central to the political life of a community and... sought to translate it into a practical programme of national preservation and restoration' (Smith, 1991: 88). In Rousseau's own words 'tout peuple a, ou doit avoir, un caractère national' (cited in Cobban, 1964: 109), a concept very much taken for granted nowadays. Although the statement just quoted might be taken to be an essentialist one, a closer look reveals that the correction 'ou doit avoir' implies that, at times, this national character needs to be *created*, needs *defining*-because it was not there 'at birth'. However, elsewhere, when writing about Corsica and Poland, Rousseau seems to be clear on the idea that national characters are an *inherent* feature of different human groups, albeit he refuses to ground the differences between peoples on race and prefers to focus on cultural factors such as language (Rousseau, 1953 and 1972). It is not clear, though, if these characteristics are a by-product of national characters, or if they rather *define* national characters and make them what they are (Cobban, 1964: 109).

The name of Rousseau tends to be associated with a romantic conception of nationhood, according to which national cultures express the diverse national characters of the various peoples into which humanity is 'naturally' divided. Needless to say, if there is a notion that the modernists want to prove wrong once and for all, this it is the idea that nations are 'natural' and that they 'always existed' (if with slightly different characteristics). And yet, if nations are a modern invention, what brought about 'national consciousness' after the Middle Ages? Should one be content with the notion that it was *all* done by a centralised education system able to instil in the general public a consciousness of nationhood? The Italian intellectuals who conspired to achieve unity and independence in the 19th century certainly did not attend the same schools, and can hardly be said to have shared the same culture, as the country was divided into different states and ruled by authorities who spoke different languages. To put it simply, we cannot compare the State of the Church which ruled the centre of what would become a unitary state, or indeed the south of Italy (ruled by the Bourbons), with the Austrian-Hungarian Empire of the north in terms of modernisation, of the guiding values of the administration, or the activities of a modern bourgeoisie- which just did not exist in the south. Therefore, the point can be made that some members of the middle and upper classes achieved national consciousness *well before* a unitary education system was established in Italy (they were themselves, in fact, well aware of the necessity of creating a unitary culture and stirring up national feelings in the country).

This is not surprising: as Smith points out (1998: 39-40), a unitary education system in fact often *follows* the construction of the nation, being one of the first preoccupations of a government which achieves power after a nationalist uprising. Smith also reminds us that if we look at the case of de-colonised continents such as Africa and Asia, the first to wave the national flag had often been people certainly well educated, *but educated abroad*-and often in the 'master-country'. Moreover, the failure of the USSR to create a 'soviet man', thus wiping out previous national loyalties through a 'soviet education system', again confirms that caution must be exercised when evaluating the power of education in 'making identities'.

If the idea that nations are grounded on education is not without its problems, one needs to look further than a centralised school system to justify the strength of national identities.

A question that has always puzzled scholars of nationalism, and one which inevitably troubles modernists, is why nations are able to command such an immediate and, crucially, *unquestioned* loyalty, and particularly in times of crisis⁵. Connor (1994: 196) distinguishes between nationalism (loyalty to the nation) and patriotism (loyalty to the state), claiming that the loyalty to an ethnic group (out of which nations were born, according to both him and Smith) and loyalty to the state (a political entity, as seen above) should be kept separate. The distinction becomes crucial when analysing phenomena like the dissolution of the Soviet Union (a state destroyed by the re-emergence of *its* nations- according to Connor) or past conflicts in former Yugoslavia.

Anderson provides an answer to the question of what makes nations such a powerful means of identification, however his discussion of the power of national identities is often overshadowed by the seminal analysis of the 'process' whereby nations came to be imagined as such. The emotional bond provided by nations has a lot to do, in Anderson's view, with questions of *life* and *death*.

...neither Marxism nor Liberalism are much concerned with death and immortality. If the nationalist imagining is so concerned, this suggests a strong affinity with religious imaginings (Anderson, 1991: 10).

According to Anderson, nationalism must be associated with religions more than with the other 'isms' of the nineteenth century, such as Marxism or Liberalism. And what actually connects nationalism and religion is that both address some of the fundamental questions of 'man'.

The extraordinary survival over thousands of years of Buddhism, Christianity or Islam in dozens of different social formations attests to their imaginative response to the overwhelming burden of human

suffering- disease, mutilation, grief, age and death... The great weaknesses of all evolutionary/progressive styles of thought, not excluding Marxism, is that such questions are answered with impatient silence (ibid. 10).

The age of the Enlightenment and of rationalism needed a new secular religion akin to those systems of thought which had been able to answer (no matter how 'irrationally') some 'fundamental human questions' concerning the very destiny of the individual and the meaning of life⁶. The strength of nationalism is that it provides answers to the same questions, it gives people a sense of purpose and justifies the sacrifice of the individual in the superior interests of a group. Moreover, it does so by placing 'man' back 'on earth' (on the 'fatherland', that is). Nations 'loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future' (ibid. 12): by claiming their own eternity nations expect the ultimate sacrifice.

It is not a question of nationalism superseding religion. Such a claim would be a mistake, and contemporary Anglo-Saxon societies show that a strong sense of national identity often goes hand in hand *with* faith. It is not the case that one has been substituted for the other, but rather that, far from having to compete, religion and nationalism can become just 'two sides of the same coin'. The case of Britain, with the head of state who is head of the Church, too, proves how the two 'faiths' may not only coexist, but indeed be embodied in the same institution. Indeed it is often the case that a particular faith is at the very core of national identities, and that religion actually works to *reinforce* the sense of identity of a country, even when there is no such a thing as a total interpenetration of state and church.

In a collection of essays which challenge the modernist approach, and in particular the idea that nations are a recent invention, Hastings makes the point that the Christian religion should be seen as a central influence in the emergence of nations, as the Bible provided nothing less than 'the original model of the nation' (1997: 4). Because Christians used the Old Testament as a set of precedents which could guide their

actions, they were led to identifying the general experience of their people 'with that of Israel, in a way productive of nationalism' (ibid.: 204).

The influence of religion over nationalism is thus twofold. Firstly (and crucially) the Bible provided Christianity with the 'model of the nation, quite apart from the meaning attached to the specific experience of the Jews. This explains why Hastings sees nationalism as a Christian (as opposed to Islamic) invention- although it was eventually adopted by Islamic culture at a later stage. Secondly, religion proved itself to be a crucial factor in the particular history of *some* nations and the definitions of *some* national identities. This is to say that the idea of Spain as a unitary nation, for instance, developed as it did *due to* the constant opposition of two cultures (the Catholic and the Muslim) (ibid.: 112).

And Spain is not an exception, according to Hastings:

Whenever a people feels threatened in its distinct existence by the advance of a power committed to another religion, the political conflict is likely to have superimposed upon it a sense of religious conflict, almost crusade, so that national identity becomes fused with religious identity (ibid.: 190).

Thus religion becomes a powerful sign of 'otherness' when there is a conflict to achieve hegemony, or a frontier is contested between powers that do not share the same faith. If not, its contribution to national identity may be far less important (see also Colley, 1992).

The issue of a potential contribution of religion to the emergence of (some) national identities is one thing, the problem of alleged similarities between nationalism and religious thinking *as systems of thought*, an idea put forward by Anderson (1991), quite another. These alleged similarities can arguably provide a powerful explanation of the power of national identities to locate individual selves in the world, to say it with Smith (1991: 17), and clarify why nationalists -including the Lega- seem to enjoy employing a

rhetoric which is reminiscent of religious mysticism. Still the links between nationalism and religion have not yet been fully explored.

1.4 Nations, vernaculars and print-capitalism

If we follow Anderson, 'print-capitalism' opened the way to a new conception of society. From the early sixteenth century onwards Europe witnessed the increasing influence of Protestantism, with its emphasis on a direct relationship between the believer and God (and, therefore, the word of God- the Bible). If the Reformation 'owed much to capitalism' (ibid. 39), it could also be argued that print-capitalism owed *even more* to the Reformation.

The public of those who could read Latin was limited, so the necessity arose to print the new commodity of the book by adopting vernaculars instead, as Protestants maintained that the public had the right to read the word of God without the mediation of the clergy. There were too many local vernaculars across Europe, though, and indeed they were too diverse to provide capitalism with the instruments that it needed (i.e. languages that could be understood in a wide-enough area to justify investing in them). That is why capitalism had to create print-languages that were either based on a particular vernacular used for the administration (ibid. 45), or else on languages regarded as 'superior' for reasons of prestige⁷. These languages, in fact, had more chances of being adopted by speakers of similar vernaculars:

These print-languages laid the basis for national consciousness in three distinct ways. First and foremost they created unified fields of exchange and communication below Latin and above the spoken vernaculars (ibid. 44).

Speakers of the various European languages became aware of the fact that they could now communicate via the printed word with the ones who would eventually become their countrymen (the French, Spaniards and so on) and *only with them*. In the first half

of the sixteenth century, Europe was going through an exceptional period of prosperity: this meant an increasing demand for leisure and culture, and, therefore, an increasing demand for books. After all, the print-industry was 'a great industry under the control of wealthy capitalists' (Febvre and Martin, quoted in Anderson, *ibid.*: 38). This was to have a profound impact on the process of imagining the nation as a political community which was 'both inherently limited and sovereign', because the limits of the nations (in people's minds if not in actual fact) started to be set by a *cultural factor*, the sharing of the same print-language. Moreover, a large reading public was created in this period, one which included the middle-classes and increasingly women- a crucial development as the nation is always conceived as all embracing.

We can summarise the conclusions to be drawn from the argument thus far by saying that the convergence of capitalism and print technology on the fatal diversity of human language created the possibility of a new form of imagined community, which in its basic morphology set the stage for the modern nation (ibid.: 46).

Naturally, the book was not the only medium to bring about unified languages and cultures. Nations also emerged as 'imagined communities' distinct from others thanks to the newspaper. This was a 'different' form of book that Anderson sees as fundamental for the creation of a sense of belonging to the same community. By opening up, every morning, the same paper which was read everywhere else within the borders of a state, and only by those who could understand, if not always speak, a particular language, the individual was not simply taught that the nation existed, but learned to identify its *cultural space*. Thus, one was taught what was relevant, what constituted news in the nation and one was raised to national consciousness through the 'ideology of the nation'.

Thus the media actively shaped the nation by providing a very powerful means through which to sell nationalist ideology to the public; even more importantly, they created a *cultural space* where some people, characters, values and cultural products were talked about *and not others* (Gans, 1980: 4-6, 12; Galtung and Ruge, 1965; Palmer, 2002:

427). Anderson could be criticised (e.g. Schlesinger, 1991: 162-165) for not paying any attention to more modern media, such as television, that are nowadays fundamental, to say the least, in the shaping of national identities; however, he clearly wanted to focus on the *emergence* of nations in the popular consciousness, not on how they are *kept alive* in the contemporary world.

Whatever the media that are (or rather are not) taken into account, the importance of Anderson's contribution lies in linking nations and *representation*, therefore strengthening the modernist paradigm by showing that nations have to exist, first of all, in the minds of their members⁸. In this spirit, nationalism becomes the socio-political movement for *achieving* and *nurturing* this imagined, limited and sovereign entity.

While Anderson's work advances our understanding of what a 'nation' is, it is not, in itself, sufficient. Granted that the nation imagines itself as 'limited and sovereign', on what basis does it set its limits, what are the criteria to decide how far it should reach, and what is the justification of its right of sovereignty? These questions will be further addressed below when considering Smith's definition of 'nation' and 'ethnic community'. However, before moving on, Anderson's famous definition of nations as 'imagined communities' deserves further discussion.

The term 'imagined' should be distinguished from 'imaginary', as the ease with which we can slide from the first into the second has earned Anderson some criticism (e.g. Smith, 1998: 136-138). Here Anderson is neither claiming that nations are *artificial* creations coming out of nowhere, nor that they have no tangible reality. It is not Anderson's fault if his work has inspired postmodernist readings of the nation which might be said to 'forget' the very *real* existence of national communities *outside the world of textuality* (e.g. Bhabha ed. 1990). Benedict Anderson is not only ready to point out that 'imagination' means 'creation' and *not* 'fabrication' (the latter term implying an idea of *falsity*), but he also reminds us that nations are no more imagined than *any other community*. The contribution of Anderson lies in his insistence on the centrality of subjective and cultural factors in the creation of the nation, an achievement that should not be underestimated *vis a vis* readings of the origin of the nation which might put too

much emphasis on economic factors (Gellner, 1983 and Williams, 1983), and/or the power of centralised education and propaganda (Gellner, 1983; 1987; 1997; Hobsbawm and Ranger eds., 1983; Hobsbawm, 1990). One must not forget that in Anderson nations are *very* real, and in no way can they be said to exist *only* in the imagination of their members. Admittedly, the confusion does originate from the complexity of the topic, and Smith is obviously right in warning us against the risks of confusing 'imaginary' and 'imagined'⁹. The nation is imagined 'because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion' (Anderson, 1991: 6). While we normally meet all members of our family, at least once in a while, perhaps all our colleagues at work, we can never meet all members of a community like the nation- or of other communities, too, for that matter (e.g. the city): yet we feel a special relationship with these people, we know that they 'belong' where we 'belong'. Even if people can never see with their own eyes every single corner of their nation -unless they live in San Marino- yet they represent the nation to themselves through its map and they are therefore clear about where 'it finishes' and where other nations 'begin' (ibid. 170-178). We need to represent the nation to ourselves for it to exist, but this does not mean that an act of imagination is in itself sufficient to *create* the nation, somehow, from nowhere.

1.5 Nations and capitalism: comparing ideas

This chapter opened with an analysis of Gellner's views on the nation, seen as a product of capitalism, and it is to capitalism that the discussion has turned once again. In fact, according to Gellner, it was capitalism that needed homogeneous, monolingual and monocultural entities in which a higher education was centrally provided by what came to be known as the nation-state. Thus identity was bestowed on people by the nation-state through education (Gellner, 1983: 36 and again 61).

In Anderson the connection between the idea of the nation and capitalism is also central, but from a different perspective. Indeed in Anderson 'the element of fatality is

essential' (Anderson, 1991: 43): at the origin of national communities there is a 'half-fortuitous, but explosive, interaction between a system of production and productive relations (capitalism), a technology of communications (print), and the fatality of human linguistic diversity' (ibid.: 42 and 43). At the heart of Gellner's work there is the conviction that at some stage in human history nations became *inevitable*, as the economic forces pushing in the direction of homogeneous mono-cultural entities were just too strong. Nationalism itself *had* to happen, and, therefore, it cannot be defined as a 'contingent, artificial, ideological invention' (Gellner, 1983: 56). Moreover, it is quite clear in Gellner that nations were *created by nationalism* and would not have come into existence had this force not shaped them. Traditions can indeed be invented to justify the nation and 'pristine purities restored' (ibid.), i.e. there is no doubt that nationalist movements do employ various strategies so as to define the nation in particular terms and give it authority and some sense of a common past, however

... in no way does it follow that the principle of nationalism itself, as opposed to the avatars it happens to pick up for its incarnations, is itself in the least contingent and accidental (ibid. 56).

In Anderson, on the contrary, the whole process of formation of nation-states seems to be less the product of a destiny and more the outcome of the fortuitous encounter of a series of historical factors. Also, the role of capitalism is different. In Anderson, capitalism plays a central role because of the ways in which it determines the production of books (and then newspapers) on a mass scale. It is because of capitalism that books must be printed in a new 'written vulgar' that sets the mental boundaries of the national community by unifying the previously diverse local and regional vernaculars. In Gellner the role of capitalism is (if possible) even more decisive: no society can afford not to take the form of the nation-state because of the importance of a centralised education-system in the new capitalist economy of modern Europe. Or, to use his own words: 'the high educational level is in any case also presupposed both by the type of highly productive economy and by the expectation of sustained improvement' (Gellner, 1987: 15).

By the end of the nineteenth century the process had come to an end: the world was now seen as being 'naturally' divided into nations, each with their own 'national character' and culture, and nations were seen as the depositary of legitimisation for the exercise of political power -the guiding principle leading to the Treaty of Versailles after WWI (Hobsbawm, 1990).

Although possibly 'inevitable' in historical terms, this transformation had been achieved by nationalist movements in Europe thanks to a clever use of symbols and signs creating and defining 'club-membership'. Before looking at an approach to the study of nations which focuses on the importance of symbols, i.e. ethnosymbolism, this study considers how images, symbols and myths are consciously manipulated by the builders of the nation by reflecting on the notion of 'invented traditions'.

1.6 Invented traditions

The idea that traditions are often quite recent in origin and that sometimes they have been invented to meet *novel* needs is associated with the names of Hobsbawm and Ranger, editors of *The Invention of Tradition* (1983). This concept plays an important role in the context of the present research, as it supports a radically modernist notion of nations, seen as entities 'constructed' through various means (an idea further developed in Hobsbawm, 1990). "Traditions which appear or claim to be old are often quite recent in origin and sometimes invented" (Hobsbawm in Hobsbawm and Ranger eds., 1983: 1); the link that a tradition allegedly provides with the past is thus exposed as being illusory. In reality, as the authors and others show in the book with reference to particular European case studies, traditions have often (although not *always*) originated quite recently, and may be answers to *novel* situations.

But what is a 'tradition'?

'Invented tradition' is taken to mean a set of practices, normally governed by overtly or tacitly accepted rules and of a ritual or symbolic nature,

which seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition (ibid.).

The function of traditions is, therefore, ideological: by claiming their origin in a distant past, traditions seek to reinforce the legitimacy of particular institutions, and/or act as factors binding communities together (ibid.: 9)¹⁰. The fact that some of them are denounced as invented, does not mean that all of them necessarily are so, as we have already pointed out: 'Where the old ways are alive, traditions need be neither revived nor invented' (ibid.: 8).

As we will see at a later stage (cf. chap. 8) these suggestions need to be taken up when looking at the would-be nation of Padania. It will be argued below that one of the main problems with Padania is actually the lack of traditions and rituals to be taken as 'signs of club-membership' by its inhabitants. Moreover, we will have to consider and discuss the ways in which new rituals and symbols have indeed been re-discovered (when they have not been created *ex-nihilo*) by the advocates of the nation (cf. chap. 7).

Traditions bind the community together:

The crucial element seems to have been the invention of emotionally and symbolically charged signs of club membership rather than the statutes and objects of the club. Their significance lay precisely in their undefined universality (ibid. 11).

Thus traditions can be defined as 'boundary-making' practices whose function lies precisely in clarifying who is 'in' a certain group or community -i.e. those who take part in the ritual and *respond* to the symbol- and reassure them that they belong, while excluding others. This process is always at work in the case of groups that rely, at least to a certain extent, on the loyalty of their members (e.g. political parties), or in the case of communities of whatever size (not necessarily national communities, then, although traditions have obviously played a crucial role in fostering national cultures). Cohen emphasises the importance of symbolism and of the notion of 'boundary' in any process

of community-building; we are reminded that if the primary function of many symbols is to express, signify and therefore create the boundary, then members of a group do not even need to attach to them exactly the same meanings (Cohen, 1989). The same happens with traditions, whether invented or not. They 'seek to inculcate certain values and norms of behaviour by repetition, which automatically implies continuity with the past' (Hobsbawm in Hobsbawm and Ranger eds., 1983: 1). They only need to be vaguely understood in order to work¹¹: they communicate the beliefs and values that must be embraced if one is to become (or to be confirmed as) a member of the national community. These values can be very difficult to define, and can mean different things to different people.

One criticism that could be made of Hobsbawm's and Ranger's conceptions of the process of nation-building is that they overemphasise the role and power of elites. In fact, the underlying *leit motif* of their work is that the masses are led to 'believe' in the nation and identify with it through the exploitation of artificial means on the part of the leaders. Writing from a Marxist perspective Hobsbawm makes clear, unsurprisingly, that these leaders act on behalf of a ruling class (the bourgeoisie). What this model fails to explain though -as seen in the case of Gellner, too- is *why* so many common people become willing to identify ardently with the nation, no matter what their social background is, to the point of *dying* for it. To assume that all this is achieved *merely* by bombarding people with powerful propaganda means overestimating its power to a great extent (Smith, 1998: 130).

It cannot be *only* a matter of the 'cultural engineers' doing their job properly when manipulating the passive masses and selling a nationalist ideology to them (although nobody is suggesting that propaganda should not be regarded as crucial). If Anderson insisted on the analogy between nationalist philosophy and religious thinking in trying to provide an explanation for the power of the nation, Smith instead sees a necessary link between the re-invented tradition, the re-discovered symbol, and the culture which *predates* the nation. The selection and re-working of the invented traditions

takes place within strict limits, and... must do so if the new 'invented' tradition is to be 'on the wavelength to which the public is ready to tune in', in Hobsbawm's phrase. These limits are set by the culture, or cultures, of the public in question (Smith, 1998: 129).

Thus propaganda only works *if* and *when* it is based on myths, images and values that are already shared, at least to some extent, by the ethnic group which can be said to be dominant among the audience -no matter how liberally these myths and rituals are then re-interpreted and maybe even given new meanings. That is to say: these constructions cannot and do not come out of nowhere. What this criticism assumes, as we will see, is that nations develop on the basis of ethnic groups -they need some underlying, pre-existing symbols and values recognised by a majority.

Modern nationalists certainly re-write history and re-interpret symbols: this can only be done to a certain point, though, and the addressee must see the link between what could be a 'new' solution to a 'present' problem (an invented tradition in Hobsbawm's terms) and a pre-existing myth, known values and beliefs -or else the communication will fail, or perhaps succeed only for a short time (Armstrong, 1982).

However, a constructionist approach to nations and national identities still opens the way to an understanding of processes of *nation building*. The power of propaganda and the passivity of the masses might have been overestimated by some, however identity must be *communicated* and is continuously *redefined*. Nations must be seen as flexible, adaptable entities. This remains true, even when one acknowledges the necessary link between this continuous process of re-interpretation and the culture of the past.

1.7 The invention of traditions: a case study.

A useful case study in this context is Switzerland, analysed by Birmingham (1995), with an eye to de-constructing the myth of William Tell. Although this essay was not

published in *The Invention of Tradition* it is clearly indebted to Hobsbawm's and Ranger's work.

The case study proposed here is of value to students of Padania, as there are many similarities between the two areas. First of all, both areas are extremely wealthy, and although Padania does not reach Switzerland's level in terms of GNP per capita, its economy has been booming for years. Secondly, they are both characterised by very strong local identities and a variety of different languages. Thirdly, Switzerland is a federation and the plan of the separatists for Padania, at least in the period that is studied by this thesis (1996-1998), was to constitute the nation as a federation, too. Finally, and crucially for us, both nationalist movements have 'invented' traditions in order to cement either weak (and threatened) national identities- the case of Switzerland -or indeed still non-existing ones -Padania.

The Bern constitution, which is seen as the founding act of the state of Switzerland, was signed in 1848 by no less than twenty-five sovereign states (Birmingham, 1995). The choice of constituting a federation, and not a centralised state on the model of post-revolutionary France, represented a wise acknowledgement of the diversity of Switzerland. The struggles between the various Swiss states and municipalities in the preceding centuries, not least due to different religious allegiances, must have played a significant role in reminding the founders of Switzerland that here taking the federalist path was a necessity, rather than a choice. And still, the creation of a unitary state was a necessity, too, and not only in military terms: first, this was a period when two bigger neighbouring countries- Italy and Germany- achieved nationhood, and this could have posed a threat to Swiss municipalities; second, there were pressing practical reasons in favour of the choice for a unitary nation-state. Birmingham summarises them as follows:

The most urgent need was for a single market, a Zollverein on the German model. Custom dues were the major source of revenue for the governments of most Swiss republics... The miniature scale of most states meant that custom posts were frequent even over short distances and

added to the cost and delay of any commercial journey (Birmingham, 1995: 40).

Moreover, the abolition of internal custom posts had to be followed by the establishment of a national mail service and the creation of a unitary currency, all elements that have become essential to the survival of industrialised European nation-states in the nineteenth century (ibid.: 40 and 41). Nonetheless, it is questionable whether this state being created in the nineteenth century could already be defined as a 'nation'. In the situation faced by the 'fathers of Switzerland', which indeed is the same faced nowadays by proponents of the nation of Padania, the problem was, in fact, to 'invent patriotism', as Birmingham puts it (ibid.: 42)¹². To put it in different terms, they needed to make the nation of Switzerland a lived, felt (and loved) 'imagined community'. The Swiss were in fact going towards unification but centuries of division had made it much easier for them to identify with their 'communes' than with the new-born national community.

One of the problems here was the absence of figures, images or heroes that could be taken as past examples of Swiss nationalism. 'In the absence of modern heroes through which to cement loyalties they turned to legendary ones. In particular, they turned to William Tell' (ibid.). However, William Tell was not only a legendary figure -as opposed to an historical one- but different versions of his legend co-existed. Which one was to be taken as the founding myth of Swiss nationalism? Was it the William Tell defender of the poor (a sort of Robin Hood) of the twelfth century (a populist myth of foundation), or was it rather the one who allegedly fought Charles the Bold three centuries later? It is worth noticing, as it reinforces a point made elsewhere, how Tell came to be deployed in the context of a pre-existing *deeply felt* tradition. Tell himself, in fact, was quite simply *not* a 'tradition', whether invented or not (although Birmingham at times seems to think that he was, not helped in this by the ambiguities of Hobsbawm's and Ranger's own definitions)¹³. William Tell represented a legend that could be (and has been) turned into a mythical hero embodying the virtues of a 'people' (see chapter 7).

The Swiss, according to Birmingham, put together elements belonging to the different versions of the legend of Tell, and by doing so created a new myth of national unity

which borrowed from various sources. In this sense, the myth of Tell was, to a certain extent, 'constructed'. However, the re-interpreted story of Tell came to be attached to an old tradition of the Alpine valleys, namely the one of 'pacts sworn on a mountain' by representatives of independent communities, one that cannot in itself be classified as 'invented'. Such tradition acquired a new meaning by being associated to a re-interpreted, re-assembled legend (i.e. William Tell):

One of the early judicial pacts that were so common between medieval Alpine valleys was turned into the founding charter of the nation... Although the 1291 pact bears neither place, nor day, it was alleged to have been sworn by three brave men who met secretly on August the 1st, in a small prairie above the forest lake and vowed to defend each others' liberties. It was even hinted that William Tell had been of their number (ibid.: 43, the emphasis is mine)

One of the main novelties of the Lega Nord's communications strategy is the clever use of symbols as well as the invention, or sometimes rather the deployment in a different context, of rituals. One of the traditions which were deployed by the Lega in a completely different context (although belonging to the history of the Alpine northern-Italians valleys) was exactly the 'ceremony of the pact'. This is a ceremony whereby the Lega's MPs and dignitaries meet in some place of special historic significance to swear a pact of mutual help and support, by claiming to represent 'the north'. The ceremony itself, as we have seen, is truly one of the Alpine (and not only Swiss) traditions of the Middle Ages, yet it was repeatedly exploited by the Lega Nord and intelligently used to cement the loyalty of the party's supporters, by being invested with new meanings.¹⁴

1.8 Defining the nation

An authoritative voice against the modernist interpretations of the rise of the nation is that of Adrian Hastings, whose views are well presented in the collection of essays *The Construction of Nationhood* (1997)¹⁵. Three ideas in particular stand out:

1. Nations are not at all an invention of modernity. On the contrary, they are an invention of the Middle Ages (Hastings, 1997: 205), so that the widely held assumption that nations are modern because nationalism is a phenomenon of the end of the eighteenth century is unproved and erroneous.
2. England is the oldest nation to have appeared on earth (Hastings, 1997, chap. 3), because it is here that the historian finds a clear sense of belonging to a community defined by 'a people, language, religion, territory and government' (ibid.: 18), an awareness of nationhood on the part of the English, as early as the eleventh century.
3. The Bible has provided the West with an essential model of the nation, Israel, one without which nations and nationalism, as we know them, would never have existed (ibid.: 4). Israel is not presented in the Old Testament as *just*, so to speak, 'a nation' (or 'the oldest nation'), but, more crucially, one willed (and therefore blessed) by God. So if the Bible provided 'the model', England was 'the prototype' (ibid.: 4).

Although we are not concerned here with finding out which was the first nation to appear on earth, let alone 'exactly' when this happened, Hastings' views provide a useful contribution insofar as they point to two related problems that, so far, have not been dealt with in these pages: defining 'what is a nation' (and, therefore, what is an 'ethnic group' and what is 'nationalism') and considering if the awareness of the nation must spread to all sections of the population for the nation to exist. The answer to these questions may in fact explain, at least in part, why scholars are divided as to when nations appeared on earth. The dispute over the origin of nations may reveal itself as being caused by a confusion in the terminology.

What are 'ethnicity' and 'nation', according to Hastings? 'An ethnicity is a group of people with a shared cultural identity and a spoken language' (ibid.: 3). The vagueness of such definition is apparent: apart from the obvious question of 'what is a culture', the definition also begs the question of where would such culture 'end', and where would the next 'begin'. Furthermore, where should we place the dividing line between a

language, or a dialect, and the next? In fact, cultures and languages tend to elude definite categorisations: they are better represented as being part of a continuum, one language and culture fading into the next.

If an ethnicity is defined by a spoken language and a culture, how is the 'nation' to be defined, according to Hastings? In his text, Hastings indeed runs the risk of confusing nation and state:

A nation is a far more self-conscious community than an ethnicity. Formed from one or more ethnicities, and normally identified by a literature of its own, it possesses or claims the right to political identity and autonomy as a people, together with the control of a specific territory, comparable to that of biblical Israel and of other independent entities in a world thought of as one of nation-states (ibid., 3).

Self-consciousness, a national literature *plus* the means for controlling a specific territory *through political institutions* seem to be, therefore, the elements characterising the nation. However a nation -i.e. a group of people recognising each other as belonging to the same community on the basis of some affinities- may well *not be* in the position of controlling a certain territory through political institutions. And yet this people (and others, too) may nonetheless identify this territory as 'theirs'. The case of Scotland, at least until very recently, is an example; the cases of the Basques and the Kurds are equally relevant. These people seem to fit Hastings' definition of a nation quite well, if it wasn't for the fact that they do not exercise exclusive (and at times not even partial) sovereignty over the territory they call their own. This is why it could be argued that Hastings confuses 'nation' and 'state'. Also, if nations exist in a world which is thought of as 'one of nation-states', then England could *hardly* have been imagined as a nation in the Middle Ages, as Hastings would like us to believe. If there is something that Europe *was not* before the age of nationalism, it is, precisely, 'a collection of nation-states'. In this period, rulers were *not* seen as legitimate because speaking on behalf, and interpreting the needs, of a 'particular people' -the basis of legitimacy of contemporary nation-states. Legitimacy at this stage was still dynastic: monarchs did not need to share

a culture, or indeed a language, with their subjects, as the case of England itself (and even later than the Middle Ages) easily demonstrates.

In conclusion, a decision must be made: either nations and national identities predate modern nation-states, so that the latter were created by self-conscious elites in order to give political expression to a cultural and linguistic reality (thus Italy, according to this point of view, was only united when Italians 'woke up' to the necessity of their unification); or, on the contrary, Gellner is right when claiming that it is *nationalism* which creates *nations* (Gellner, 1983 and 1987).

Smith distinguishes between nationalism, as an ideology, and national 'sentiments and symbolism' (Smith, 1998: 190). The former -a political movement driven by the belief that culturally homogeneous communities appear as the only legitimate repositories of political authority, can be 'fairly securely dated to the later eighteenth century' (ibid.). The latter are more difficult to define, and certainly almost impossible to date. Since the end of the eighteenth century, an age that all students of national identities agree is of fundamental importance, nationalists made the case that the political and the national units *should coincide*. This is the essence of their ideology. The nationalist principle is thus violated either when the boundary of a state does not include all rightful members of a nation; or when it includes them, but it also includes foreigners; or, finally, when the ruler does not belong to the nation him/herself -as in the case of Empires (Gellner, 1983: 1; see also 1987). Smith further specifies nationalist ideology as follows:

As an ideology, nationalism holds that the world is divided into nations, each of which has its own character and destiny; that an individual's first loyalty is to his or her nation; that the nation is the source of all political power; that to be free and fulfilled, the individual must belong to a nation; that each nation must express its authentic nature by being autonomous; and that a world of peace and justice can only be built on autonomous nations. (Smith, 1995: 55).

According to nationalists, and for the reasons outlined above, 'state' and 'nation' should thus coincide. This thesis embraces such definition of nationalism. The assumptions of nationalism that Smith summarises in the passage above may seem so obvious that one might be excused for thinking that such an ideology has always been dominant. And yet such a doctrine, at least as a coherent set of principles legitimising political power, 'was unknown before 1500 in Europe or elsewhere, and therefore anything resembling the modern mass nation (underpinned by nationalism) was likely to be fortuitous as well as rare' (ibid.).

For a definition of the nation, this thesis relies, once again, on Smith. The nation is:

a named human population which shares myths and memories, a mass public culture, a designated homeland, economic unity and equal rights and duties for all members (ibid.: 56 and 57).

The first interesting feature of this definition is that it regards the nation as 'the people who make up the community' and not as the community itself, as in Anderson. Thus, according to Smith's definition, the Jews did not always constitute a nation, not because they were unable to return to a 'homeland' -after all they knew where 'their homeland was'- but rather because they were necessarily unable to achieve economic unity -as they were scattered all around the globe. The population of the nation must be 'named', thus recognising itself as peculiar. It needs to share myths and memories which, as pointed out above, can be, and indeed often are, actively manipulated by an elite. Nations are further characterised by the -at least theoretical- equality of all members *vis a vis* political power and the law. Furthermore, rule is legitimate if and when the ruler acts on behalf of 'the people'.

How would this definition differ from that of the ethnic group? According to Smith ethnic groups should be defined as

named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity' (1986: 32; see also Hutchinson, 1987; 1994).

The bond that these myths and symbols create can be very powerful and ethnic communities obviously existed in history well before modern nations emerged. What distinguishes the nation from the ethnic group is thus the degree of self-awareness, the fact that the nation is legitimised by a mass ideology (nationalism), that members of it enjoy equal rights and duties, plus features (i.e. economic unity and a mass culture) that, as discussed in chap. 8, are brought to the nation... by the state. This thesis will employ this understanding of 'ethnic group'.

There is a further specification that needs to be made. The myths and memories pointed out above as those which bind the nation together do not necessarily need to be firmly grounded in history. The principal founding myth is the one of 'common descent'. Connor (1994: 75) thus proposes to conceive the nation as an extended family successfully keeping people together also thanks to this myth. There is no point in arguing that different races -if indeed the term can still be used- languages and cultures contributed to the formation of many a nation: what counts is that members of a national community *feel* that they are related -whatever history might suggest. '[A nation is] a group of people who *feel* that they are ancestrally related. It is the largest group that can command a person's loyalty because of felt kinship ties; it is... the fully extended family' (ibid.: 202).

In this thesis Smith's definition of a nation will be adopted, but with the specification insisted upon by Connor: that the national community is firmly rooted in a *psychological* bond that has nothing to do with science and objectivity¹⁶. This bond is *beyond reason*. It would not be correct to state that *all* nations developed from a pre-existing ethnic group that was dominant within a certain area (many former colonies of European powers, in fact, although having achieved independence, are still in the process of *becoming* nations, and their ethnic composition is very diverse). However, Smith maintains that those nations which developed early and provided the model for others to imitate (England of course, if perhaps not in the Middle-Ages, Russia, Holland and others) *did indeed* come out of pre-existing ethnic ties and were the expression of a dominant ethnic group. Nations, one learns, are usually formed either through

bureaucratic incorporation or through vernacular mobilisation (1998: 193-195). In the first case, a 'loose, aristocratic ethnîe' turns into a territorial nation because of its need to involve the middle-classes in a politicised 'national culture' and therefore compete with other countries. The examples given here are those of France, England and Spain since the sixteenth century. The second route to nationhood involves the transformation of an ethnic group into a nation thanks to a local intelligentsia which rediscovers and re-appropriates symbols and myths belonging to the lower class and uses them as to raise a people to national consciousness. This, Smith maintains, is the route normally followed in Central and Eastern Europe (ibid.: 194).

If anything, it is surprising how little explanation Smith gives to the processes whereby an ethnîe is turned into a nation, as this seems to be, as discussed again in chap. 8, at the very *core* of his theory of national identities. His contribution is nonetheless crucial in the context of this thesis as the focus shifts to the would-be 'national' community of Padania. We will see below whether the claim to nationhood is here grounded in an underlying self-consciousness of northern Italians regarding themselves as 'an ethnic group'. In order to do this, this study will search for evidence of a 'shared memory and collective destiny' (Smith, 1991: 29) among northern Italians, for a 'cultural affinity embodied in myths, memories, symbols and values' (ibid.) and see how these are used and re-interpreted (when not created *ex novo*) in the Lega Nord's propaganda.

1.9 Conclusions of chapter 1

This research has taken the modernist conception of the nation as its starting point because it offers suggestions which are useful to an understanding of 'Padania', as well as being roughly consensual nowadays. Authoritative discussions of various theories of nationalism and national identities can also be found in Connor (1994, chap. 3) and Smith themselves (1983; 1998).

Some of the ideas that have emerged from this account of different theories and need to be kept in mind are as follows:

1. Since there is no agreement on the basic terms used by students of nationalism, sometimes arguments about concepts are, in reality, terminological quarrels.
2. This thesis insists on the *subjective* dimension of national identities, as a way of clearly distinguishing the nation, a cultural entity, from a set of institutions that could be objectively described, i.e. the state. The aim is to give due weight to perceptions and representations, in short to the act of 'imagining' the community. This is consistent with the aims of this thesis: an analysis of the constructed nation of Padania as it has been defined, portrayed and invented by the Lega Nord through its own propaganda. So called 'objective' signs of 'belonging' (from the colour of the skin to an ability to master a particular language) can obviously become crucial, too, when deciding who is 'in' and who is 'out', however they only play a part in defining communities *if and when* they are emotionally charged. In other words, they need to be activated, they do not signify *per se*.
3. Following Smith, one may argue that modernists are right *and* wrong at the same time. They are wrong when not acknowledging the continuity between how 'model' nations developed in modern times and the pre-national ethnic identities that provided a basis for them, therefore overestimating the power of propaganda in bringing about what are seen as completely new entities. However, they are right when insisting that nationalism as a political movement is a recent phenomenon and that only in recent times (since the nineteenth century) has it become a scandal when ethnic boundaries cut across political ones- as Gellner maintains (1983: 1). It was indeed "the revolutionary nature of the economic, administrative and cultural transformation of seventeenth and eighteenth century Europe that brought culture and ethnic identity to the fore as a basis for polity formation" (Smith, 1998: 192). Furthermore, it was the French Revolution which put national identity at the top of the political agenda (Smith, 1979). It is also true that many nations are very recent inventions (e.g. Libya), and that sometimes these inventions are not without their problems (this thesis will be concerned with one of them, Italy). Modernism, therefore, crucially contributes to an understanding of the process of nation building, concerned as it

is with the way in which national identities are defined and communicated, and nations themselves represented. And yet one needs to keep in mind that there is no guarantee that propaganda works in creating a deeply felt, identity-defining bond -and many reasons to believe that, on its own, it generally does not.

Notes:

¹ There are many works taking modernism as a starting point, and some of their titles are quite explicit. Ringrose's and Lerner's collection of essays *Reimagining the Nation* (1993) provides many examples; Melman's 'Claiming the nation's past: the invention of an Anglo-Saxon tradition' (1991) or Birmingham's 'The 1848 unification of Switzerland' (1995) equally take Hobsbawm's work as their starting point. Among the literature on Padania, the curiously titled *L'invenzione della Padania* (1997) is worth mentioning, not just because the author is a renowned figure within the Lega (cf. chap. 6) but because he claims that Padania has always existed, thus using 'invention' as a synonymous for 're-discovery'.

² This is apparent in *The Communist Manifesto*, although the text is one of the founding documents of a new internationalism. When Marx and Engels write, for example, that 'the bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most barbarian, nations into civilisation' (1998: 39) they are forgetting that these 'barbarians' may not constitute 'a nation' at all. In most cases, in fact, modern nations have been created in the now so-called Third World only as a *consequence* of processes of de-colonisation.

³ Whether Marx was a self-hating Jew or not is a question that does not need to retain us here. However, it is difficult not to take notice of statements like the following one, on Lassalle: 'Now, this blend of Jewishness and Germanness, on the one hand, and basic negroid stock, on the other, must inevitably give rise to a peculiar product. The fellow's importunity is also niggerlike' (letter to F Engels, 30 July 1868, quoted in Wheen, 2000: 55). What interests us here is the clear assumption that colour and/or 'race' determine (or at least affect) the identity of the individual

⁴ Max Weber is always –inevitably– referred to when mentioning the state's monopoly of legitimate violence, however he talked extensively of how more solid the state becomes when it appeals to principles which people believe, thus legitimising its authority. State's power has a threefold dimension according to Bobbio (in Bobbio, Matteucci and Pasquino eds. , 1983): economic, ideological and political.

⁵ As the 2003 crisis of Irak unfolds, the British Lib-Dems let it be known that, whenever the first shot is fired, they will all be united behind the British troops, whether or not they believe that an attack on Irak is morally justified ('The Politics Show', BBC1, 2 March 2003). Given that the nation is often equated to the 'enlarged family', it could be argued that such position is not far from claiming that one should always *actively* support his/her brothers and sisters, even if they go mad and start shooting passers-by from the garden. The nation indeed commands such sort of blinding loyalty.

⁶ Rather than 'irrational', the love for the country may be said to be 'beyond reason' (Connor, 1994).

⁷ The debate on the Italian national language went on and on for centuries among Italian intellectuals and exceeds the scope of this thesis. If toscano eventually prevailed and is now the national language (although with strong influences from Rome) it is because it was regarded as the purest of languages in the peninsula. The founding fathers of Italian literature (some might say: of an Italian, unitary cultural identity), Petrarca, Boccaccio and Dante had all used a literary variant of the Florentine vernacular. As late as 1868 intellectuals were still debating this issue, with Manzoni writing the treatise 'Dell'unità della lingua e dei mezzi per diffonderla' (Of the unity of language and of the means to propagate it). At this stage intellectuals were still debating whether Italians should adopt the contemporary, spoken version of Toscano- as Manzoni claimed- or the one of the 14th century, the language of Dante (see Migliorini, 1960).

⁸ To be fair to Anderson, this is said to be true of any community, and not only of nations, as communities 'are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined' (ibid.: 6).

⁹ In fact, Anderson's title has been translated for the Italian market as 'Comunità Immaginarie' and not 'Comunità Immaginate', as one would expect.

¹⁰ Here 'ideological' is used in a sense which is slightly different from the one normally associated with Marxism -keeping in mind that even within Marxism (and in Marx's work) 'ideology' seems to assume various meanings, as powerfully demonstrated by Williams (1977: 55; 1988: 153-157). What normally distinguishes the Marxist uses of the term, anyway, is that 'ideology' tends to be seen as a system of ideas which serve the interests of a particular class. In the passage above we follow instead J. B. Thompson's definition: ideology is 'meaning in the service of power' (1990: 7). The power we are talking about here, political power, happens to be embedded in the institutions of the state, but whether the state only serves the interests of the bourgeoisie or not does not need to retain us now.

¹¹ Indeed the very fact that nobody can fully appreciate the significance of particular gestures and rituals only adds to the aura of mystery and to the sense that, somehow, symbols can put us in contact with the past (e.g. the case of the rituals of the British monarchy, as analysed by Cannadine in Hobsbawm and Ranger eds., 1983) It could be argued that Hobsbawm's definition of 'tradition' is far from being clear, though: his distinction between traditions and customs is certainly helpful (ibid.: 2 and 3), however some of the examples of traditions provided can be confusing. Why should the re-building of the British parliamentary chamber on exactly the same plan after WWII be classified as 'a tradition'? This is not an 'act' which is always performed on particular occasions and alleged to be performed always the same way, i.e. a ritual; it is not a dress worn in particular circumstances, or a symbol (e.g. a flag) worshipped at particular times of the day. By re-building the chamber with the same structure, the British are clearly stressing the necessity of continuity between the past and the present, all the more important when old and 'glorious' political institutions are involved. However, one wonders if this can be taken as an example of a 'tradition'.

¹² They needed rather to invent 'nationalism', if we accept the definition proposed by Connor that was mentioned above, as patriotism means, in his view, loyalty to the state and not the nation.

¹³ The interpretation of Hobsbawm's and Ranger's approach that is followed here claims that one should define as 'traditions' a set of *practices* of a *symbolic* nature which are *repeated, performed regularly* at certain times (ibid., 1). A person or object cannot in himself or herself fall into this category.

¹⁴ The nation of Padania has been 'declared' independent by Lega Nord on 15 September 1996 after a series of ceremonies, including the 'ceremony of the water' and the 'ceremony of the pact'. In the first case, the leader of the party took some water collected at the source of the river Po right to the mouth of the river near Venice. This ceremony is now repeated every year in September (a clear case of an 'invented' tradition) as it represents the unity of Padania through the image of its main river. The second ceremony, the ceremony of the pact, is again significant: Padania was declared independent in Venice after major exponents of the Lega Nord had sworn a pact of allegiance between them and the people of northern Italy, in front of a crowd of supporters. This ceremony duplicated the 'pact of Pontida', when representatives of the Lega Nord of the 12th century swore to defend the liberties of the northern-Italian municipalities against the German Emperor Frederick Barbarossa. Ceremonies of this kind have become very common in the Lega Nord's history (see following chapters).

¹⁵ Commercial considerations aside -as terms like 'construction', 'invention' and so forth clearly 'sell' when it comes to discussing identity- it becomes difficult to understand why the book has been given this title, as it criticises precisely the idea that nations should be seen as constructed.

¹⁶ On the other hand it is, of course, true that in some cases people may have lived separated from others -e.g. in Iceland- or may have practised marriage within their own group to a very large extent -e.g. the Jews- and might, therefore, be *really* ancestrally related to a great extent.

CHAPTER 2

Globalisation, homogenisation, the demise of the nation-state and other myths

2.1 Introduction to Chapter 2

It was appropriate that a discussion of Padania, arguably a 'virtual' nation (Tambini, 2001), should start by considering different approaches to nationalism and national identities; however, no-one is suggesting that nation-states should be seen as self-sufficient, independent entities, either in economic or in cultural terms. Nations did not evolve and develop in isolation from one-another, and national institutions have never enjoyed total control of the affairs of the nation-state. On the contrary, if we accept the idea that nation-states are modern, it logically follows that they started to be seen as an 'inherent attribute of humanity' (Gellner, 1983: 6) in the same period in which the capitalist economy was becoming more and more internationalised (i.e. the nineteenth century). Indeed, some theorists would argue that by the mid-nineteenth century the economy of the industrialised countries was even more internationalised than it is now (e.g. Hirst and Thompson in Held and McGrew eds., 2000). That is to say that nation-states were made possible by -and were necessary to- a capitalism that was already international in scope and outlook since the nineteenth century.¹

It is a myth (and possibly one invented by nationalists) that nation-states were able to control and regulate their own affairs (first of all in the economy) and enjoyed a quite large degree of autonomy until the age of globalisation (which, depending on the writer, started either at the beginning of the nineteenth century, or rather after WWII)². In reality, because of the very nature of capitalism, the economies of nation-states have always already been interconnected and have always depended on each other to a very high degree (Dicken, 1998). Moreover, the Westphalian model, with its implications of total control over a definite territory on the part of nation-states³, has *never* been an accurate description of how much power states enjoy, as Krasner (1995) demonstrates;

in fact, quite apart from the problem of economic interdependence, rulers have often been forced to accept principles such as 'human rights' or 'fiscal responsibility' which have been imposed *on them*. Moreover, while weak states have always been subjected to the arrogance of the strong, powerful states themselves have sometimes entered conventions that hindered their claims of total control of a certain territory.

Naturally, it is less easy to tell if the so-called process of globalisation established a trend whereby the interconnectedness of nation-states was increased and their mutual dependence in any way altered. In other words: does globalisation bring about a radical change of notions of sovereignty, and in particular (and this shall be the focus of the discussion which follows) does it bring about a qualitative change in the economy of nation-states? The two are just different aspects of the same problem, of course, as it is the loss of control over the economy which is taken to determine loss of power on the part of the state.

Another interesting debate focuses on whether globalisation brings about more homogenisation and the destruction of difference, or rather creates a world which is, on the contrary, even more heterogeneous and where groups and communities cling even more fiercely to their traditions. This debate has visibly grown within Sociology and Media studies in recent years (e.g. Featherstone ed., 1990; Friedman, 1994; Appadurai ed., 2001). From our perspective the most interesting question that this chapter will enable us to *ask* (although a detailed analysis of the problem will only follow in chapter 8) is to what extent the invented nation of 'Padania' is a reaction to, or rather *a product of* the process of globalisation.

2.2 What is globalisation?

According to Robertson (1992), globalisation refers both to the time-space compression of the world and to the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole. The term, therefore, refers not only to the increasing abundance of global connections, made possible by technological advances in the transportation of people, goods, money

and information, and to the impact of these connections on people's perception of time and space, but indeed to people's *understanding of these connections*, too. Robertson's work suggests that the world is not only becoming one, but is increasingly seeing itself as one.

Following Held and McGrew (in Held and McGrew eds., 2000: 3-4) globalisation could be defined as:

- a) a process embodying a transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions, as economic, social and cultural exchanges increasingly take place not just across regions and nations, but across continents, too;
- b) a process whereby time (i.e. *duration*) no longer imposes fixed barriers to many forms of social interaction.

The increasing insignificance of 'space' has attracted much study within academia. In fact, in an extremely influential work on the changes brought about by globalisation Held et al. suggest that globalisation involves, first of all, 'a *stretching* of social political and economic activities across frontiers' (1999: 15) which causes events in one place to impact deeply on people's lives globally. The effects of events that take place in distant locales (places of which, interestingly, we only have a mass-mediated, normally very superficial, understanding) are felt directly on our lives. Alongside this process, the world witnesses an *'intensification*, or growing magnitude, of interconnectedness' between locales (ibid.) and 'a *speeding up* of global interactions and processes as the development of world-wide systems of transport and communication increases the potential velocity of the global diffusion of ideas, goods, information, capital and people' (ibid.). When considering all of these developments together we must then conclude that the *impact* of distant events on everybody's life has been greatly magnified by globalisation: obvious examples are the effects of the economic crisis of Japan on the world economy in 1989-1990 (globalisation and the economy), or the effects of distant wars on domestic politics in Europe due to the influx of refugees (globalisation and politics/culture).

The definition offered by Held et al. on the basis of these reflections can be taken as a starting point here. Globalisation is:

a process (or set of processes) which embodies a transformation in the spatial organisation of social relations and transactions -assessed in terms of their extensity, intensity, velocity and impact- generating transcontinental or interregional flows and networks of activity, interaction, and the exercise of power (ibid., 16)

Globalisation, as suggested above, needs to be seen as a process that has revolutionised societies in terms of their economy, culture and social relations. Thus the discussion of the effects of globalisation on national cultures must be based on an assessment of the process in the economy.

2.3 Globalisation in the economy: the process and the ideology

Among those scholars (such as Ohmae, 1994) who see globalisation as a process that is revolutionising the world -appropriately defined by Held et al. as 'hyperglobalisers' (ibid., 2)- there seems to be widespread agreement about the causes of the phenomenon. As an outcome of modernity (Giddens, 1990; 1991), globalisation depends on the changes in the global information system and the development of the world capitalist economy. With reference to the transformation of capitalism, Mittelman speaks of 'an intensification of previous patterns (e.g. from cross-national lending to the hypermobility of finance capital) but also a quantum transformation of a system lacking the staying power of effective means of regulation' (in Mittelman ed., 1996: 231). The discussion can be taken further by considering the role of multinational and transnational corporations in the world economy and the growing extensity and intensity of trade between countries.

MNCs and TNCs⁴ play a role in the contemporary world economy that could hardly be overestimated. Already in 1973 it was calculated that of the one hundred largest economic units in the world, about half were MNCs (Makler, Martinelli and Smelser in Makler, Martinelli and Smelser eds., 1992: 25). According to Dicken 'this minuscule proportion of the total number of business firms in the world is responsible for a highly disproportionate share of global production and trade. UNCTAD estimates that TNCs account for around two-thirds of world exports of goods and services' (1998: 43). Mittelman (1996: 231), quoting the UN Conference on Trade and Development, claims that the number of globalising firms has tripled in the last 25 years in the richest countries. Moreover, he maintains that the concentration of powers in the hands of growing corporations, coupled with the dispersal of production across the globe, is leading to a loss of control of the economy on the part of the state (ibid.)⁵.

MNCs and TNCs are central to global trade, with a very large proportion of world trade being intra-firm trade between their branches (Dicken, 1998: 43). They are also fundamental to the generation and international transfer of technology. Furthermore, international trade has grown to unprecedented levels in relation to national income. As barriers to trade have fallen across the world, global markets have emerged for many goods and increasingly services -although this did not entail the end of protectionism, nor a re-distribution of wealth across the globe. Castles and Davidson (2000: 5) rightly suggest that we should be cautious when assessing the 'openness' of societies to foreign goods, ideas and indeed people. In fact, it is easy to see globalisation only through the spectacles of the privileged minority -people who do indeed travel often and who do find a variety of goods on their supermarket shelves- thus losing sight of the ever growing inequalities brought about by this 'openness'.

Clearly there are countries which benefit from globalisation, but others on which the process has been imposed from without (Stiglitz, 2002); also, the process is uneven and does not affect every community in the same way. Nonetheless, it can be safely argued that countries are nowadays connected by trade and communication exchanges to an unprecedented degree. Developing and transition economies have become (or have they been forced to become?) significantly open to trade, and national economies can be

shown to depend on each other to a very large extent (Dicken, 1998). In terms of production, capital can now choose 'The most propitious sites in which to locate diverse phases of a geographically disseminated production process, taking account of differences in labour costs, environmental regulations, fiscal incentives, political stability, and so on' (Cox in Mittelman ed., 1996: 23). Moreover, corporations can now 'manage their accounts so that profits would accrue where the lowest taxes prevailed' (ibid.).

Therefore, while, on the one hand, economic power is increasingly *centralised* in the hands of certain powerful corporations which can control their business on the global level, the production of goods is instead increasingly *dispersed*.

Some theorists strongly advocate the existence of a 'global capital network, whose movement and variable logic ultimately determine economies and influence societies' (Castells, in Held and McGrew eds., 2000: 78). Martin and Schumann, while criticising the idea that globalisation benefits all players (see below) point out that 'Nothing today is more mobile than capital' (1997: 111). However, despite the insistence of some on the now popular idea that the world has been revolutionised by globalisation, there are academics who question whether the process is at all new. A good example of this view is offered by Hirst and Thompson:

- 1. The present highly internationalised economy is not unprecedented: it is one of a number of distinct conjunctures or states of the international economy that have existed since an economy based on modern industrial technology began to be generalised from the 1860s. In some respects, the current international economy is less open and integrated than the regime that prevailed from 1870 to 1914.*
- 2. Genuinely transnational companies appear to be relatively rare. Most companies are based nationally and trade multinationally on the strength of a major national location of assets, production and sales, and there seems to be no major tendency towards the growth of truly international companies...*

4. As some of the extreme advocates of globalisation recognise, the world economy is far from being genuinely 'global'. Rather trade, investment and financial flows are concentrated in the Triad of Europe, Japan and North America and this dominance seems set to continue (in Held and McGrew eds., 2000: 68 and 69).

Hirst and Thompson are not alone in arguing that the world economy in the half century preceding WWI was even more open than it is now: both Gordon (1988) and Kozul-Wright (in Michie and Grieve-Smith eds., 1995) have suggested that in this phase of capitalism there was more international integration, capital movements from one country to another were far easier because unchecked, the migration of workers reached levels never seen before and states played a less decisive part in trying to control the economy than they play now.

According to this point of view, despite the economies of national communities being very much linked and despite international factors clearly having serious consequences for the lives of national and local communities: a) the internationalisation of the economy is not at all new; b) national forces remain, anyway, highly significant.

Despite the differences highlighted above, there are also convergences between the two camps of the 'hyperglobalisers' and the 'global-skeptics', as a great majority of writers would agree that:

- 1. There has been some growth in recent decades in economic interconnectedness within and among regions, albeit with multifaceted and uneven consequences across different communities.*
- 2. Interregional and global (political, economic and cultural) competition challenges old hierarchies and generates new inequalities of wealth, power, privilege and knowledge.*
- 3. Transnational and transborder problems, such as the spread of genetically modified foodstuffs and money laundering, have become increasingly salient, calling into question the traditional role, functions*

and institutions of accountability of national government.

4. There has been an expansion of international governance at regional and global levels -from the EU to the WTO- which poses significant normative questions about the kind of world order being constructed and whose interests it serves (Held and McGrew, in Held and McGrew eds. 2000: 38)

Dicken (1998), while acknowledging that the process of globalisation shows some similarities with the internationalisation of the economy of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries and while admitting that we should be cautious when 'measuring' the effects of the process, also recognises that the integration between economies is now *qualitatively* different from what it was one century ago. He argues that scholars now need to talk about 'deep integration', as this now extends to the level of the production of goods, a change that has more crucial effects on national communities than 'simple' international trade (which obviously did not start in the last few decades). Economic globalisation, in Dicken's view, is to be regarded more as a matter of integration between economies than a matter of simple links and exchanges: we need to refer to the notion of a 'network', a 'system'. Furthermore, the role of the international financial community in shaping globalisation seems to have changed dramatically in recent years: what they see as good for the global economy, should simply be imposed on it, regardless of the consequences for economies in crisis, and under the auspices of the IMF -widely regarded as a branch of the US treasury (Stiglitz, 2002).

If fundamental changes in the world economy can be acknowledged, according to Hirst (1997) it is also important to see globalisation as an ideology, and one which is based on two underpinning principles:

- a) the process is unstoppable and irreversible and, therefore, we may as well accept it, whether we like it or not;
- b) a global open 'free' market is (or, in some versions of this ideology, can become) truly beneficial to all, not excluding the developing countries. Miyoshi aptly defines it as an '<<ideologyless>>' ideology that is bent on the efficient

management of global production and consumption' (Miyoshi in Dissanayake and Wilson eds., 1996: 91).

Challenging the idea that globalisation is inevitable, Mittelman maintains that accepting globalisation as destiny would imply rigidifying it and transforming the process 'into a form of structuralism, which banishes agency' (Mittelman in Mittelman ed. 1996: 232). He continues by arguing that this notion 'is clearly at odds with the multiplicity of forms [of globalisation] encountered and engendered in diverse contexts' (ibid.); furthermore, this conception does not sit comfortably with the reality of a growing movement of opposition to globalisation which highlights the fundamental injustice inherent in the process. The claim of some political organisations that globalisation is a game where everyone can win (e.g. Labour party on line, 2002) are, according to writers such as Mittelman, clearly unfounded. Sharing a similar approach, Cox also reminds us that globalisation has been alleged to be desirable because of its claimed beneficial influence on both the weak and the strong:

The multinational corporations and banks, principal agents of globalization, henceforth represent themselves (and after a time were perceived by many governments and academic theorists) as primary agents of economic development. They were also a growing force for national and international deregulation in trade and finance. Globalization began to be represented as a finality, as the logical and inevitable culmination of the powerful tendencies of the market at work. The dominance of economic forces was regarded as both necessary and beneficial. States and the interstate system would serve mainly to ensure the working of market logic (in Mittelman ed., 1996: 23).

Arguing, on the contrary, that globalisation is an uneven process which only brings prosperity to those states which are already hegemonic in economic terms, Taylor and Flint (2000: 129-132) claim that the ideology of openness and economic freedom is only pursued by strong states because it favours efficient producers of commodities.

The feast of globalisation excludes not only massive areas of the globe (such as some African regions) but a class of people in the West, too, i.e. those who are in precarious employment.⁶

Despite pointing out that the centre of gravity of the world economic system has begun to shift away from the West and towards the Pacific, Dicken (1998: 68) also agrees that there are only a few developing countries that seem to have enjoyed a sudden substantial economic growth in recent years. The process of globalisation is thus clearly uneven in its supposedly beneficial effects.

2.4 Globalisation and the demise of nation-states

The discussion above has highlighted conflicting opinions as to the nature and features of globalisation in the economy. Indeed, as we have seen, some commentators argue that globalisation is not happening at all and that we should rather talk about the internationalisation of the economy, one that started in the 19th century (if not earlier than that). On the other hand, most scholars seem to agree that the world is heading towards greater interdependence and that the degree of autonomy and sovereignty enjoyed by nation-states has diminished. Despite being true that enthusiastic globalists may exaggerate the former strength of nation-states (cf. Held and McGrew eds., 2000) as well as its current decline, there is much agreement among scholars that 'it is much harder for individual governments to intervene and manage their economies faced with a global division of labour, the absence of capital controls and the operations of the world financial markets' (Held, 1995: 131; see also Miyoshi, in Dissanayake and Wilson eds. 1996). According to these commentators, 'national governments are relegated to little more than transmission belts for global capital, or, ultimately, simple intermediate institutions sandwiched between increasingly powerful local, regional and global mechanisms of governance' (Held et al., 1999: 3; see also Holm and Sorensen in Holm and Sorensen eds., 1995; Martin and Schumann, 1997).

Cheru (1996) shows how the role of the state has been taken over by international financial institutions and non governmental organisations in large parts of Africa.

Furthermore, Cox claims that 'States and intergovernmental organisations play a role in enforcing the rules of the global economy and enhancing national competitiveness, but their powers of shielding domestic economies from the negative effects of globalisation have diminished' (1996: 27): to put it simply, it is alleged that the nation-state has become almost irrelevant on the economic level because 'the central dynamics of economic life now transcend national borders and have become uncontrollable for national governments' (Castles and Davidson, 2000: 7).

However, while some scholars debate whether the state is a powerless observer of the transformations that are taking place, or rather (at least) a 'facilitator' of the process, Panitch interestingly argues that the internationalisation of the economy has been brought about *by nation-states themselves*, maintaining that, still nowadays, national forms prevail: 'Not only is the world still very much composed of states, but insofar as there is an effective democracy at all in relation to the power of capitalists and bureaucrats it is still embedded in political structures that are national or subnational in scope' (in Mittelman ed. 1996: 109). Keohane agrees, and sees public institutions as still essential to defend (and provide advantages for) their constituents in the face of global competition: 'The state is by no means dead', he maintains (2000: 116).

Whatever the extent of the changes, few would disagree that the power of states is being renegotiated, and that the meaning of sovereignty is changing rapidly, given the impact of decisions made by TNCs and other states on the internal affairs of any national community. Even a project such as that of the EU, a community that Keohane defines as 'an unprecedented hybrid, for which the traditional conception of sovereignty is no longer applicable' (ibid.) might be 'read' as the response of nation-states *to* the threats posed by globalisation to their sovereignty, rather than being seen as *an aspect of globalisation* itself: this is because the union will be 'better placed to govern wide-ranging socio-economic processes transcending individual countries' (Cento Bull and Gilbert, 2001: 142).

Whether people are justified or not in foreseeing the imminent disappearance of the nation-state, nationalism itself appears to be buoyant, and so are notions of ethnicity in

political propaganda. The case of northern Italy discussed in this thesis, together with the resurgence of movements of rejection of distant cultures across Europe, confirm the continuing appeal of both concepts (nationalism and ethnicity), however variedly understood and variedly applied to different situations. Nationalism is hardly in retreat in contemporary Europe, and even in countries that seemingly enthusiastically joined the common currency (e.g. Italy itself) there rather seems to be a resurgence of feelings of patriotism (e.g. Donovan, 2002). Moreover, as Alberto Melucci (1982) demonstrated, contemporary ethno-national movements are not only political but also pre-eminently cultural, as they respond to a need for identity of a symbolic nature. This is where 'the differentiating impact of globalisation' rather than weakening the idea of the nation, 'strengthens or reactivates national identities, communities and projections (Arnason, in Featherstone ed., 1990: 225).

2.5 National identities and globalisation

Not surprisingly, the role of the globalisation of communication in either bringing about a more homogenised world or rather in reinforcing national (and local) cultures, has received much attention in recent years. Thompson writes about foreign (normally Western) cultural products being consumed all around the world pointing out that they cause a symbolic distancing from the spatial-temporal contexts of everyday life (Thompson, 1995). Put in simple terms, in his view the primary role of such products is to offer a glimpse of what life is like in other parts of the world, therefore enabling people to 'distance' themselves from the repetitive routine of everyday life -an idea reinforced by the work of Lull about Chinese viewers of Western television products (Lull, 1990). However, it would be imprudent to claim that the consumption of Western products *must* necessarily cause a rejection of traditional values and forms of life. On the contrary, research conducted into the consumption of media products confirms that the global text is appropriated locally and that recipients bring their own views and understandings to the reception process (Ang, 1984; Liebes and Katz, 1993). Featherstone (1990) agrees: according to him, in many cases forms of hybridisation and creolisation emerge in which the meanings of imported goods and information are

reworked and blended with pre-existing cultural tradition. Paradoxically, once indigenised these products end up sustaining the sense of the local, as it is clearly the case with the genre of soap operas mentioned below.

In addition, Robertson reminds us that the global producers of culture tailor their products to local markets, therefore explicitly contributing to maintaining a sense of distinctiveness –one that is, arguably, at least in part manufactured (Robertson, 1995: 38-39). Furthermore, this writer contends that the cultural influence of the so-called Third World on the West has clearly been underestimated (ibid.). By making 'other' cultures so easy to confront in their 'irreducible' difference, information technology may even have had the effect of strengthening the sense of one's own 'distinctiveness', as well as igniting the sense of the threats posed by globalisation to the purity of identities. The networks of communication made possible by new media may even contribute to the re-emergence of ethnic communities and their nationalisms by making possible a denser, more intense interaction between members of communities who share common cultural characteristics (first of all language).

Within contemporary Media and Cultural studies academics have studied quite closely how new technologies can be employed to keep minority cultures alive. The focus has been on 'diasporic communities', diaspora being defined as 'an intermediate concept between the local and the global that nevertheless transcends the national perspectives' (Gillespie, 1995: 6). Scholars, challenged by the 'deterritorialisation of social identities' (Cohen, 1997: 173), have focused on the strategies of diasporic groups which strive to retain their traditional values and a sense of distinctiveness while confronted by the hegemony of the host culture (Gillespie, 1995; Cohen, 1997; Gilroy, 1993; 1997). Hall theorises global cultural movements and relates them to national discourses and the emergence of hybrid identities. These movements present a new articulation between 'the local' and 'the global' where 'it seems unlikely that globalization will simply destroy national identities' (Hall, 1992: 304). Furthermore, globalisation can 'lead to a strengthening of local identities, or to the production of new identities' (ibid., 308) so that its 'general impact remains contradictory' (ibid., 309). Hall talks of two 'routes' that those identities can take: translation or tradition. The former are 'those identity

formations which cut across and intersect natural frontiers and which are composed of people who have been dispersed forever from their home lands' (ibid., 310), while the latter refers to attempts 'to restore... purity and recover the unities and certainties which are felt as being lost' (ibid., 309).

The role of the media, and particularly of new media, has been the focus of much attention, given the importance of internet and cable TV (above all else) in providing people with the opportunity to maintain links across great distances (Naficy, 1993; Naficy ed., 1999; Gillespie, 1995; Morley and Robins, 1995; Dayan, 1999). The sense of distance 'from home' of migrant populations is now surpassed thanks to the new opportunities offered by the electronic media.

It is widely accepted that new media are fundamental to the retention of distinctive cultures among minorities across the world, however the extent to which this is impacting on host countries and is therefore creating fragmented, hybrid identities on a large scale, identities that would take the place of national identities and decree their demise, is at best open to discussion.

Apart from pointing out that messages are always appropriated locally, it is also worth noticing that national institutions still have a very decisive impact on public life in many states. National television and radio broadcasting continues to enjoy substantial audiences and a great percentage of programmes are still produced nationally; the organization of the press and news coverage retains strong national roots, too. Tunstall, re-thinking the issues he had explored in his well-known *The Media Are American* (1977), points out that 'Nearly all of the world's population today consume substantially more domestic than imported media' (2001: 3). National newspapers, so crucial in the process of imagining the nation (cf. chapter 1), may be declining in developed countries, but they are 'still growing fast in China and India' (ibid.) which provide an ever increasing share of the world population. 'Radio is still alive – also very national - and has a weekly world audience of some three billion' (ibid.), while the soap opera, a genre often accused of exporting American values when 'Dallas' and 'Dynasty' achieved international fame, has now been readapted to the tastes of different audiences and has

grown considerably in South America, where many different sub-genres have been noted.⁷

Finally, writers such as Appadurai would contend that any talk of 'Americanisation' is at best a simplification, as Koreans might find 'Japanisation' a more worrying (and realistic) perspective, and Estonians have certainly been more aware of the risks of 'Russification' of their culture (Appadurai in Featherstone ed., 1990: 295) until the nineties. This is to say that when discussing the alleged 'homogenisation' of the world regional power imbalances are too often and too easily forgotten.

2.6 Conclusions of chapter 2: the local as an aspect of the global?

So far we have treated homogenising and heterogenising tendencies as mutually exclusive. However, some of the most interesting work on these issues is rather focused on the ways in which the local could be exposed as *an aspect of the global* (Hall, in Hall et al. eds., 1992). In fact, according to Robertson, the 'homogenisation vs. heterogenisation' approach neglects 'the extent to which what is called local is in large degree constructed on a trans- or super- local basis. In other words, much of the promotion of locality is in fact done from above or outside. Much of what is often declared to be local is in fact the local expressed in terms of generalized recipes of locality' (in Featherstone, Lash and Robertson eds., 1995: 26). The claim, supported by the work on diasporic media mentioned above, is that 'the contemporary assertion of ethnicity and/or nationality is made *within* the global terms of identity and particularity' (ibid., the emphasis is mine). A good example of this process is offered by press-ignited fears that we live in a world where cultures are losing their roots as peoples are 'swamped' by American cultural products; or, in a somewhat more worrying version of the argument that will be considered in some detail in chapter 6, that peoples are losing their identity as they are 'invaded' by 'armies of foreigners'. Robertson contends that it is this claim that has generated an 'ideology of home', 'as if in prior periods of history the vast majority of people lived in "secure" and "homogenised" locales' (ibid. 35).

As will be demonstrated in subsequent chapters, in the hands of the Lega Nord the small, 'natural', 'knowable' –to steal a definition dear to Raymond Williams (1969)-community of northern Italy became a myth through which to re-define an identity and then 'sell it' to northern Italians. Here one is again reminded of Stuart Hall and his suggestion that the perceived threats posed by globalisation have provoked a new need for 'purity' among communities, a return to a traditional past as a guarantee of authenticity: it is in this sense that the re-invented 'local' can be seen as having been conceptualised within the framework of the global. Friedman also considers the need 'to regain a cultural past and a traditional identity that are lost if not impossible in the emergent "post-modernity" of today's capitalism' and warns that the focus has shifted 'from class to ethnicity, from class to culture' (Friedman, 1994: 79). Castells speaks of people who 'resist the process of individualisation and social atomisation, and tend to cluster in community organisations that, over time, generate a feeling of belonging, and ultimately, in many cases, a communal, cultural identity' (1997: 61). Responding to Harvey and Castell's theorisation of the dynamic between the local and the global, Smith writes: 'For both... "place" is understood as the site of cohesive community formations existing outside the logic of globalisation' (2001: 106).

Following a similar logic, Padania is presented by *leghisti* as a 'meaning-making' local form of organisation which resists the velocity of change brought about by globalisation -while in reality being the product of these very changes. On the other hand, this is certainly not the first time that a project of 'nation-building' relies on a politically-driven nostalgia for some mythical 'past' seen as a guarantee of authenticity -whether this has been re-discovered or purely invented. And yet, as Robertson points out, the accelerating pace of globalisation has made 'nostalgia' ('wilful nostalgia', as he defines it) even more of a necessity (Robertson, 1992: 155).

The Lega's efforts to create a new national identity for northern Italians could thus be understood as a reactionary project which puts forward a new nation as a way of empowering northern Italians in their resistance against certain aspects of global capitalism. Interestingly, though, there were significant contradictions and

inconsistencies in the Lega's discourse, as the Padania can also be shown to be the product of a certain, characteristically northern Italian, model of *modernisation*.

A discussion of such issues will indeed follow below (cf. chapters 6 and especially 8). It has now become necessary to move on from the definition of key concepts such as 'nation', 'globalisation' or 'homogeneisation' to a discussion of how the *leghista* movement actually took shape, and then eventually grew into such a formidable vehicle of change, in the context of an otherwise stagnant political environment. It is time to turn to the so-called Italian revolution of the nineties.

Notes:

¹ It could also be claimed that capitalism has always been international in its outlook and that the economy of local communities was already to a certain degree interconnected at the end of the Middle-Ages when the trade with other continents was established on a regular basis, however it is obvious that the international dimension of the economy did not have at this time an impact on local communities that can be compared with that of the 19th and eventually the 20th century.

² To be fair to Modelski (1972) there are even writers who indicate the opening period of globalisation as 1000 AD. However, as argued above, many would agree that the process dramatically accelerated since the 19th and especially in the 20th century.

³ The Peace of Westphalia ended the 30 years war which had started in 1618, with the participation of various European rulers (such as the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire, German territorial rulers, France and Sweden). The treaty laid the foundation for a new political and religious order -the consequences of which are very much in evidence even to this day- by recognising the new centrality and power of 'states' at the expense of the Emperor.

⁴ The distinction between the two is problematic, however the central element to be considered is arguably the degree of alienation of these companies from their country of origin. MNCs produce and trade globally, and yet they originated from a particular country where they still have their main base and with which they are identified. TNCs instead can no longer be associated to any particular nation: a true TNC 'is adrift and mobile, ready to settle anywhere and exploit any state including its own [i.e. the state where it originated], as long as the affiliation serves its own interest (Miyoshi, in Dissanayake and Wilson eds. 1996: 87)

⁵ This is obviously also the view of many social movements which oppose globalisation because of the threat it poses to democracy, by taking power away from accountable institutions. A good example of this debate is offered by *The New Internationalist* no. 347, July 2002.

⁶ The concerted moves of 2002 by the British, the Spanish and the Italian governments for a further, allegedly 'inevitable' liberalisation of the job market in Europe testify to the seriousness of the threat.

⁷ At the beginning of the 1990s the Brazilian *Globo* was 'the world's largest producer of television fiction, producing simultaneously an episode a day for four different telenovelas' (Creeber, 2001: 59)

CHAPTER 3

The Lega between 1980 and 1994 -The emergence and accession to power of a new political actor

3.1 Introduction to Chapter 3

This research now turns to the economic, political and social factors which provided the background against which the Lega emerged. While some detailed analysis of such factors is justified by the nature of this study –the nationalist movement Lega Nord, after all, acted in a specific political and social climate that can be described– the author does not regard the Lega as a mere '*reflection*' of such factors, or indeed as an *inevitable* outcome of any process of change. There were indeed strong indications that Italians were very unhappy with the political system when the Leagues made their appearance: they had had enough of increasing taxation not matched by efficiency and accountability and they were ready for radical change (Newell, 2000). However, the reasons why they decided to express these -and other- grievances through the Lega, and why so many in the north accepted the new identifications proposed by the movement *and not others*– this has to be explained. Why is it that Italians did not reject corruption by massively voting for 'La Rete' of Leoluca Orlando, which put its anti-corruption, anti-Mafioso stance at the very heart of its programmes? Why didn't they look for new faces among the *Verdi*, for instance? The Green movement, after all, could hardly be accused of having taken part in the 'spoil-sharing' system that, as seen below, was unearthed by the magistrates in these years.

The explanation of Bossi's success to be adopted here derives from Diamanti's definition of the Lega as a 'political entrepreneur' (Diamanti, 1995; 1996; also Biorcio in Mannheimer ed., 1991). The relationship between political structures and the actions of the movement can thus be characterised as follows:

- a) The peculiarities of the case 'Italia' exercised *specific* pressures on political action and set *limits* to it. This is a fairly obvious consideration, however one should remember that, to borrow a phrase from the former head of

government D'Alema, since the end of WWII this country has plainly 'refused' to become 'normal'. For example, in the first few years of their political life the Leagues -not just Bossi's- found it very difficult to find a political space - however well tuned they were to some of the grievances of the north- also because of the *characteristic* immobility of the Italian political environment which lasted until the end of the eighties (see below). However,

- b) The specific case of Italy also provided the party with a series of *great opportunities* through which to re-define the problems faced by the north. And re-defined they were: as this thesis argues again below the Lega offered *original* solutions to such problems, and was able to set the agenda of political debate in Italy *to a very large extent* since the end of the eighties.

Moreover, far from being a mere reflection of economic, political and social factors, the Lega -and this provides the justification for the present research- redefined a whole culture, thus offering pride and identity to the north. If parallels have to be made with other political forces of the period, then the only new party that managed to exercise an influence that can be compared to that of the Lega, and emerged in even less time, is, of course, Forza Italia. However Berlusconi's movement only emerged later; as explained below, this new party was able to exploit the media owned by its leader and profited from the same 'anti-systemic' culture the Lega itself had actively promoted. By the time Forza Italia made its appearance, lower taxes and federalism, if not yet key ideas that all parties had accepted, had nonetheless become far more popular in political discourse.

Although the account that follows is non-reductionist, it is relevant to focus on the situation of the country in the period in which the Lega came to prominence, to set the context in which it acted. The third chapter will thus consider the period leading to the transformation of the Lega into a nationalist movement.

3.2 The economy and public finances in Italy, 1980-1994.

The first paragraph aims to provide a very brief account of the economic performance of Italy through the eighties and in the first four years of the nineties,

by focusing in particular on the crisis of public finances in the country -a theme, as we will see, absolutely central to the Lega's propaganda.

The period 1980-1994 witnessed the apogee of a process which had started around 1965 (Sapelli, 1997: 101), i.e. the decline of big (family or publicly-owned) firms and the rise of middle and small sized companies -of which many were based in the north. In fact, exploiting the generally favourable international conjuncture of the sixties and seventies, many specialised workers who had learned advanced skills in industry started their own activity or business and moved up the social scale (ibid., 101). Thus an entrepreneurial culture emerged in this period among sectors of the working classes, one that was often family-oriented, in terms of *where* to turn for the provision of capital and *who* should be trusted in the running of the enterprise.

These small businesses found their strength in their adaptability and flexibility (Antonelli, 1980; Balcet, 1997) *vis a vis* the difficulty of large scale industry in adapting to the changes in the international landscape. The constant devaluation of the lira in this period further contributed to the success of an industry often oriented, as it is nowadays, towards foreign markets - and particularly those of central Europe.

In the context of a growing Italian economy, the role of Milan as the *industrial* and *financial* heart of the country can hardly be overestimated- suffice to say, with Sapelli (1997: 108; 121-122), that the metropolis controlled 41.9 per cent of the total movements of capital throughout the boom years via its banks. As shown in table 1, the tendency at the end of the period was for the GDP per person to increase steadily throughout the country. However, while in all the regions that the Lega would later define as part of 'Padania' (bar one) the average GDP per person was well above the national average (regions 1 to 11), in those regions that would be excluded from the project of Padania (bar one) the exact opposite was true (12 to 20).

Table 1. GDP per region per head (in thousands of liras)

Region	1990	1993
1. Piemonte	26.908	30.498
2. Valle d'Aosta	28.059	33.707
3. Lombardia	29.341	33.667
4. Trentino Alto Adige	27.487	32.929
5. Veneto	26.004	31.288
6. Friuli Venezia Giulia	29.904	31.632
7. Liguria	25.637	30.814
8. Emilia Romagna	28.051	33.206
9. Toscana	24.173	28.816
10. Umbria	21.048	25.027
11. Marche	23.810	28.143
12. Lazio	25.812	30.997
13. Abruzzo	19.954	23.317
14. Molise	16.384	18.964
15. Campania	15.862	17.990
16. Puglia	16.596	19.100
17. Basilicata	13.664	16.296
18. Calabria	12.639	15.432
19. Sicilia	15.158	18.048
20. Sardegna	16.797	20.757
Italia	22.755	26.685

(source: Castelvechio and La Piccirella, 1997: 52)

It is also worth noticing that the average GDP per person in underdeveloped areas such as Basilicata and Calabria was about *half* that of Lombardia or Piemonte in the period considered.

Interestingly, if we look at the funds handed out by the state to the regions in order to provide welfare at the end of the period (1994), the disparity between what the

north produced and what it 'got back' from the state- a strong propaganda weapon for the Lega, as highlighted below- becomes apparent.

Table 2: Expenditure in welfare per region per head in 1994 (thousands of liras):

Calabria	521
Umbria	513
Abruzzo	510
Friuli	441
Molise	387
Basilicata	384
Emilia	371
Lazio	360
Liguria	358
Marche	340
Sardegna	329
Sicilia	324
Toscana	322
Puglia	299
Veneto	266
Campania	261
Valle d'Aosta	251
Piemonte	243
Lombardia	216
ITALIA	312

(source: Castelvechio and La Piccirella, 1997: 52)

Although there were regions of 'Padania' (e.g. Friuli and Umbria) that received just as much as others in the south, if not even more, rich regions like Veneto, Piemonte and Lombardia were at the very bottom of the list. This is obviously largely explained by the low unemployment rate in these areas. However, when data are presented in these terms- as they often are in the propaganda of the League (e.g. 'La Rubrica Silenziosa' in *I Quaderni Padani*) the point can easily be made that the north is subsidising the south.

In political terms, the eighties were dominated by the alliance between the PSI of Bettino Craxi and the more conservative factions of the DC led by Andreotti and Forlani. Although a distinctive feature of the eighties was the absence of harsh confrontations between social classes -especially when one compares this period to the sixties and seventies- and despite the rapid economic growth outlined above, the governments of the period let public debt rise quite dramatically. Indeed, as Italy

entered the nineties, the country's debts seemed to have reached levels almost beyond recovery. What had determined such a situation?

1. Practices of corruption deepened and the sharing out of public money between political and business groups increased. Huge amounts of public money got covertly channelled not only towards political parties but indeed towards illegal organisations, at times controlled by the Mafia (see the 'Mani Pulite' investigation below).
2. The governing parties widely resorted to practices of so-called *clientelismo*, whereby they guaranteed 'protection' -in the form of privileges, impunity for tax-evaders, handouts to specific groups and sub-groups in society, as well as whole geographic areas, in exchange for loyalty and votes (Sapelli, 1997: 136 and 137).
3. Tax evasion got to a level which was unknown in the rest of Europe. Thus, while direct taxation increased throughout the eighties, eventually reaching unbearable levels¹, whole categories of workers (i.e. some categories of professionals and self-employed workers) paid, in reality, far less than they should have done, due to the inability (read 'unwillingness') of the state to keep an eye on them. If, by subsidising deprived areas of the south, the governing DC had managed to use them as safe 'banks' of votes, by turning a blind eye to tax-evasion they made sure they would not lose the support of huge sections of the middle classes. Prudent estimates put tax evasion at a level of 25 to 30 per cent of the total income of the state in this period (Balcet, 1997: 149). Ironically, this caused a constant 'official' rise in taxation throughout the eighties and the nineties, as international pressure mounted for the state to sort out its finances. And yet only *some* groups in society that could not avoid paying their taxes, as these were taken out their wages directly (i.e. all employees, as well as pensioners) found themselves left *on their own* in dealing with a very greedy tax-man. At the same time, others were buying public bonds, and actually using the very money they should have paid in taxes to do so, thus avoiding taxation by becoming themselves *creditors* of the state.
4. Politicians were unwilling to introduce radical reforms, as these would have alienated large sections of the population. As a consequence, no government wanted to handle problems such as the necessary reform of the pension

system, one that could not provide many people with a decent pension, while leaving untouched the privileges of others (Vitali, in Brunetta and Tronti eds., 1991).

5. Successive Finance Ministers seemed to be content with the idea that the country could live beyond its means and resorted to massive issues of state bonds. These were widely regarded as 'safe', and because they were very popular, as pointed out above, huge amounts of funds got channelled towards the state as opposed to productive activities. Successive governments resorted to more and more bonds *so as to pay off the interests on the public debt* (Sapelli, 1997: 136 and 137). The outcomes can be seen in table 3.

Table 3: Public debt and deficit of the Italian state (percentage of GDP)

Year	Public deficit	Public debt
1970	3.7	38.0
1975	11.6	57.6
1980	8.5	57.7
1985	12.6	82.3
1990	10.9	97.8
1994	9.0	121.4

(source: Della Sala, 1997: 23)

In the mid-nineties public debt totalled a staggering two million billion liras² (Balcet, 1997: 150-151). In the same period, in Germany, France and the UK public debt was only about 50 per cent of GDP (Sapelli, 1997: 194), less than *half* the level reached in Italy.

The 'relaxed' approach of various Italian governments to public expenditure is also shown by the constant gap between *programmed* and *real* expenditures, as some data for the years 1989-1991 clearly show:

Table 4: Public expenditure (in billions of liras)

	Programmed public expenditures	public expenditures
1989	419.636	437.286
1990	439.444	462.961
1991	452.325	483.581

(source: Balcet, 1997: 80)

Despite the increase in the level of public debt and despite the worsening of practices of corruption³, the eighties were an age of growth and of consumerism (Sapelli, 1997: 140; Balcet, 1997: Chapter 5). This is all the more surprising as between 1980 and 1987, due to the radical restructuring of the Italian industry, one million jobs were *lost* in the manufacturing sector alone (Balcet, 1997: 83). As unemployment increased (see table 5) the state, pressed by the unions, massively resorted to the *Cassa Integrazione*⁴, and found itself having to provide for more and more people.

Table 5: Unemployment rates 1980- 1994

Year	Unemployment rate
1980	7.6
1985	10.3
1990	11
1994	11.3

(source: Balcet, 1997: 78)

If consumption remained buoyant throughout the period this was not only thanks to the family unit -which kept the function of re-distribution of resources- but also because of the diffusion of *lavoro nero*, illegal work, which eluded statistics and can now only be vaguely estimated⁵. On the monetary front, the lack of sense of responsibility shown by successive Italian governments, together with intensive speculation against the currency and other international factors led to a devaluation

of the lira of 45 per cent against the mark and 41 per cent against the dollar in the period 1992-1995 (Graziani, 1998: 159 -162).

The fall of the lira, the lack of trust in the Italian state shown by foreign investors and the new commitment towards a European common currency finally forced Italian governments to put the reform of public finances on the agenda (Bull and Rhodes, 1997: 7 and 8; Della Sala, 1997). In fact, the Treaty of Maastricht 'ensured that the boundaries of state-society relations in the economy could no longer ignore outside pressures' (Della Sala, 1997: 29). This coincided with the dissolution of all major political parties and the so-called 'revolution' of 'Mani Pulite' (see below).

The first government to take the reduction of public debt quite seriously was the one led by the socialist PM Giuliano Amato in 1992: Amato imposed drastic measures (which enjoyed the support of the ex-Communists of the PDS, too) in order to reduce the debt. Indeed, since the beginning of the nineties the left took charge of successive governments which put public finances very high on the agenda- with the notable exception of the first Berlusconi government in 1994, which only lasted eight months. Amato was followed by the so-called 'governi tecnici' (governments of technocrats)⁶. These were:

- 1) the *governo Ciampi* (1993), which preceded Berlusconi, a government led by a former governor of the Bank of Italy (later on elected President of the Republic) and in which many ministerial posts were filled by senior managers and administrators;
- 2) the *governo Dini* (1995), which followed Berlusconi's, Dini having been the former director-general of the same bank;
- 3) the *governo Prodi* (1996), not a 'governo tecnico', yet one led by a very moderate economics professor and ex-administrator of public companies. Dini and Ciampi served in this government as ministers.

The obsession with 'technocrats' and bankers of the period says a lot about the feelings of distrust of Italians -and foreign governments for that matter- towards the political class of the country and about their perception that politicians could not be trusted to put public finances right. It also gave the ex-Communists the opportunity

to accredit themselves as responsible players in the political arena by showing how little they now valued 'old-style' socialist ideas.

The Dini and Prodi governments will be covered in the next chapter, which discusses the years 1995-1998. To the credit of Amato and Ciampi -particularly from the perspective of a necessary reduction of the debt- goes a good relationship with the national unions, which brought about a continuation of relatively stable relations between social classes, and successive deals for the reduction of the cost of labour. Among the many exceptional measures taken by these two governments, the start of a massive programme of privatisation of a number of state companies should be mentioned (Balcet, 1997: 86). However, unemployment was still rising at the beginning of the nineties and in 1993 the GDP was lower than that of 1992. With the Berlusconi government (1994) the programme of privatisation came to a halt and public debt increased once again. To be more precise, in 1994 the public debt as a percentage of GDP reached the highest point of all times -121.4 per cent according to Della Sala (cf. table 3), 124.3 per cent according to other commentators (Castelvecchio and La Piccirella, 1997: 11). In addition to this, the year 1994 witnessed the sudden reduction of foreign investments in the country, as well as a 10 per cent devaluation of the lira. Interest rates went up four points (Balcet, 1997: 88). In the meantime, during the fifteen years considered by this chapter the political landscape of the country had completely changed. One of the factors determining the change, and one that can only be understood with reference to the crisis of the economy in Italy, as well as the rapidly changing international situation of the end of the eighties, was precisely the birth and sudden rise of the Lega Lombarda, later Lega Nord.

3.3 The Lega Lombarda in the period 1980-1989

At the end of the seventies Bruno Salvadori, leader of the Union Valdôtaine- a tiny autonomist movement in the Valle D'Aosta region- was busy trying to bring together the autonomists of northern Italy. According to the LN (SOFLN, 1998: 27) and its leader (Bossi and Vimercati, 1992: 31-35; Bossi, 1999: 9-21), the Lega originated from a casual encounter between Bossi himself and Salvadori outside the University of Pavia⁷. Moved by Salvadori's ideas and personal charisma, Bossi eventually agreed

to create an autonomist movement in the area where he lived, the city of Varese in Lombardia. Following the death of Salvadori in a road accident in 1980, Bossi gave up University and went into full-time politics, allegedly paying back the debts of Salvadori, too⁸. The Lega Autonomista Lombarda was born, a party which was legally registered only in 1984 (SOFLN, 1998: 33).

The name of 'Lega Autonomista Lombarda' was inspired by the alliance of the independent communes of northern Italy that fought the German emperor Frederick I Barbarossa, and later his grand-son Frederick II, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries AD. The historic Lega Lombarda (from now on: HLL) was, in fact, just a temporary military alliance between very different entities (the independent cities of northern Italy, often at war with each other in the Middle Ages). The name of the party, by reminding people of this almost mythical medieval alliance, was taken to work well as a symbol of unity against centralisation and homogenisation (see chap. 7). The paper of the movement, *Lombardia Autonomista*, began publication in 1982 (SOFLN, 1998: 31): this event marked the beginning of the Lega's attacks against the political system.

In the eighties the LAL was clearly inspired by another autonomist movement, in terms of its propaganda and target audience, i.e. the Liga Veneta (Diamanti, 1995: 45-56). Both movements successfully exploited the crisis of representation faced by the Christian Democrats in northern Italy (see below), and both resorted to a populist and simplifying rhetoric in order to become visible. Not surprisingly, the dialectic between the 'Lombardi' and the 'Veneti' after the unification of the two movements as Lega Nord has always been one of the party's main problems.⁹

At the national election of 1983 the Liga Veneta got 4.2 per cent of votes in the Veneto region, enough to elect an MP and a senator. This was regarded as a good performance by a party with no well-organised propaganda machine and no friends in the press; more so if one thinks of the reluctance of the Italian electorate to send strong signals to the governing parties. The analysis of electoral behaviour during these elections demonstrates that the LV attracted votes from the moderates, particularly in industrialised areas dominated by small and medium-sized companies (Diamanti, 1995: 46).

The LV prepared the ground for a redefinition of northern regional identities by 'filling in' the term 'Veneto' with new values generated by the party's own interpretation of events. In particular, the movement exploited a feeling of political marginalisation characterising areas whose economic importance and average income were growing fast, but whose political weight was perceived to be non-existent. In the context of a still centralised state where all important decisions were taken in Rome, and in a context in which many important national political leaders were of southern origin, the LV managed to re-awaken always present feelings of parochialism and give new dignity to a general feeling of disaffection with the central state (ibid., 49), turning moderate voters against the very party (the DC) that had been their political referent for so long.

The Lega Autonomista Lombarda existed since the beginning of the eighties -if only in the mind of its secretary and a few supporters- but was only constituted legally on 12 April 1984, as already pointed out. Following the examples of other autonomist formations -the UV, the LV, and others like the Sardinian PSd'AZ- the Lega of the period focused on the distinctive *ethnicity* of the Lombards¹⁰. Lombardy, commonly seen as a site of financial power and wealth (see discussion above) was now portrayed as a region under siege, one colonised by the homogenising forces of Southern Italy which controlled the central state (Bossi in *Lombardia Autonomista*, reprinted in Bossi, 1996: 7- 10). The identity and culture of the Lombards were now said to be at risk.

However, as Bossi soon understood (ibid.: 15), if he had based his propaganda on the 'forgotten' popular cultures of Lombardy -and on dialects to be 'saved'- he would have experienced the isolation already enjoyed by many autonomist leaders. Dialects were not as widely spoken in Lombardia as they were in Veneto, not to mention that Bossi's region was extremely advanced in terms of modernisation and links with Europe. Issues of 'cultures' and 'languages' were certainly not forgotten in this propaganda¹¹, and they took centre-stage again in the second half of the nineties, albeit in a completely changed context, however in this period a common ground for identity-definition had to be found elsewhere if the party was to be successful. As the Lega Lombarda was taking shape, the leader increasingly focused on a notion of *common interests*.

The issue of identity formation will be focused upon in chapters 5-8. As the present chapter, and the one that follows, focus on the Italian economy, society and political life, special attention will be paid now to the *economic* grievances of the Lega.

The state of the country's finances was identified as a target of political action by Bossi, especially given that Italy's chronic problems were at odds with the economic success of Lombardy:

Lombardia is not the idiot who ends up paying somebody else's debts. It does not want to passively follow Rome towards bankruptcy as it does not want to sacrifice on the altar of Roman misrule its citizens' right, its children's sweat and its people's incessant hard work and personality (Bossi, 1982, reprinted in Bossi, 1996: 9).¹²

The LAL engaged in a radical *cultural* re-definition of the problems facing the country, by cleverly reducing all of these problems to the impossibility of bridging the 'north'/'south', and the 'people'/'politicians' divides. Thus economic problems, criminality, excessive taxation and other issues came to be linked in the Lega's discourse as follows:

- a) A polemic against the presence of too large a number of Southerners in the public and local administrations, in itself allegedly justified by the willingness to 'look after' the Lombards and protect their jobs, was constantly linked to the party's criticism of the public administration's -indisputable- inefficiency (e.g. the letter of Bernasconi, in *Lombardia Autonomista*, 1985, and the reply of -presumably- Umberto Bossi). The public servant, the social worker or the administrator were thus talked about *both* as 'southern' and as 'unproductive'.
- b) The party claimed that the resources of the Lombard region should have been there *for the Lombards* to enjoy. This, as stated in the programme of the LAL, could only be done by reserving jobs and houses to the Lombards (ethnic quotas) and by re-organising welfare, the pension system and taxation at a regional level (anonymous, in *Lombardia Autonomista*, 1984b). These measures were intended to reverse the alleged discriminations of the

state against Lombards, in a country in which southerners were accused of being privileged (Bossi, 1999: 49-50)¹³;

- c) The party portrayed itself as the defender of Lombard workers against a very greedy, money-wasting taxman (Lega Nord ed., 1996: 13). The greed of politicians was said to add to the forever-failing programmes of aid to the south administered by the central state, through a worsening public debt (Biorcio, 1997: 45).
- d) The movement voiced its opposition to the practice of 'domicilio coatto', whereby 'Mafiosi' who had served their sentence were taken to a town of the north and were banned from their region of origin. This struggle was turned into the symbol of the northerners' rejection of an alien 'Mafioso culture' imported into Lombardy by southerners¹⁴. As seen in some detail in chapter 6, the often made explicit link between the Mafia, alleged southern acquiescence and state inefficiency struck a chord with the resentments and frustrations of the north.

Bossi was thus proposing an idea of 'region' in which *interests* become *values*. Lombardia was presented as the *site* of *shared interests*, as well as the only community which could possibly *defend* these interests against the voracity of Rome¹⁵. In this context, key words like 'productivity' and 'efficiency' were given centrality in what was developing as a new ideology, a sort of new selfish regional liberalism.

If in the administrative elections of 1985 the Lega Lombarda did not get beyond electing two representatives in local administrations of the Varese area (anonymous, 1985a in *Lombardia Autonomista*), two years later the party saw its first representatives (Leoni and Bossi) elected to the lower and upper houses of Parliament. As noted by Diamanti (1995: 61) the LL of 1987 performed well in the same sort of areas that had listened to the LV in 1983 (although the two movements had presented lists in different regions, of course) i.e. in provincial towns and villages, characterised by small and medium-sized companies.

Following the election of its first representatives to the national parliament, the Lega became more visible and therefore felt even more 'under siege', threatened by the forces of centralisation (SOFLN, 1998: 37), as a previously marginal movement was

now proving itself able to rally support behind its flag. This is why, according to the LN, the party needed to adopt in its internal organisation those very principles of centralisation that were said to hinder the efficiency of the central state and make the periphery a slave of the centre¹⁶. Only the founders of the movement had a right to vote on the political strategies to be pursued, while others only supported the party and had no say over political decisions (SOFLN, 1998: 37). This 'complex of the siege' and the determination of Bossi to get rid of internal opposition determined a situation of continuous expulsions of militants from the party, a policy that has continued unchanged throughout the nineties.¹⁷

1989 was the year when things started to change quite dramatically in Lombardy, and the rest of the country, too. The various autonomist parties based in the northern regions of Italy presented a common list at the European elections, called 'Alleanza Nord'. If it is true that none of these formations did particularly well, the important exception was indeed the Lega Lombarda, which suddenly became the fourth party in the Lombard region by gaining 8.1 per cent of votes. In the same elections the party got over 10 per cent in four Lombard provinces (Natale, 1991: 90).

3.4 The creation and rise of the Lega Nord: 1989-1992

The year 1989 thus constituted a threshold for the Lega. From now on, and for some years to come, the party grew at an incessant pace.

In 1990 local, provincial and regional elections were held on the same date. In Lombardia the LL came *second*, after Democrazia Cristiana, with 18.9 per cent of the votes. The party also secured 4.8 per cent of the national vote in the regional elections (table 6), which was a very good result given that the support for the LL was still mainly concentrated in one region- although, of course, the most populated one in the country.

Table 6: Results of the four main parties + Lega in the local, provincial and regional elections of 6 May 1990

Party	Local	Provincial	Regional
DC	33.9	31.6	33.4
PCI	23.3	23.8	24
PSI	17.6	15.7	15.3
Verdi	3.8	5.2	5
LL	2.2	4.0	4.8

(source: SOFLN, 1998: 45)

Table 7: Results of the main five parties in the regional elections of Lombardy.¹⁸

Party	percentage
DC	28.6
LL	18.9
PCI	18.8
PSI	14.3
Verdi	5.2

(source: SOFLN, 1998: 45)

At the Congress of February 1991, Bossi's project of bringing together the various autonomist parties which had given birth to the electoral alliance 'Alleanza Nord', thus creating a unitary movement of northern autonomists, became a reality and the Lega Nord was born. The strongest formations among the autonomists were the LV and the LL; however, following the recent performances of the Lombard *leghisti*, they inevitably took charge of the leadership of the new party. The regional autonomist parties did not disappear, though: they became 'national branches' of the Lega Nord, *de facto* surrendering their autonomy to the centre in Milan.

Assuming the leadership of the new formation, Umberto Bossi explicitly indicated the 'political leadership of the country' (and no longer just the 'liberation' of one or more regions) as the objective of the movement (SOFLN, 1998: 43). Furthermore, he told the party to unite behind him and avoid the creation of internal factions (*ibid.*). The first article of the statute of the LN claimed that the country needed to be turned into

a federal state (See Lega Nord, 1991). This was to be divided into three macro regions which were said to be economically homogeneous: the north, the centre and the south.¹⁹

On 16 June 1991, in Pontida (i.e. where the representatives of the historic Lega Lombarda swore allegiance to each other), the LN publicised its new federalist keywords by proceeding to the symbolic 'foundation' of the Republic of the North in a mass demonstration. This event gave people a taste of the (many) symbolic, attention-grabbing mass gatherings through which the party would speak to the north in the years to come. Following the national elections of 1992, the LN became the *fourth* largest party no longer in Lombardia, but indeed in the country as a whole. This is shown by the table below.

Table 8: (Lower Chamber), results of the five largest parties in the national elections of 5 April 1992.

Party	Percentage	Seats
DC	29.7	206
PDS	16.1	107
PSI	13.6	92
LN	8.7	55
RC	5.6	35

(source: Bull and Newell, 1997: 86)

'The share of the vote of the three largest parties (DC, PDS, PSI) tumbled from 75.2 to 59.4 per cent... the four parties of government (DC, PSDI, PLI and PSI) lost the overall majority of votes (although not of seats)' (Bull and Newell, 1997: 85 and 86). The performance of the League in the regions of the north bore testimony to the speed at which the party was growing: in Lombardy the party gained 23 per cent of votes; 18 per cent in Veneto (where it suffered the competition of other autonomist movements that refused to be 'ruled by Milan'); 15 per cent in Trentino; finally, about 10 per cent in other regions, including the 'forever-red' Emilia-Romagna (Diamanti, 1995: 78)²⁰. Also, the movement was now growing in big metropolitan areas like Milan, these being places in which people had historically been less enthusiastic about the party than voters in minor centres.

Once again, the Lega had 'stolen' the majority of its votes from the traditional parties which had been governing Italy for years and were now heading for extinction: the various PSI, PLI, PRI, PSDI and especially the DC- although there were also votes taken from the opposition and indeed the 'party' of the undecided (Mannheimer, 1991b; Biorcio, 1997: 63). The DC had been governing the country since the end of WWII, and because it had an absolute majority only in the period 1948-1953, it had had to rely on shifting alliances with the other four minor parties of the political centre²¹. This system of 'blocked democracy' in which the opposition (the PCI) never managed to become the party of government was soon to become a thing of the past:

The conventio ad excludendum [of the Communists] had three consequences which would undermine electoral support for the governing parties in the long term. First, governments were highly unstable (since parties which knew that they would remain in office indefinitely could afford to quarrel). Second, governments were ineffective (because the effective absence of electoral constraints removed the need for parties to compete on policies). Third, governing-party rivalry gave rise to a politicisation of the state apparatus as the governing parties engaged in a 'sharing out' (lottizzazione) of ministerial and administrative posts according to the bargaining power of each. This allowed the parties to maintain and develop clientelistic ties with their electoral constituencies, a practice which frequently degenerated into out-and-out corruption. As a consequence, the Italian polity was characterised by a profound alienation of the citizenry from the political system and from the early 1970s surveys carried out by the Eurobarometer consistently found Italians to be far less satisfied with the way 'democracy works' in their country than the citizens of any other country in the European Union (Bull and Newell, 1997: 82 and 83).

Two further events of the end of the eighties are also to be considered, if the rise of the LN is to be understood. First of all, the year 1989 had witnessed the beginning of the end for the Eastern bloc as the world had known it, and the Italian Communist party acknowledged that by changing its name and by turning, although perhaps not

unambiguously, to social democracy. The change did not come as a complete surprise to those who had followed the evolution of the party's line throughout the eighties. In fact, as far as 1977 the then secretary Enrico Berlinguer had formally distanced the PCI from the CPSU, thus proposing a 'European way' to communism that many had read as an acceptance (if reluctant) of capitalism and a move towards Social Democracy²². Even if expected, the turning of the PCI into a social-democratic party, proposed for the first time in 1989, was a traumatic experience for its militants and indeed one that profoundly changed the Italian political landscape²³. Centrist voters were now free to *withdraw* their support from the governing DC and its allies and choose a party that better represented their views *without fearing a Communist 'take-over'* anymore. This greatly influenced the behaviour of the so-called 'moderate' voters, as we will see in more detail below.

The other factor underpinning the success of the Leagues and giving them new ammunition was the rise of the tax burden in the eighties and especially at the beginning of the nineties. As already pointed out, this was caused primarily by the need for the country to reduce its debt. Together with the start of the investigations known as 'Mani Pulite' which will be discussed below, the events just mentioned made the message of the LN more and more appealing to dissatisfied voters, and particularly *some* categories of voters (see, again, below). As the Lega was progressively and successfully turning its own definitions and concepts into 'common sense', a new culture imposed itself on the attention of the country, one that the press labelled as 'leghismo'. Despite the risks of oversimplification, it might be useful to point out some of the aspects of this culture:

- a) The core was disillusionment with traditional parties and a lack of trust in professional politicians. A new idea was becoming dominant in the country, one that the Lega had made its own, however one that truly belonged to the political climate of the period -as confirmed by the fact that 'governments of technocrats' became the norm in the nineties. The reference here is to the idea that one should let people from the private sector sort out the 'real' problems, a conception that prepared the ground for the rhetoric of the Forza Italia movement later. In the case of the LN, the message -and the *practice*, too, in the case of local administrations 'conquered' by the party- was to put shopkeepers and accountants *in charge*, in place of bureaucrats and 'old

style' politicians. It was as if 'common sense' and self-declared honesty could, by themselves, be sufficient to run complex administrations. Consistent with this approach was a second key theme, i.e.

- b) a deeply held belief that small businesses were *central* to the economy of the north and a declared willingness to defend them. The centrality of this theme explains the importance of *fiscal* federalism for the political project of the party. It is true that the Lega put forward various proposals as to how to reform the Italian state -the major shifts being the one from regionalism to federalism, then later on the turn to nationalism and separatism, and finally, recently, a discourse of 'devolution'; it is also probably true that many people in the north would be hard pressed to explain the differences between a federation, a confederation and a state which devolves powers to the periphery. However, the idea of giving to 'the local' (whether macro-region, region or even province could then be discussed) the power to spend its own money 'locally' was always paramount for the *leghisti* (e.g. anonymous, 1984b; see also Cento Bull and Gilbert, 2001: 90-93) and marked a great shift in the thinking of parts of the north as it made the crisis of Christian and Communist solidarism even more apparent. Fiscal federalism was said to be primarily in the interests of local businesses as it would enable the administrators to provide those infrastructures and services that the central state was simply not giving to the north.
- c) The courage to 'say it' and 'say it loud', as the Lega inaugurated a new 'language' of politics which borrowed heavily from 'bar-talk', slang and dialects so as to give new dignity to the 'language of the people'²⁴, while re-defining this language at the same time (Fusella ed., 1993 and Iacopini and Bianchi, 1994).
- d) The continuing polemic against southerners and immigrants. If anything, the LN's speeches increasingly targeted foreign nationals and not just southern Italians, however this did not happen at the speed that people often attributed to it (see chap. 5 and 6). In the meantime we shall not forget that the anti-southerner rhetoric of the party in the eighties had already achieved the important goal of making the explicit and uncompromising refusal of the 'other' -whoever this 'other' happened to be- a theme that could be discussed in the open.²⁵

e) The simplification of political perspectives. Allegedly outdated categories such as 'class' were being replaced by a mentality of 'us' and 'them' that made problems easier to understand. By claiming the necessity of more autonomy and more independence for the regions of the north *vis a vis* central government, the idea of a community of the 'north' as an identity-defining entity was continuing to take shape, and was slowly taking its place *beside* regional and local identifications.

'If I had to represent with an image the Leagues and the company which follows them between 1990 and 1992, I would pick the image of a tram', claims Diamanti (1995: 87). And he continues:

It is a tram on which get a lot of passengers, whose motivations, frustrations and expectations are different. A tram on which get, more numerous by the day, self-employed workers of the productive and distribution sector, worried because the crisis is deepening and unsatisfied by the rise of the fiscal burden; the workers of small businesses...; the young, de-ideologised and lacking strong points of reference... This confirms the importance of the <<driver>>, of the political actor who decides where to stop the vehicle to let the passengers on, but, even more importantly, who decides what direction to take, what is the final destination of the journey. This means that Lega now reflects the instincts of the society of the north; also because it contributes to produce them (ibid.).

Now that some of the factors underpinning the rise of the Lega have been discussed in more detail, it becomes easier to justify Diamanti's claim, with which the author of these pages agrees, that the party is not *simply* a product of external factors. It is most certainly true that the Lega created a channel through which a *pre-existing* hostility to the country's politicians could be expressed, once the cold war and threat of Communism had become a thing of the past; it is equally true that the movement voiced the increasing anxieties of quite wealthy sectors of the populations unwilling 'to be ripped off by the tax-man'²⁶; finally, it could easily be argued that a devolution of more powers to the periphery, an idea not at all conflicting with the actual constitution, was long overdue. And yet the party was also 'building on' these fears

and problems by superimposing *its own interpretative framework* on to feelings of rage and frustration. This was done, first of all, by reducing all the problems of the country to problems between the *north* and the *south* or else between the *north* and politicians '*in Rome*', as pointed out above.

This interpretation of a complex economic and political environment, according to which all the 'good guys' are brought together under the label of the 'north' while the others become 'unproductive south' was condemned as simplistic by journalists and political parties, and yet it proved very effective. It was indeed a hypocritical stance, more due to its silences than because of its choice of scapegoats. After all, if 'southerners', as an all-embracing category of people, could hardly be taken to be responsible for the problems of the country, there weren't many doubts, at least, that the political system had not dealt effectively with economic problems or that decentralisation was needed. However, in its haste to put all northerners in the same boat²⁷ the Lega did not, and could not say, that a system based on favours, ready to turn a blind eye to tax evasion, and controlled by the same party that had effectively acted as the link between 'Rome' and the periphery of recent industrialisation of the north-east for so long, had also *benefited* those very sectors of the northern population that were now ready to catch the *leghista* 'tram'.

3.5 The year 1993: a revolution which did not take place

Can one define what happened in Italy in the period 1992 to 1994 as a 'revolution'? The term itself was very popular in the Italy of the 1990s and seems to retain some appeal a few years later (Gilbert, 1995)²⁸. It is difficult not to see that much changed in Italian politics, if only because almost all parties which had led the country in the previous fifty years literally *disappeared* for one reason or another; and yet scholars and journalists are divided as to the *extent* of these changes. Interestingly, some commentators point out that clear signs of crisis and dissatisfaction were already apparent as early as the 1970s, as: a) the turnout at elections was declining (still at the high figure of 93.4 per cent in 1976, then falling steadily); b) the Catholic and Communist cultures were being weakened by secularisation, growing consumerism and lowering levels of participation in political activities (Newell, 2000: chap. 4); c)

the political landscape was increasingly fragmented, which resulted in a decline in the number of voters backing the governing parties (Bull and Newell, 1997: 83).

According to Bull and Rhodes 'these years have witnessed considerable continuity beneath the surface change, making the contemporary period one of ongoing transition rather than rupture with the past' (1997: 1). One should also consider that many professional politicians of the old class successfully managed to 'recycle themselves' and keep their seats in Parliament- if with new leaders and under different banners- despite the collapse of the old parties described below. Therefore, while some parties may have disappeared, often Italians found themselves having to choose in a particular constituency between a Christian Democrat now running for the left and *another one* holding the banner of one of the 'new' moderate formations. Secondly, the only *structural* change so far had been in the voting system at the national and municipal levels- changes that will need to be considered shortly. Although there had been much talk of changing the Constitution through the nineties, nothing was done in this period which could justify talking about a 'Second Republic'²⁹.

The crisis of the country at the beginning of the nineties needed to find some sort of 'radical' resolution, though, if not in substance at least in form. It was a crisis that Bull and Rhodes reveal as fourfold (1997: 4 and 5): a crisis of political parties, clearly turned into organisations for illegally distributing and exchanging resources; a crisis of the forever corrupted governing class, which many felt no longer forced to support after the collapse of the Communist threat (McCarthy, 1995); a crisis of institutions such as the Parliament and the Judiciary, often unable to function properly; finally, a general crisis of the idea of the state as a system which protects the 'identity of the nation'.

Two events precipitated the crisis at the beginning of the nineties:

1. The change of the electoral system from a proportional to a mixed one, largely based on a plurality system. How this came about is clearly explained in Pasquino (1995), who also discusses the changes in the elections of the mayor of medium and large communes:

Nevertheless, and precisely because Parliament proved unable to enact any reform, the initiative was undertaken from the outside by an Electoral Referendum Movement. Due to the nature of the Italian referendum, the mechanism can be applied only to repeal entire laws or specific portions of some laws. Therefore, the Referendum Movement targeted the law on proportional representation as responsible for the political and governmental stalemate and succeeded in promoting two referendums aimed to repeal the proportional components of those laws. The success of the first one held in June 1991 on a minor clause of the electoral law, the reduction of the number of preference votes to be cast by the voters, opposed by all the governing political class, was widely interpreted as a mandate for a major electoral reform. As a matter of fact, the consequence of the second referendum held in April 1993 amounted almost to a major electoral reform. The Italian electoral system was drastically reformulated: from a proportional electoral formula applied in relatively large constituencies to a mixed system, three-quarters of the seats to be attributed by a plurality system in single-member constituencies, one-quarter to be attributed through a proportional formula. In the meantime, threatened by another referendum, the Italian Parliament had succeeded in formulating an electoral reform for all municipal governments largely based on plurality criteria and entailing the popular election of the mayor plus a seat majority bonus (ibid., 36).

As far as the new electoral system is concerned, Italy's perfect Bicameralism also need mentioning. Once the electoral law for the Chamber had been changed as a result of the referendum outcome, Parliament was placed under immediate pressure to change the law for the Senate, too. As the two have identical legislative powers, keeping different electoral rules could have resulted in different, and even opposing, majorities in each branch.³⁰

The new electoral system for national elections did not reduce the number of parties as was the intention of the proponents, however at least it 'forced' them to come together in order to survive³¹. It was in this period that the two opposing coalitions of the centre-left and centre-right took shape.

2. The investigations of the 'Procura' of Milano first, and then other magistrates, too, into the way in which political parties had been financed and into the relationship between politics and big business. There are no doubts that the magistrates must have 'felt' that the time was right for such an investigation, as the end of the Communist danger and the mood of the public (made even clearer by the growing support for the LN) had opened a 'space' for some renewal on the part of the 'pentapartito', the five-parties coalition (Newell, 2000, 45-67). The Italian 'Watergate', later called 'Tangentopoli' (Bribe-City) began on 17 February 1992 with the arrest of Mario Chiesa, 'the first Socialist to be caught in the act of collecting kickbacks' (Rhodes, 1997, p. 72). He was the first to be arrested, but by no means the last:

The Milan prosecutors profited from the weakness of the traditional political class and began progressively to expand their investigations, reaching by the end of the year the national leader of the PSI, Bettino Craxi. As is well known, as a result of judicial investigation, the traditional party-system was completely overhauled in less than two years (Guarnieri, 1997: 166).

What were the causes of such widespread corruption as was uncovered by the Milanese judges?

As Cazzola points out, there are numerous schools of thought on this topic, and each may contribute part of the answer. These range from the specific to the more general and include the increasing costs of politics; administrative decentralisation and the growth of bureaucracy; the absence of alternation in power and the colonisation of the state apparatus by a hegemonic Christian Democratic Party; new forms of political professionalisation, including the emergence of party agents dedicated to the accumulation of resources which, in parties with a weak ideology, can become an end in itself; and the degeneration of political morality so that the 'governing of the public sphere becomes a means rather than an end, while public power becomes an end rather than a means'. All of these are, in fact, very closely connected (Rhodes, 1997: 65).

The years of the Socialist PM Craxi (1983 onwards) had made systemic corruption, which was already widespread, the absolute rule. In close alliance with the centre-right factions of the DC against the Communists and the DC left, Craxi successfully created a party leader based clientelism which forced entrepreneurs willing to work with the public sector to give more and more to their political referents (Sapelli, 1994). In many cases paying bribes to the various parties became the only way to get public contracts. However, many of the cases uncovered by the investigations were much more complex than this, as the following example reveals:

As mentioned above, ENI had become a Socialist fiefdom from the late 1970s onwards. But what is surprising about its role in the tangenti system of party finance is that it was involved in subsidising all parties, not just the PSI with which it clearly had the closest links. As investigations revealed by 1993, the ENI 'affair' was a complex one, involving multiple deals and covert kickback arrangements that were linked to other public companies such as ENEL, the state electricity authority. In March 1993, the Socialist senator, Franco Reviglio, was forced to resign from the finance portfolio in the government of Giulio [sic] Amato after being accused of receiving illicit funds while ENI chairman between 1983 and 1989. In the same month, his Craxi-appointed successor at ENI, Gabriele Cagliari, admitted paying 4 billion lire to a representative of the PSI to secure a contract on a power station being built by ENEL. In one of the more tragic episodes of the Tangentopoli investigations, Cagliari committed suicide after 133 days in prison, but not before revealing to the magistrates that he knew of at least 50 billion lire in illegal funding through ENI and its subsidiaries to the Socialists and Christian Democrats. Former ENI finance director, Florio Fiorini, revealed that 1.2 billion lire per annum had been channeled from the company to both parties and the Liberals and Social Democrats during the 1970s and 40 million lire a month to the DC and PSI in the 1980s. This was facilitated by the role of Valerio Bitetto who confessed to being placed on the board of ENEL by Bettino Craxi for the explicit purpose of procuring bribes. The ENEL connection also hastened the fall of Franco Nobili, the chairman of the giant state holding company, IRI, who was arrested in May that year on charges of arranging a 600-million lire payment to the PSI

arising from an ENEL contract (Rhodes, 1997: 68).

According to some, a prudent estimate of the funds involved in these illegal transactions would amount to about 3,400 billion liras per annum -well over a billion pounds, ten times the official income of all parties, including those which were never accused of having taken kickbacks like the MSI and the Verdi (ibid.: 71 and 72).

As the parties of the 'pentapartito' were being wiped out, the ex-Communists of the PDS were the only major traditional party to survive the 'revolution' of Mani Pulite. According to some, this is because the left had been traditionally more 'responsive towards judicial demands' *vis a vis* a highly politicised judiciary (Guarnieri, 1997: 166), and was therefore spared the attention of the investigators. This would find the critics of the Milanese judges, including the winner of the 2001 political elections, in agreement. However, various 'procure', including Milan, did indeed investigate the finances of the former PCI turned PDS, however less investigations were conducted and less Communists put behind bars than Christian Democrats or Socialists.

Without necessarily assuming that the PCI had been less prone to funding its activities through illegal methods, or that judges turned a blind eye on the party's finances, the simple answer could be that while the DC and the PSI were administering local administrations *and* controlling the national government, and had done so for a long time, the PCI had been excluded from power in Rome. As a consequence, its power and blackmailing potential *vis a vis* businessmen were necessarily more limited.

In many areas of the north the Lega, despite its own involvement in the investigations³², simply *took the place* of traditional parties, a process that was accelerated by the administrative elections of 1993 (Biorcio, 1997: 71).

The data below reveal some results of this process.

Table 9:

(a) Partial communal elections (1,192 communes), 6 June 1993.

(b) Provincial elections (Gorizia, Ravenna, Viterbo, Mantova, Pavia, Trieste, Varese, Genova, La Spezia), 6 June 1993.

(c) Partial communal elections (424 communes), 21 Nov. 1993

	(a)	(b)	(c)
DC	18.7	12.1	10.7
PSI	2.5	0.6	1.2
PRI	0.7	0.2	0.2
PSDI	0.8	0.4	0.9
PLI	0.2	—	0.1
MSI	4.0	5.3	12.0
PDS	7.7	19.8	12.1
RC	5.1	8.0	5.3
Verdi	1.0	3.4	3.5
Pannella	—	—	0.9
Rete	2.0	1.8	3.1
LN	11.7	30.5	6.2
Others	45.6	17.9	43.8
Total	100	100	100

(source: Bull and Newell, 1997: 8)

In column a we see the results of the partial communal elections (1,192 communes) of 6 June 1993, while column b shows those of the Provincial elections held on the same day in *some* provinces of *northern Italy* like Trieste, Varese and others. The general trend is apparent: while the DC performed very badly in both cases and its allies were on the road to total extinction, the LN was up to a staggering 30.5 per cent *in the north*, while the PDS, although not performing well, got around 20 per cent *in the same areas* (column b).

In column c data refer to the partial communal elections of 21 November 1993, held nation-wide and involving 424 communes. These were again seen as a very important and representative test, due to the number of voters being involved and

due to the fact that they just followed the elections of June. The DC was now down to one third of the votes secured in the general elections 1992 (discussed above), while its allies did not seem to recover very much and the Northern League was over 6 per cent *at the national level*.

These data are indeed made difficult to read due to the success here of 'other lists' (43.8 per cent)- these often being led by an 'independent' who would benefit a political alliance with his/her reputation as a member of the community. Not long before (March 1993) the law governing communal and provincial elections had been changed and the mayors of provinces and communes of over 15,000 inhabitants were now to be elected directly by means of a double ballot system. This forced political parties to create coalitions standing for local elections under various denominations.

As we have seen, June 1993 witnessed not only some provincial elections, but municipal elections, too. The League performed very well in the symbolically important election of Milan, where it became the major party with 40.9 per cent of votes, by securing the support of the middle classes which had lost their referents (the DC and the PSI). Bossi's victory was largely expected³³ and yet still constituted a landmark.

In a twist reflecting the climate of those years, the *leghisti* had become the only choice for those very voters whose parties had been crushed, among other things, by the LN's propaganda. Given the new 'double ballot' system for the election of mayors recently introduced, voters in the north often found themselves having to choose between a leghista and a left-winger, as in Milan. Despite some aspects of the Lega's language being difficult to stomach, centrist voters often went for what was, after all, a right-wing, economically liberal, low-taxation alternative to the left. This is how the mayor supported by the LN, Marco Formentini, got elected in Milan, with the support of 57.1 per cent of voters .

The traditional refusal of the *leghisti* to locate themselves on the left-right axis, claiming that they represented 'all northerners', could not be sustained anymore, and the party moved towards the 'centre'- if clearly leaning towards the right³⁴. As a consequence (almost) gone were the secessionist accents that *at times* appeared in

the Lega's pages, as the key word now had become *federalism*³⁵. Moreover, the Lega insisted on a 'liberal' approach to the economy, a shifting of responsibilities from the state to the market and a programme of privatisation (Turani, 1993). At the same time, the anti-southerner rhetoric of the party was played down (although it did not disappear) in favour of a 'no-bureaucracy' and 'no-politicians' populist style (Diamanti, 1995: 95). Foreign immigrants remained a target, though, as an anti-immigration discourse based on 'law and order', as well as a suspicious attitude towards Islam, could strike a chord with the conservative Catholics orphans of the DC.

The administrative elections of 1993 clearly showed that there was much potential for political forces willing to oppose the centre-left, if only they could prove to be 'different' from the traditional parties of the centre wiped out by the investigations of 'Mani Pulite'. Apart from the Lega and the PDS, yet another party managed to survive the 'Mani Pulite' investigations: it was the MSI, a movement which had been completely marginalised until the beginning of the 1990s, the 'untouchable' of Italian politics -due to their defence of fascism and links to the extra-parliamentary, seditious far-right (Sidoti, 1992). And yet, thanks to its past as the 'pariah' of Italian politics, the MSI could also quite rightly present itself as the 'other' of traditional political forces and was redefining its image by turning into a modern, moderate, conservative party with no past to be ashamed of (Ignazi, 1994; Newell, 2000: 113-134).

In the administrative elections of 1993 the Alleanza Nazionale, born out of the MSI³⁶, competed with the League in attracting the support of former Christian Democrats by equally attacking the old regime and by insisting on a law and order discourse. However this time the anti-politicians rhetoric resounded also in the south. More than that: AN performed well in the south *also because* the party spoke out in *defence of it* and against any proposed division of the country (Diamanti, 1995: 132)³⁷.

In this political context, the idea of bringing together such a heterogeneous right as the one represented by the old style nationalists, ex-fascists, state-loving militants of AN on the one hand, and the anti-Italian, federalists and neo-liberals of the Lega on the other must have been generated in the mind of Silvio Berlusconi by the sensible

use of a simple calculator. In fact, although implausible and perhaps difficult to explain to the supporters of both the LN and MSI³⁸, this joining of forces was badly needed if the left was to be kept at bay: as seen above, in fact, with the new system introduced by the Segni referendum an alliance of the left would have been able to *wipe out* the divided forces of the right. The left had understood this very well and was going to take part in the 1994 elections under the banner of the 'Progressisti'. In pure 'old regime' style, the Progressisti did not bother to propose a *common* programme for government: theirs was purely an electoral alliance, thanks to which the various leftist parties hoped they would win the elections.

In order to attract the moderates, as well as people who felt 'distant' from the world of politics, and defeat the left a new party was needed, and Berlusconi created it³⁹. This party had to provide moderate leadership to a centre-right coalition and act as a bridge between the LN and the Movimento Sociale. Moreover, it had to be 'new' and not led by a politician. Despite the fact that Berlusconi had enjoyed the protection of the discredited former leader of the PSI Bettino Craxi, now in 'voluntary exile' to avoid jail, being a businessman 'lent to politics', he managed to propose himself as someone who was not involved with the old 'regime', and as the only real novelty of the incoming general elections of 1994.

3.6 The creation of Forza Italia and the 1994 elections.

Silvio Berlusconi created Forza Italia a few months before the general elections of 1994 when it was already taken for granted that the centre-left was going to win⁴⁰. The new party, that someone defined as 'virtual' because it already commanded a huge support before it had any centres, militants or campaigners (McCarthy in Ignazi and Katz eds., 1995) was totally dependent on the funds of its leader, the richest man in the country. Berlusconi's group 'Fininvest', created in 1978, employed about 40,000 people at the time of the elections. The group consisted of different branches: the retailing sector; publishing activities; insurance and financial products; TV and advertising (Balcer, 1997: 88 and 89). As far as broadcasting was concerned, the group controlled three national channels (RETE 4, CANALE 5, ITALIA 1), this being the only private group that could compete with the national channels of state television RAI- what has been called a 'duopolio'. In terms of its publishing activities,

apart from owning several popular magazines, various weekly publications and a daily paper (*Il Giornale*), Fininvest also owned two extremely well-known publishing houses: Mondadori (bought in 1991) and Einaudi (bought in 1994). In addition to the backing of his media, through which the new party was launched, Berlusconi also benefited from the experience of the management of his group, therefore heavily relying on marketing techniques so as to position his party in the electoral market. Many among the managers of Fininvest took it upon themselves not just to help their boss, but to stand for election themselves, thus becoming MPs.

The message of Berlusconi borrowed from both the MSI and the LN, although his personal style was very dissimilar to Bossi's (McCarthy, 1994). From the MSI Berlusconi took the obsession with the 'Communists', who were indeed part of the centre-left coalition, and a law and order discourse. This may obviously seem surprising, insofar as Berlusconi has always had a very conflictual relationship with the judiciary: his activities and businesses, as well as some of his relatives and friends, have all been the object of some scrutiny by different judges (not only in Italy) and he himself has been found guilty of charges such as corruption, bribery and false accounts (anonymous, 1997 on *bbc on line*; anonymous, 1998 on *bbc on line*; anonymous, 1999 on *bbc on line*). However, the leader of FI had to address the concerns of the Italian public for what was perceived as a rise in criminality and did so, although he resorted to a conservatism which sounded more 'compassionate'-and therefore more similar to the tones of the DC- than the one of Alleanza Nazionale.

Berlusconi shared with the Lega an allegedly liberal approach to the economy, although one not oblivious to the 'plights' of southern Italy, as well as an opposition to 'excessive taxation'. While according to Bossi huge sums had always been wasted in the vain effort to subsidise the south and the parasites of the public service, Berlusconi's attacks were more targeted at those professional politicians who had badly mismanaged the economy. There were no doubts that the south was 'innocent', according to Forza Italia, which also avoided a direct polemic with the public service as such. In Berlusconi's own rhetoric the old system usually meant *the left* and not the DC, as his party aimed at progressively taking the place of the DC by projecting a very moderate image. While trying to put forward his own reading of the recent past, Berlusconi was helped by two main factors:

- a) By the time he created his party the DC and the PSI had either disappeared (the former) or had been reduced to nothing (the latter), so that only the PDS (ex-PCI) was left to 'represent' the old system -the MSI notwithstanding.
- b) Among the forces opposing the 'radical liberalism' of the new right there were sectors of the powerful unions CGIL, CISL and UIL⁴¹, who were, and still are, quite rightly associated with the left- particularly the CGIL.⁴²

Although there were points of convergence between the parties of the right, a unitary coalition proved to be impossible to create in a few weeks. Berlusconi's masterpiece was then the formation of two *different* coalitions: 'Il Polo delle Libertà' (the Freedom Alliance) in the north with the LN, and 'Il Polo del Buongoverno' (The Alliance for Good Government) in the south with AN.⁴³

The support for the Lega, which had dramatically increased in 1993, *shrank* to the level of 1992 in the national elections of 27 March 1994. The party lost heavily to Berlusconi's FI (see analysis of voters' behaviour in Biorcio, 1997: 78). However, because the Lega had chosen most of the candidates to be fielded in northern constituencies by the 'Polo delle Libertà', the *leghisti* ended up being the most represented party in Parliament, controlling 18 per cent of MPs- that is 180 people between the two houses- while having received only 8.4 per cent of votes.

Eighteen per cent of MPs may not look as an impressive percentage to those who are accustomed to the British, or indeed the American systems, however things look different when one considers the endemic fragmentation of the Italian political landscape. The change to a 'first past the post' system, far from reducing the number of political parties, had actually had the opposite effect. It is true that now all political parties, especially the small ones, were almost forced to join a coalition, however their bargaining power with the major parties, if anything, had increased. Small parties now proved absolutely essential to the success of a coalition- especially when their support was concentrated in particular areas⁴⁴. In the 'Polo delle Libertà' and 'Polo del Buongoverno' there were more than the three major parties that this research always mentions (the LN, FI and AN), and the coalition of the left was constituted in 1994 by *eight* parties, plus a list of 'independents'. On top of this, more than ten different parties presented lists that competed with the two major coalitions.

These were the results of the 1994 elections:

Table 10 and 11: results of the opposing coalitions and four biggest parties at the 1994 national elections

Coalitions	Percentage	Total seats
Total: Polo delle Libertà and Polo del Buongoverno	46.4	366
Total: Progressive Alliance	34.3	213

Major parties Percentage

FI	21
PDS	20.4
AN	13.5
LN	8.4

(Source: Bartolini and D'Alimonte, 1994: 112-114)

As mentioned above, thanks to the favourable bargaining position of the Northern League, the party got 117 seats in the Chamber of Deputies out of a total of 630. The other big players of the 'Freedom Alliance' got far less: Alleanza Nazionale had 109 and Forza Italia 99. The major party of the Left, the Partito Democratico della Sinistra had 109. The relative strength of the various parties could still be calculated: voters did not only vote for a candidate in a specific constituency, but also indicated their party of preference as 25 per cent of seats were still assigned proportionally.

An analysis of the vote for the Lega shows that the party had lost support in the big cities of the north, including Milan, which now seemed to find a new referent on the right in the Forza Italia. The Lega only gained in areas of hard-core support, such as northern Lombardia (especially small towns and villages) and particularly the veneto region (Biorcio, 1997: 79; Diamanti: 1995: 139-144). In general terms, and whatever the region considered, Bossi's party only improved on its 1992 performance in those

areas in which it had always been strong, often areas of diffused small and middle-sized industry.⁴⁵

The real novelty of the elections, however, was Berlusconi's party, which managed to overcome the PDS, while being a few weeks old. According to Ricolfi: 'The impact of the three RAI channels together [i.e. the state TV, theoretically independent, but seen by many as leaning towards the centre-left during the 1994 campaign] is on at least *five* per cent of the electorate, whereas that of the three Fininvest channels is on at least *thirteen* per cent... To this we should add that a simulation of electoral constituencies has shown that, without the effects of television, the composition of Parliament would be very different indeed...under the most likely scenario, the Progressisti would have won an absolute majority of seats' (1997: 141 and 142).

Ricolfi's article deals primarily with the disparity in the time dedicated to different political actors by the various channels, and claims that this had an important effect on what people perceived as priorities of government (ibid. 146). Whether it is indeed at all possible to quantify the influence of television on voting behaviour in such precise terms, it was not the first time that Italian television could be accused of bias: in the 'sharing out' frenzy of the 1980s, *even TV channels* had been shared among political parties. RAI UNO, with the highest ratings, had been for long a 'protectorate' of the DC; RAI DUE had gone to the Socialists; RAI TRE, which for some time did not even manage to reach all areas of the country, was left to the Communists. However, it had never happened previously -and the case is quite unique in the world- that the owner of three national television channels had become PM- and could now control state television, too⁴⁶.

After the elections, the Lega Nord continued to moderate its language. Now that they were in government, the radical pro-north overtones for which Bossi had become so famous needed to be kept quiet. In fact, by taking up top national responsibilities (for instance, the *leghista* Pivetti had become Speaker of the Lower House, Maroni Minister of the Interior), and in the face of international alarm, the Lega had to offer a pragmatic and moderate image to voters. The aim was to reassure the EU, the middle classes and naturally also the southerners: after all, by assuming governing responsibilities, the party -if perhaps not happily- had now to represent them. However, by moving too much towards the 'centre', the LN risked

losing contact with its 'popular' nature and not being seen anymore by the angry 'deep north' as a 'pure' and uncompromising party. The leader of the Lega had understood very well that the party had ended up in a corner: they had to be 'serious', and yet if giving up on their populist, radical identity they would have been absorbed by the FI -that after all was putting forward similar proposals but without the virulence of the Lega. Bossi knew this, and increased the attacks against his own ally Berlusconi, insulting him even *before* the election (Diamanti, 1995: 138). However, it was a desperate strategy that could not really contain the losses to the new 'virtual' mass-mediated movement.⁴⁷

3.7 The Lega Nord in the first government led by Silvio Berlusconi

The crisis of the northern populist movement, then, coincided with its accession to power and the possibility for Umberto Bossi to control the largest group of MPs in the national parliament -an event which was greeted by yet another demonstration in the by now notorious Pontida. However, the celebrations did not last for long. The crisis of the Lega was apparent, only temporarily hidden behind the troupe of MPs heading for Rome. The European elections which followed in June 1994 did not do much to cheer up the *leghisti*. FI increased its share of votes to 30 per cent (its support rising not only in the south, but, crucially, in the north, too) and the Lega went down from 8 to 6 per cent. The party had lost 25 per cent of its votes in a two month period.

By persevering in his strategy of demolishing his own allies, Bossi turned the party into a sort of 'enemy within', always critical of the government -a strategy that produced a lot of confusion among ministers, MPs and especially his own supporters. When the Minister of Justice Biondi proposed a decree modifying the legislation on preventive custody for corruption offences, the alliance was seriously tested for the first time. The decree caused a popular uprising, especially in Milan where the magistrates of 'Mani Pulite' openly expressed their opposition to the decree (Guarnieri, 1997: 169)⁴⁸. The government should have known better: it was not surprising that an initiative aimed at changing the legislation on preventive custody should be met by such fierce criticism, given Berlusconi's own brother's position:

Fininvest and Berlusconi's brother, Paolo, were under investigation by the magistrates. These suspicions [leading to popular protests] appeared to be confirmed when Berlusconi himself received the notorious avviso di garanzia (formal notification that he was under judicial investigation). Moreover, his reaction- denouncing the action amidst accusations of a political vendetta and instigating a ministerial investigation of the Milanese magistrates- destroyed any prospect of normality in judicial-political relations while he remained Prime Minister (Bull and Newell, 1997: 98).

The second Berlusconi government is again at war with the judiciary amid accusations of writing laws to protect the 'Presidente del Consiglio' and its entourage. The Italian Parliament passed a law in November 2002 that enables defendants to have their trials switched to other cities if they have a 'legitimate suspicion' that judges are biased against them, a law widely seen as having been written *for* Berlusconi (anonymous, 2002, in BBC on line). In the summer 1994, with the country still shocked by the extent of political corruption unearthed by the judges and with the judiciary enjoying great popularity, even AN had to distance itself from the government. Furthermore, with a majority in the country still behind the magistrates, 'rather than stopping, the investigations gained momentum' (Koff and Koff, 2000: 176).

The alliance was soon to be haunted by another thorny problem. After the summer Berlusconi tried to put forward a very radical reform of the pension system, introducing such reform via decree and without any debate in Parliament. It was a major tactical mistake, given that such an issue clearly lacked those requirements of great urgency that could have justified bypassing Parliament in this fashion. The decree caused a swift reaction on the part of the unions, and provided Bossi with an excuse for finally abandoning his allies.

The withdraw of the Lega from government in December was preceded by some significant speeches given by its secretary. On 6 November 1994, Bossi presented the proposal of a new federalist constitution for the country to the Federal Assembly of the party, mentioning his own allies among the forces aiming at a *restoration* of the old political regime which had just collapsed (Bossi, reprinted in SOFLN, 1998: 109). A few days later, Bossi told his supporters that a reform in a federal sense was

just impossible with the centre-right (ibid.). The leader was preparing the ground for what was soon to come.

The first government of Berlusconi fell on 21 December 1994. The PM resigned, as it became clear that he would not have survived a vote of no confidence because of the changed attitude of the Lega. The end of the experience in government came at a very high price for the *leghisti*, too, though: knowing only too well that they had been elected to Parliament thanks to the votes of Forza Italia supporters in uninominal constituencies, and lured by the troops of Berlusconi, one third of *leghisti* MPs abandoned the party and joined Forza Italia. This was not enough for Berlusconi to keep his government afloat, but it gave a serious blow to what was left of Bossi's credibility with his own supporters. In fact, it was difficult to see how these MPs could be accused of betraying the movement (the usual strategy of Bossi when facing his critics), given that the impressive victory of the centre-right alliance had occurred only eight months before: not a long time to accomplish all the reforms, including the transformation of the state into a federation, that Bossi was asking for. As we will see in the following chapter, the end of this experience also determined a radical turn in the political strategy of the Lega Nord.

Notes:

¹ At the beginning of the eighties the tax burden was 30 per cent of GDP, but it went up quite steadily throughout the eighties and the nineties, until it reached 44 per cent between 1992 and 1993 (Castelvecchio and La Piccirella, 1997: 73).

² At July 2001 exchange-rate this amounted to about six hundred and fifty billion pounds.

³ Corruption, in many cases, meant unfair competition between companies, too, as only some firms enjoyed the protection of political parties and were consequently advantaged.

⁴ When placed in 'Cassa Integrazione' the worker was still paid part of his or her wages although not working anymore. The 'Cassa', partially funded by public money, was meant to provide for industrial workers who had been placed out of work *temporarily* by their employers in a period of crisis, however some workers survived on the 'Cassa' for years.

⁵ *Lavoro nero* is a practice whereby people do work, but they are employed 'unofficially', so that their employer does not have to pay any contributions towards the health service, social security and so on. This widespread practice goes side-by-side with tax-evasion in subtracting resources to the tax-man.

⁶ The 'government of technocrats' is one that is led and staffed by people who are not professional politicians and often enjoy international recognition. Although the 'governo tecnico' obviously needs to be backed by a majority in Parliament, it allegedly does not take orders from political parties and it claims to be focused on 'what is necessary' for the country, thus claiming to remove politics from the budgetary process.

⁷ Umberto Bossi is the creator of the LAL (later LL and then LN) and has always been the secretary of the party since its foundation.

⁸ All these details, often repeated in the propaganda of the party, contribute to defining the 'myth' of the almost 'miraculous' foundation of the Lega.

⁹ Franco Rocchetta, a popular President of the Lega Nord that has now been substituted by Luciano Gasperini, was from the veneto region. He has defined the Liga Veneta as 'the mother of all Leagues' (see Diamanti, 1995: 45). This is not only true in chronological and ideological terms, as mentioned above, but, perhaps more importantly, when thinking about the finances and organisation of the movement. The veneto region provided essential support to the leghista struggle from the very start- in the form of about fifty million liras lent to Umberto Bossi by the autonomists of the LV (Vimercati, 1990: 73). It is also a region that has strongly supported the Lega when the LL and LV joined forces and became the LN.

¹⁰ The statuto of the Lega Autonomista Lombarda (art 3) was already concerned with preserving the Lombards as a separate ethnic group. The growth of northern Italian society, it claimed, should be grounded on 'the ethnic and historic features of the Lombard people' (see anonymous, 1984a: 2). However, a unified language characterising Lombardia never existed, as the leader of the Lega Nord knew only too well. According to Rocchetta, Bossi was in fact interested in the possible creation of a Lombard *koinè*, i.e. an artificial language which could unify the different dialects spoken in the region (Rocchetta quoted in Diamanti, 1995: 58).

¹¹ In 1985 the Lega managed to see its first militants elected to local administrations (see below). On that occasion all the new elected of the party made their first speeches to the local assemblies by using local dialects and not Italian (see anonymous, 1985b, in *Lombardia Autonomista*).

¹² 'La Lombardia non è il fesso che paga i debiti altrui. Non intende seguire passivamente Roma nella bancarotta perchè non intende sacrificare sull'altare del malgoverno romano il diritto dei suoi cittadini, il sudore dei suoi figli, la laboriosità della sua gente, la personalità del suo popolo'.

¹³ In 1986 the LL and LV published one of their better known wall posters in which the movements accused the state school of being 'colonialist' (reprinted in Lega Nord, 1996: 14). The autonomists were accused of racism by the press, as they wanted pupils in schools to 'speak our languages, breathe our air'. The idea that the school system should be made more 'Padanian' was maintained by the Lega in the years to come: the creation of the first 'scuole padane' in 1996 bears testimony to it.

¹⁴ See the well-known wall posters by the Lombard and Venetian Leagues opposing the presence of criminals in the north (reprinted in Lega Nord ed., 1996: 14, 17, 20 and 54).

¹⁵ Diamanti (1995) claims that the insistence on Lombardia as a 'community of interests' is particularly apparent in this propaganda from 1987 onwards.

¹⁶ This is not the only element of contradiction in the internal organisation of a party that was in many ways very similar to those traditional parties that it was meant to attack. As a matter of fact (see below) the history of the Lega is a history of absence of debate and expulsions of dissidents.

¹⁷ Examples of how to keep internal discipline are provided by the LN's own propaganda. The first 'traitor' is Bossi's brother-in-law, Brivio, who was beaten up by the leader and pushed down the stairs before being thrown out of the party (SOFLN, 1998: 44); the small group of militants who dared to criticise the leader at the conference of Segrate in 1989 were also, in the party's own words, 'forced to shut up without mercy' ('messi a tacere, senza pietà', *ibid.*). More examples will be provided in subsequent chapters; the lack of democracy and cult of the leader within the Lega constitute another apparent similarity between this movement and the fascist extreme right.

¹⁸ Not surprisingly, given the Italians' fondness for the proliferation of political movements, there were two competing Green Parties in the country at the beginning of the 1990s. In some places they fielded unitary candidates for these elections, in others they did not. For the sake of simplicity we treat them as one movement here.

¹⁹ When the north of Italy was reconceptualised as a 'nation' (Padania) later on and the party pushed for independence, the idea of a centre of Italy as an autonomous entity was forgotten and the antagonism between north and south polarised. Some regions of the centre (Toscana, Marche and Umbria) were therefore 'included' in the project of the new nation of Padania, while the 'rest' became 'south'.

²⁰ The region Emilia-Romagna and its main town, Bologna, were ruled by coalitions of the left, when not by the Communist party on its own, from the end of WWII until the end of the century.

²¹ Newell and Bull (1997: 82) remind us that the allies of the DC combined average vote share in the period 1946-1992 did not reach *two thirds* of that of the DC itself. However, as they were indispensable to the Christian Democrats, given the proportional system of representation, they could easily blackmail their bigger ally.

²² Enrico Berlinguer and Bettino Craxi started carrying their respective Communist and Socialist parties towards the centre well before Tony Blair's definition of his 'Third Way'. The move towards the right of the PCI meant giving up on the hope of a revolution and accepting the inevitability of capitalism; this produced a painful split between the party and many radical groups on its left. According to Moretti (1994), who claims responsibility for the killing of Prime Minister Aldo Moro in 1977, the history of this split and the lack of understanding between the PCI and Italian revolutionaries explains many of the events at the end of the seventies in the country.

²³ A new Communist Party was created straight away in 1991 as soon as the PCI officially turned into PDS, but nobody has ever thought that they constituted a threat as serious as the previous Communist Party, which had been the largest in Western Europe. In fact, while the PCI got as much as 34 per cent of votes in a European election (in 1984), overtaking the Christian Democrats, the RC (Communist Refoundation) has always struggled to reach 5, 6 per cent. The general trend for both during the nineties is one of defeat, though. Even if the coalition of the centre-left managed to score some goals, with Prodi being elected PM in 1996, the PDS (later turned into the DS, an even more diluted version of 'leftism') was down to 16.6 per cent in 2001, while the RC got 5 per cent (proportional vote for the lower Chamber). On the change from PCI to PDS see Bull, 1991 and Ignazi, 1992.

²⁴ Among Bossi's infamous slogans, one that immediately comes to mind is 'the Lega has got a hard one' (La Lega ce l'ha duro), shouted in front of an audience of militants (quoted in Diamanti, 1995: 73).

²⁵ An analysis of the way in which the issue of immigration has been exploited by the LN will be offered in chapters to follow. For now, suffice to say that in years in which the smuggling of people into Europe was becoming a wide-spread (and no doubt very lucrative) business, the Lega made the struggle against immigrants one of its key-words. Some examples of the Lega's propaganda will prove how central the issue was for the party even in more recent

years. In September 1997, the daily paper of the Lega Nord dedicated its front page to the 'eighty million immigrants from the south and the east of the world' allegedly due to get into Europe in years to come (anonymous, in *La Padania*, 1997a). Two months later, another front page in the same paper warned: 'Albanians: ready for an invasion' (anonymous, *La Padania*, 1997b), while in January 1998 readers learned that 'the Islamic invasion is on our doorstep' (Mauri, in *La Padania*, 1998a). Again in the year 2000 Muslims were said to be impossible to integrate in a western society (Anonymous, *La Padania* on line, 2000). The fact that a majority of immigrants live in the north due to the lack of work elsewhere (52 per cent in 1998, against 29 per cent in the centre and 17 per cent in the south, according to ISTAT on line, 1998b) gives the Lega more ammunition for its propaganda.

²⁶ A survey conducted among the artisans of the veneto region in 1992 sheds some light on what some sections of the population thought of the government of the time. In a period in which, as we have already pointed out, successive governments were forced to do something about the national debt, two thirds of interviewees claimed they were not ready to accept any increases of the tax burden, and 90 per cent of them held the parties in power responsible of having mismanaged the economy badly (Istituto Poster-Fraz, 1992b).

²⁷ The reference is to the Lega's claim, put forward since the very beginning, that Lombards should define themselves in terms of their ethnicity rather than social class (Bossi, 1982).

²⁸ More recently, the term has been used in the propaganda of Berlusconi's FI. In a special issue of the official magazine of the party *Linea Azzurra*, sent to all Italian households shortly before the 2001 elections and covering Berlusconi's past achievements as a businessman and a politician, the writer speaks of a 'revolution' of the judiciary which wiped out all Italian democratic and pro-western parties (see Forza Italia ed., 2001: 69).

²⁹ If the plans for a devolution of powers to the regions become a reality under the second Berlusconi government, there will be more justification to talk about a second phase of the Republic, or even a Second Republic -especially if such reforms are matched by Presidentialism.

³⁰ I owe this observation to James Newell.

³¹ In such a complex environment as Italian politics, sometimes parties still manage to run on their own. A party such as the Lega, whose support is concentrated only in certain areas of the north, can indeed do well on its own with the new system, too, as voters in these areas know that the party has a good chance of winning seats. In fact, the Lega Nord ran on its own in 1996 and indeed did very well, under the circumstances, by sending 87 MPs to the national Parliament.

³² Interestingly, even the LN received a blow from the enquiries. On 29 November 1993, Sama, a businessman, revealed that he had given 200 million liras (about £ 68,000) to Patelli, who was responsible for the organisation of the Lega, in order to help finance the 1992 campaign of the party. Patelli apologised to the party Conference in December 1993 for having accepted the money, knowing how damaging this would be to a movement that had made its name through opposing the old corrupted 'regime'. In a 'propaganda coup' perhaps instigated by the leader, the delegates of the Conference, having listened to Patelli's speech, started a voluntary collection and put together the sum that Patelli had accepted from Sama so that it could be returned to the magistrates.

³³ Surveys published in October 1992 had already indicated the Lega as the major party in many a city of Northern Italy, with percentages of about 30 per cent (Diamanti, 1995: 90).

³⁴ Diamanti does not agree that the Lega of the period had toned down its language, claiming that their inability to achieve support in the centre and south of the country was actually to be put down to their extremist propaganda (1995: 131-133). Although no clear dividing line can be drawn to separate this period from the preceding and the following one (the post-Berlusconi era), and although it is obviously true that even in a very disciplined party such as the LN different opinions can emerge, a reading of the propaganda of 1993 does indeed suggest a general softening of tones. The League was never successful any further south than Florence (when it tried to field candidates) for the same reason that a member of the Scottish National Party would not get votes in England, even if people found some of his/her proposals of some interest. The Lega had just done too much to be seen as 'the party of northerners': it never managed to be perceived as a liberal, moderate party that could speak

for the whole country, no matter how hard they tried in this period. What they were able to do was to be seen as *more moderate among voters in the north*, however in order to get a new centrist movement able to perform well in both Palermo and Milano, voters had to wait until Silvio Berlusconi created one.

³⁵ E.g. Favero in *Lega Nord*, 1993. The tone changed, as we will see, after the fall of the first Berlusconi government, when the Lega abandoned its moderate stance and turned to separatism (Bossi, 1996: 153-164).

³⁶ MSI has always been on the verge of being declared illegal, as the Italian constitution prohibits the reconstitution of the Fascist party. Although there have been investigations into the activities of this movement, and links were proved with the extreme-right, the MSI survived political ostracism to be 're-born' in 1993 with the name Alleanza Nazionale. In 1995 a group of hard-liners, unhappy with the 'Alliance' trying to occupy the centre ground, recreated the MSI as 'MSI-Fiamma Tricolore' (Tricoloured Flame).

³⁷ There are also historical reasons that help explain the success of AN in the south, as the area had seen less of the ferocious side of fascism during the 1920s and 1930s, and more of its paternalism.

³⁸ As we will see in chapters to come, how many *leghisti* voters had backed the party because convinced of the existence of an alleged 'northern Italian identity' and how many were using it as a tool against the old system is an open question. There are reasons to believe that many were ready to switch to more moderate parties as soon as these made themselves available. This is confirmed by the dramatic loss of votes of the Lega towards the Forza Italia party in 1994, and again in the general elections 2001.

³⁹ This thesis does not discuss why Berlusconi took it upon himself to 'save' Italy from the Communists, instead of going on leading his own business empire; the focus is rather on the political outcomes of Berlusconi's decision to create his own party.

⁴⁰ The announcement that Berlusconi quit all responsibilities in his group Fininvest was given on 26 January 1994. Forza Italia had just been founded on January the 18th.

⁴¹ These were still powerful in 1994, although their influence was slowly being eroded by the policies of successive governments and the disaffection of workers. The unions are widely believed to have played a decisive role in the fall of the first government led by Silvio Berlusconi, having brought more than a million people to the streets of Rome to oppose Berlusconi's plans of a radical reform of the pension system (see below).

⁴² It is again ironic that the first thorough policies of reform of the pension system, reform of the economy in a liberal sense, privatisations- together with the radical improvement of public finances- have all been pursued by the various governments succeeding Berlusconi, all of them supported by the left (Dini, 1995; Prodi, 1996; D'Alema, 1999; second Amato government, 2000)

⁴³ In Italy it is still up to the President to decide who has the best chance of forming a government after an election, once he has spoken to the representatives of all political parties. This means that 'in theory' a party could still take part in the elections without making it clear with whom they would govern. AN and the Lega attacked each other during the 1994 campaign and pretended to be adversaries, while both being allied to FI. AN even fielded its own candidates in the north against those of 'Il Polo delle Libertà' - and yet the alliance of the left was no less heterogeneous, or less prone to internal quarrels, as will be shown below.

⁴⁴ Berlusconi was defeated by Prodi in 1996 not only because the Lega had run on its own, but also because he suffered the competition of the neo-fascists of MSI-Fiamma Tricolore, who fielded their own candidates, thereby 'stealing' crucial votes from the centre-right - particularly in some regions of the south.

⁴⁵ This is reflected by the former occupation of *leghisti* MPs elected to Parliament in 1994: 46 per cent of them were in fact self-employed workers, and the figure rises to 64 per cent when one considers only the 'new entries' (Diamanti, 1995: 146).

⁴⁶ The problem has presented itself again in the same terms with the second Berlusconi government. While the various businesses of the media tycoon have been 'donated'... to other family members, the PM is still treated favourably, to say the very least, by Mediaset TV

channels. On top of this, he is also trying, with some success, to control the appointment of the senior managers of state-owned television (Mauro, in *La Repubblica*, 2003).

⁴⁷ Before the 1994 elections Bossi, in his unmistakable style, defined Berlusconi as 'a rib of the *ancient regime*', a man trying to 're-cycle' the old parties (Diamanti, 1995: 138)- a reference to the many politicians who had joined the Forza Italia movement in order to keep their seats, once their own parties had been wiped out by the Mani Pulite investigations. No political leader has ever insulted Berlusconi so often as Umberto Bossi, and this 'practice' was, if anything, made worse by the fall of the first Berlusconi government in 1994, when one third of leghisti MPs joined Berlusconi's party.

⁴⁸ The Milanese judges have enjoyed a long honeymoon with public opinion, despite the fact that in Italy magistrates are rarely popular (Cartocci, 1994: 23). The investigations of 'Mani Pulite', and the deaths of judges Falcone and Borsellino killed by the Mafia in the same period, clearly changed the perception of many. One of the better known prosecutors, Antonio Di Pietro, later abandoned the judiciary and created his own party trying, quite unsuccessfully, to 'cash in' on his popularity.

CHAPTER 4

The Lega Nord as a nationalist movement 1995-1998

4.1 Introduction to chapter 4

The aim of this chapter is to provide an overview of the period that interests us the most in the context of this thesis, i.e. the 'nationalist phase' of the Lega Nord. This phase can be taken to have started at the beginning of 1996 (see the introduction), however it was prefigured by the creation of a 'Parliament of the north' in 1995; separatism was then abandoned in 1998. As with chapter 3, the present chapter considers the economic performance of Italy first and then focuses on the developments of the country's political life, particularly the Lega's changing programmes and strategies.

4.2 Italian society 1995-1998: issues in the economy, immigration and crime

This section gives a very brief account of the performance of the Italian economy from 1995 to 1998 and considers how the finances of the state improved. Figures on criminality rates and immigration will also be given, as they provide the backdrop against which Bossi's propaganda starts to make sense; however, an in-depth analysis of how immigration is talked about and of the *leghista* representation of the 'Other' will be left until chapter 6.

The preceding chapter mentioned the rise of small and medium-sized companies in the sixties, pointing out how important they were for the Italian economy. As a matter of fact, the steady (if not impressive) growth of the Italian economy in the second half of the nineties owed much to companies of relatively modest size (up to 200 employees); indeed these are still likely to constitute a fundamental strength of Italy in the foreseeable future (CENSIS, 2000).

The Italian economy performed well in 1995, spurred by the same combinations of decisions already made at the center and by initiative at the periphery. The major impulse from Rome continued to be the devaluation of the lira, undertaken wittingly by Amato in 1992 and unwittingly by Berlusconi in 1994. The second boost came from the most significant change yet made: the tripartite agreement [i.e. with the three national Unions CGIL CISL and UIL] of July 1993 to limit wage increases. Spurred by these advantages entrepreneurs, who also profited from the precarious international revival, sent exports soaring to 15 per cent above the 1994 level (McCarthy, 1997: 195).

After a short period of quite measured growth in 1996, industrial production visibly increased again at the end of that year and throughout 1997- however there was a tendency to slow down again in 1998 (Istat on line 1997 and 1998). Scholars and observers of Italian society agree that the considerable number, strength and diffusion of small and medium-sized companies gave important advantages to the country in terms of hyper-specialisation and flexibility in the face of a changing global economy (Sapelli, 1997; Istat, 1997 and 1998; Canesi, 1998; CENSIS, 2000). Between 1991 and 1996 the average dimension of Italian companies had decreased to four employees, against an EU average of six in the same year. Also, if in the service sector (a particularly dynamic one) of the same year Italian companies with less than ten employees represented 61.1 per cent of the total, they were only 42.3 per cent of the total in the EU (Istat on line, 1998).

The second half of the nineties saw a reduction of the national debt as well as the acknowledgement on the part of the EU that Italian public finances had entered a virtuous cycle; this made it possible for Italy to join EMU in May 1998, together with the first group of European states. It was a personal success for Romano Prodi and a vindication of his policies advocating high taxation as a 'necessary evil'.

The steady (bar the first semester 1995), if perhaps not booming growth of GDP -an average 1.4 per cent in 1997 and 1998 (Istat on line, 1997 and 1998)- together with the increasing take of the public administration, its cut of expenditures, as well as the progressive reduction of the burden of passive interests on the national debt

(ibid.) laid the foundations for an apparent reduction of public debt as a percentage of GDP in the period considered:

Table 1: Public debt as a percentage of GDP:

1996	122.2%
1997	119.8%
1998	116.3%

(Source: Banca d'Italia, quoted in Istat on line, 1998)

This trend was maintained in the years to come. As mentioned above, the increase in the levels of taxation had been fundamental to achieving these results: fiscal pressure reached almost 45 per cent of GDP in 1997 -the only European state to surpass these levels in the period considered being France (Smiley, 2001: 6). Temporary measures were also introduced, such as the levy of a one-off so-called 'Eurotax' in 1996.

Throughout these years consumption increased in line with GDP (CENSIS, 2000: 471-478) and companies showed some degree of self-confidence, as they borrowed more, invested more in their own activities and in general took more risks (ibid.: 16). These indicators speak of some optimism on the part of both consumers and economic operators. Despite the good news, Italy was still, and manifestly, a country split into two: even more worryingly, the gap between the north and the centre, on the one hand, and the south on the other, was, if anything, widening out¹. All indicators would confirm this tendency, whether we look at the economic performance of various Italian provinces (i.e. data for the year 1996 in CENSIS, 1997), the percentage of GDP produced in the north as opposed to the south (i.e. Parenti, 1997, in *La Padania*, reporting on findings of SVIMEZ for the year 1996), or rather at the number of companies as a proportion of the resident population in the two areas (i.e. data for the year 1998 in CENSIS, 2000: 512).

If the south was still not recovering, the strength of the productive structure of the north-west and north-east of the country was again confirmed. The fabled north-east, now the wealthiest area in Italy, was unsurpassed in its international outlook and its attention to both foreign markets and foreign job-markets: both the exports

and the decentralising of production towards Eastern Europe increased in the second half of the nineties (CENSIS, 2000: 29 and 30). In 1998 ten north-eastern companies in one thousand held shares of foreign companies, against a national average of only six in one thousand (ibid.: 30; see also McCarthy, 1997: 195).

The number of employed in the country remained constant until 1998, when a marked rise was noted (Istat on line, 1998). However, the increase mainly involved temporary and 'flexible' work, as the 'pact for work' approved by the Prodi government and the interest organisations in September 1996 had finally made temporary work *legal*. By 1999 people working on a part-time or temporary contract constituted 12.6 per cent of the work force (CENSIS, 2000: 179). If Italian employment laws were becoming more similar to those of Italy's European partners, this was having an effect on people's attitudes towards work, too, as the idea that a job had to be for life, and needed to be, first of all, 'safe' was losing ground (CENSIS, 2000).

The level of conflict between workers and employers remained low under the Dini and Prodi governments, as both leaders strove to distance themselves from the style of Berlusconi and enforced a successful policy of 'concertazione', whereby interest groups were listened to before pushing reforms through. In 1997 the unemployment rate reached 12.2 per cent (Istat on line, 1997). Once again, the distribution throughout different areas of the country *and among society* was uneven, to say the least, as the south, women and young people paid the highest price (ibid.; Padoa Schioppa Costoris, 1999; CENSIS, 2000)². Ferrera and Gualmini (2000: 194) point out that in 1998 'the share of youth unemployment reached a European record (32.1 per cent in total, but beyond 50 per cent in many southern regions)'. Therefore, as far as unemployment was concerned, the gap between north and south was anything but bridged, as some more examples will further illustrate:

1. In 1999, just after the period studied by this thesis, the unemployment rate was a staggering 22 per cent in the south, while it was only 5.4 per cent in the north- falling to 4.6 per cent in the *north-east* (Istat on line, 1998; CENSIS, 2000: 205).
2. Moreover, while in the period 1998-1999 the number of unemployed had gone *down* 2.2 per cent in the centre and an impressive 10.1 per cent in the

north, mainly due to the offer of part-time and temporary jobs, it still went *up* 0.7 per cent in the south (CENSIS, 2000: 203). It is not surprising, then, if 22 per cent of families in the south were reported to live below the line of poverty as recently as 1997 (Istat on line, 1997). Illegal work (*lavoro nero*) was still widespread: an estimate for the period 1992-1997 gives a figure of 15 per cent of the total of regular jobs (Istat on line, 1998).³

While in 1990 51.8 per cent of young people between 18 and 34 were still living with their family, in 1998 the figure had increased to 58.8 per cent (Istat on line, 1998). Of course it is true that complex cultural factors need to be considered when addressing this phenomenon, as in the centre and in the north the vast majority of those who decided to stay with their family were in *full-time employment*; still the role of the family unit in cushioning the effects of unemployment and redistributing income had visibly increased in the south.

In 1998 the percentage of foreigners in the country had reached 2 per cent of the whole population (Istat on line, 1998). This can hardly be defined as an 'invasion' when one thinks of the immigrant population in countries such as Germany; however, throughout the nineties the number of foreigners increased at an incessant pace, thus offering a new focus for attention to the media (and political propaganda). While the majority of legal immigrants (63 per cent) were still concentrated in the centre and the north-west as recently as 1998, in the north-east the number of immigrants who had either started to work or were officially looking for employment had increased very rapidly throughout the first half of the nineties, no doubt because of the booming economy (Sciortino, 1996). Between 1992 and 1998 the number of foreigners officially resident in the country had gone up approximately 455.000 units (84,8 per cent), outpacing the local population in terms of growth (Golini, 2000: 135). Immigrants from Morocco constituted the largest community, followed by people from the ex-Yugoslavia and Albania (ibid., 8).

While in Lombardia and Central Italy in 1998 a majority of legal immigrants worked as domestic servants, in the north-east 53 per cent of them were employed in industry (Golini, 2000: 176). Hence it is not surprising if in Veneto data referring to the preceding year suggest that the number of immigrant workers in the industry constituted at least 10 per cent of the total work-force, while in some sectors this

figure reached 20 per cent (ibid.). A comparison of the centre-south -which often attracted seasonal workers- with the north-east in the two-year period 1998-1999 reveals that non-Italians were very aware of the good chances of work offered by the northern economy (CENSIS, 2000: 30).

The organisations representing the entrepreneurs of the industrial sector agree that these numbers will increase dramatically in the first decade of the new century, and that production in the north of the country will increasingly *depend* on an imported labour force (Golini, 2000: 177; Horsley, 2001). However an estimated 30 per cent of those who could lawfully work in the country because they held a regular working permit, still worked 'in nero'. In fact, while the percentage of irregular workers among Italians was still high in this period (see above), but thought to be declining, a high percentage of immigrants found that illegal work was their only option (Golini, 2000: 165).

The number of illegal immigrants also remained high throughout the period, although it is difficult to estimate. 140,000 applied for 'regularisation' in 1996 (CENSIS, 2000: 159) and 300,000 in 1998 (Istat on line, 1998) as the government offered an amnesty to those irregulars who could prove they were in employment; however, these figures ignore the irregulars who were looking for work (and thus had no reason to show up), those who had problems with the law and people who were only staying in the country for a short period as they were willing to move further north.

In the first half of 1998 a staggering 31.6 per cent of all new entries in Italian jails were foreigners (Istat on line, 1998), and yet anti-social and criminal behaviour was clearly only widespread among *illegal* immigrants: in fact, 86 per cent of foreigners reported to the police in 1998 belonged to this category (ibid.) It is also important to notice, given the object of this research, that both regular and irregular immigrants often committed crimes in the centre and the north of the country, as opposed to the south, and more often in big cities like Milan than in small towns (Barbagli, 1998: 107- 124).

When dealing with issues of security, immigration, and the prison population we should also bear in mind the following: a) foreigners were more subject to preventive

custody and often did not qualify for measures alternative to detention, as they were seen as more likely to disappear when not locked up (Istat on line, 1998; CENSIS on line, 1998); b) foreigners were less able to defend themselves and often relied on the legal assistance offered by the state (CENSIS on line, 1998); c) police forces repressing crime were more willing to target foreigners than natives in the period leading to the year 2000 (Rosi, 2000: 401-422), in response to the increasing distrust of the public towards the police (see below).

All this considered, there is no doubt that immigrants were increasingly 'perceived' as a threat to personal security by the population as a whole. Despite Dal Lago (1999) being right when reminding us that Italian politicians were already exploiting the 'emergenza-immigrati' in 1985, when the number of foreigners living in the country was extremely low, research shows that at the beginning of the new century Italy and the UK were the two countries of the EU where immigration was causing more alarm among the population (Diamanti, 2001). In Italy it was not an alleged loss of identity or competition in the job-market that worried people the most, but rather personal security (ibid.). It is also significant that in 1997 immigration from non-EU countries was the *fourth* most worrying concern among Italians, rising to the *third* position in the year 2000 (CENSIS, 2000: 10). Interestingly, given the vehement opposition to immigration of the Lega Nord, and given the strength of the party in the north-east, almost half of the residents of this area claimed in the year 2000 that criminality was the most worrying problem *of all*, while immigration from non-EU countries *took second place* (CENSIS, 2000: 32 and 33). A similar percentage of people also maintained that the area where they lived had become *more* dangerous during the preceding five years (ibid.).

Indeed it is true that the number of crimes reported to the police forces had increased quite dramatically (30 per cent) in the period 1991-1995, compared to the preceding five years: violent crimes rose even further, and the south was well above the national average (Istat on line, 1997)- although, as we have seen, here Italians (and not 'irregular immigrants') were almost always to blame. Also, a survey conducted in 1996 showed that 42 per cent of citizens *did not* think that the police force was able to *contain* these crimes (ibid.); to make things worse, what had been achieved in terms of reducing criminal activities *was not being seen*. Although the number of reported crimes started to decrease in the period 1998-1999, the year

after 76.9 per cent of Italians felt that it had gone *up* since the preceding year (CENSIS, 2000: 43), thus signalling a discrepancy between reality and perception of the public that was certainly to be put down partly to journalists and partly to political propaganda (Dal Lago, 1999).

4.3 The crisis of 1994 and the changing profile of the Lega's voters

One could be forgiven for thinking that the fall of the first Berlusconi government was brought about, first of all, by the unwillingness of Umberto Bossi to surrender the centrist voters of the north to the virtual 'sirens' of Forza Italia (see chap. 3). The results of the European elections 1994 had confirmed Bossi's worst fears and exposed the reality of a party which was losing visibility (and watering down its identity) by becoming a minor actor at the 'court' of Berlusconi.

Although the events of the summer discussed in the preceding chapter did absolutely nothing to unite the alliance, the shortfalls of Berlusconi's leadership and the mistakes of the government would not in themselves justify such a sudden change on the part of the Lega as the one considered here. Bossi's move clearly led to the party having to pay a very high price, both in terms of political credibility, and of MPs 'lost' to FI. When Bossi, on 21 December 1994, spoke to the Chamber of Deputies of a government which was not interested in, and even hostile to, the Lega's recently put forward project of federalism and of a Prime Minister who had just consolidated his personal power in the first semester of government⁴, few actually believed these to be the real reasons behind the Lega's decision to withdraw.

If, as Bossi claimed at that time, the conflict of interests between Berlusconi's public responsibilities and his position as a media magnate now constituted a threat to democracy, and if the media mogul was just trying to save the 'old regime'⁵ why had he allowed the leader of FI to become PM in the first place⁶? At the end of the day, Italians, even with the new system which has been outlined above, were not allowed to elect the PM *directly*. Even if the victory of the Polo was in all evidence a personal success for Berlusconi and his group Fininvest, the Lega could have at least *tried* to claim the leadership of the government, as they had a majority of Polo's MPs. Moreover, if AN were the heirs of the Fascist party to which the regions of the north

should not surrender themselves, as the propaganda of the following months insisted upon⁷, why did Bossi accept to govern with them at all in the first place?

As far as federalism was concerned, this no longer constituted a watershed in Italian politics because many politicians, even within the National Alliance (as well as among the left, for that matter), were now ready to concede that some forms of decentralisation had become necessary. On 9 April 1994 representatives of AN and the Lega had agreed on a project of federalism which (crucially, for the ex-fascists) did not threaten the unity of the state. As a consequence, it was now difficult to claim, as Bossi did anyway, that federalism could not be achieved with the centre-right.⁸

Finally, if the attempted reform of the pension system by decree which had determined such a swift reaction on the part of public opinion is looked at closely, it would reveal itself as at least partially consistent with the values of the Lega Nord. Thus, on the one hand, Bossi's party was certainly a populist movement trying to avoid a too radical reform that would have hit pensioners (and future pensioners) very hard indeed (Scobie et al., 1996: 65-66); but on the other hand, the general principles that had inspired this reform were those of a drastic *containment* of expenditure on the part of the National Institute for Pensions. These were principles the Lega could hardly be opposed to, given that the lack of funds of the institute would have to be met, otherwise, by the finances of the state. Surely this willingness to protect the public purse was consistent with the Lega's liberalism and its talk of the necessity to reduce the expenditure of the public administration. The *modus operandi* of a government which had tried to impose such an important reform on the country via decree, without even bothering to set up a semblance of debate in Parliament, was open to criticism; however the reform itself, if perhaps somehow softened and made easier to swallow, could have been defended by the LN as a necessary one.

By February 1995 sixty people, among both deputies and senators, had left the Lega and joined various parties of the Polo- the majority ending up as *forzisti* -i.e. in Berlusconi's party (Diamanti, 1995: 160). The profile of the leghista ready to betray the movement at this crucial stage was as follows (Diamanti, *ibid.*):

1. More often than not s/he was from regions like Veneto and Piemonte, rather than Lombardia. This is where Lega had grown stronger in recent years, and yet the majority of leghisti-ministers were Lombards, while the same can be said of Bossi's collaborators. The leader could easily be accused of bias against areas of fundamental importance in the context of any hypothesis of a unitary 'north'.
2. Usually s/he was less likely to have held a post in local or regional administrations before being elected to Parliament.
3. Crucially, s/he was often very well educated and belonging to a professional category, while the 'faithful' tended to be middle or working class, either people of the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie or former employees and not necessarily graduates.

This becomes all the more significant when the profile of the Lega *electorate* is considered. This had started to change in 1992 and 1993, to include, increasingly, better-educated people, not necessarily involved in industrial or commercial activities. However the honey-moon with these sections of the electorate did not last for long: since the crisis of 1994 the LN had started to grow, once again, *only* in the traditionally ex-DC areas of small enterprise and diffuse urbanisation, while increasing its grip on the working-class of the provincial north and on people either owning, or else working for, small and medium-sized enterprises (Corbetta and Parisi, 1997; Diamanti, 1997a). In 1995 the party was seen as a party for workers, especially young males⁹: thus the MPs who decided not to leave were suited to represent, and could appeal to, the changing electorate of the party.

4.4 The Government of Lamberto Dini

The backing of the Dini government, which led Italy in 1995, was meant to buy all political actors (except the Polo) some time. The alliance of the left did not have a majority in Parliament to sustain an alternative government to Berlusconi, not even with the help of the centrist bloc 'Patto per l'Italia': either the Lega found a way to govern with the centre-left, or otherwise fresh elections would become inevitable. The right claimed that the President had no choice but to call fresh elections, as the electorate had given the Polo a clear mandate to govern and now should be given an

opportunity to judge the behaviour of the leghisti (Hine and Poli, 1997: 172- 175). After all, the reform which had turned the electoral system into a majoritarian one a few years before was meant to give voters a chance of electing a governing majority, it was claimed: and yet the Lega had broken with the coalition it had pledged it would govern with, despite enjoying the support of forzisti voters in majoritarian constituencies.

The 'betrayal' of the Lega had undoubtedly made fresh elections appropriate (to say the least) in political terms, however there was no *obligation* for the President to dissolve Parliament. Quite the contrary: according to the constitution, the President had a duty *not to dismiss Parliament*, providing a new majority could be found (ibid.). It soon became clear that the President of the time, Scalfaro, had no intention of seeing the country go through yet another phase of instability brought about by yet another vehement pre-election campaign. He chose to support the formation of another 'government of technocrats' instead, one that could lead the country for long enough so that a budget could be approved, and hopefully create the necessary conditions for the constitution to be reformed. Although Berlusconi and the leadership of the PDS allegedly tried to reach an agreement in the months to come and re-think the Italian institutions, at the end the experiment failed.

The choice of Dini as prospective PM was a sensible one. He had been a minister in the Berlusconi government; therefore, it was difficult to claim, as the Polo did anyway, that by picking him the President had ignored the will of the electorate. On the other hand, he had a reputation for being a moderate and not a radical right-winger, thus being well placed to find some sort of agreement with the centre-left. He was also a former President of the Bank of Italy, yet another technocrat keeping alive what had become a tradition in Italian politics.

Scalfaro himself has acknowledged that there was no precedent for the decision he took in that crisis: to establish a government uncoupled from any specific parliamentary majority, entrusted with a very focused and pre-defined program, and explicitly designed to defuse the tension of a deteriorating political climate (Hine and Poli, 1997: 173).

While such a government 'robbed' the right of its chance of immediate revenge through fresh elections, it gave the defeated left of the Progressisti and the LN the chance to show themselves as 'responsible' (because they were ready to back a government which was allegedly not 'their own' so as to give the country some sort of lead) while at the same time avoiding elections they thought they could not win. A government that was supposed to be 'neutral' (as if such a thing existed) soon inevitably became the government of the centre-left plus the Lega, as the vote of confidence forced on the mini-budget by Berlusconi showed as early as March 1995 (McCarthy, 1997: 203). The main initiatives of the Dini government in its one-year existence were the following:

1. A budget that followed principles of austerity, principles that had been temporarily forgotten by the preceding government, which had been hesitant in tackling public debt (Scobie et al, 1996: 67-88).
2. A reform of the pension system consistent with the principles that had inspired the partial Amato reform of 1992 (Ferrera and Gualmini, 2000). Dini's reform a) severed pensions from other forms of social spending; b) re-established a tight link between contributions made and benefits received; c) made the system more rational; d) raised the retirement age; and, finally, e) gave incentives to people investing in pensions funds. The reform was able to go through thanks to the involvement of the Unions -it was a triumph for the advocates of 'concertazione'; however the right and the *Confindustria* (the Association of Employers) attacked it for allegedly falling short of what was needed (McCarthy, 1997: 204).
3. A decree on the use of TV in electoral campaigns that limited political advertising (widely used by Berlusconi on his own network before the elections 1994) and allowed parties equal access to TV.

Dini resigned on 11 January 1996, having managed to survive with his technocratic government for a year, while his personal rate of approval among voters had remained high. Berlusconi, who never stopped demanding fresh elections, had to face legal problems throughout this period and lost the 'aura' of the winner. Dini could pride himself on a decent management of the economy and a good relationship with the Unions: having considered the crisis of the FI and of the political centre, he naturally (this being Italy) decided to 'cash in' on his personal

success and founded yet another centrist movement. 'Rinnovamento Italiano', as Dini called it, eventually joined the coalition of the centre-left before the 1996 elections.

Dini's government embodied and reflected the difficulties and complexity of Italian politics. The country was still recovering from the disappearance of the old political class wiped out by the judiciary in the 'revolution' of 1992 and 1993: having been promised a 'new beginning' under the leadership of Berlusconi, Italy had found itself, once again, in a sort of 'political limbo', with yet another technocrat as leader. It had been a government of contradictions. The Premier of 1995 had been a moderate, and yet his decisions were often backed even by Rifondazione, which did not want to give Berlusconi the chance to stage a 'come back' through immediate elections; Dini was a former minister of Berlusconi, and yet the media magnate attacked the government on a daily basis. If anything, this showed Berlusconi's perception of himself as the only legitimate candidate to the premiership after the victory of the Polo (an idea which found no ground in the Italian constitution, as pointed out above). Finally, this had been a government led by a prominent minister of the Berlusconi administration that the Lega had brought down, and yet the northern 'fighters' had supported it.

In the meantime, Umberto Bossi was preparing for yet another radical change of strategy that in his view would unite the movement behind himself and re-affirm the identity of the Lega as the party 'of the north': he was going to turn the LN into a nationalist party, no longer trying to achieve a federalist reform, but rather independence (Bossi, 1996: 99-101). The leader got rid of the internal opposition to the abandonment of the Polo in the congress of February 1995. If in the first weeks after the crisis militants could be forgiven for expressing doubts about the opportunity of a divorce with Berlusconi, now it was time to move on *united* and people abandoning the party 'will be remembered as traitors', as Bossi told the conference (Bossi, 1996: 107; also SOFLN, 1997: 116).

In June 1995, near Mantova, the self-appointed 'Parliament of the North' sat for the first time. This assembly was attended by those leghisti elected in the national, regional and local assemblies who were allegedly coming together to exchange ideas about how to advance the cause of autonomy. Although at first the 'Parliament' did not claim to speak on behalf of the whole of northern Italy, and although it obviously

did not have any real power, the importance of such an 'institution' in symbolical terms should not be underestimated. The Lega had 'dispossessed' the state of one of its crucial prerogatives *for the first time*, suggesting the *possibility* of alternative channels of representation for the north (SOFLN, 1997: 123). Below it will be shown how the LN eventually took over the prerogatives of the state (such as public security, through the creation of an army of volunteers, or the currency) *in the realm of the symbolic*, in an attempt to show that the imagined community of a 'northern nation' could indeed become a reality.

4.5 The 1996 elections and the victory of the 'Ulivo' coalition

In the period between the 1994 and 1996 elections the coalitions opposing each other had changed. In 1994 a centrist block (the 'Patto per l' Italia', crowded with many ex-DC) had stood between the right and the left: having performed badly in the context of a now polarised political system, and having found themselves backing the Dini government together with the left in 1995, the centrists decided to join forces with the left to defeat Berlusconi (Chiaramonte, 1997).

The alliance of the 'Ulivo' (the Olive Tree), which replaced the 'Progressive Alliance' by excluding the RC on the left and including the centrists of the 'Patto' on the right, was created on the assumption (undoubtedly correct, given the results of the national and European elections of 1994) that the centre-right had very good chances of winning even without the help of the Lega. On the other hand, those centrists who could not stomach an alliance with the ex-PCI ended up joining the Polo (McCarthy, 1997: 211-217), a quite small 'consolation-prize' for Berlusconi and Fini who, having lost the support of Bossi, now had to face a competitor on their right, too. This had come in the shape of the 'Movimento Sociale-Fiamma Tricolore', some sort of a 'Refounded-Fascists' movement which was created once Fini's turn to the centre proved too much to bear for the rightist hard-liners (Newell, 2000: 113-134).

As the PDS was the only party outside the Polo commanding over 20 per cent of support among voters, and as it was a very well organised one, many moderates felt they could come to be seen as the minor partners of the coalition. Eager to avoid

such a situation, they claimed the leadership of the coalition¹⁰. The PDS found this not only acceptable, but indeed desirable, as the party knew only too well that either it could hide behind technocrats and centrists, or else it would face defeat. The unlikely hero of the centre-left was found in Romano Prodi:

Prodi presented himself as the antithesis of the new Berlusconi and as a leader who somewhat resembled the Berlusconi of March 1994. He talked little of his stints at IRI [a state-owned company that Prodi directed] claimed never to have been a member of the old DC, and stressed that he wanted to bring into politics people from the professions and industry (McCharty, 1997: 215).

Even if the Ulivo had excluded Rifondazione Comunista, an electoral agreement with the party had to be found. This had been made essential by the refusal of the LN to shut down its 'Parliament of the North' so as to open the way for a 'stand down' agreement with the Ulivo:

In order to avoid a mutually damaging competition between their candidates, the Ulivo and Rifondazione Comunista reached a stand-down agreement for the majoritarian districts shortly before the deadline for presenting candidates. The agreement had two main points: (1) it was expressly declared that it was purely electoral; (2) there was a clear predominance of Ulivo candidates in the allocation of seats. The fact that two separate programmes for government were presented and that Rifondazione's majoritarian candidates ran under the Progressisti 1996 symbol rather than the Ulivo made clear that the agreement sprang from electoral necessity and had no political implications (Chiaramonte, 1997: 36).

During the electoral campaign the Lega, not surprisingly, attacked both coalitions, now re-named 'Roma-Polo' and 'Roma-Ulivo' by the secretary, in order to stress their alleged indistinctiveness in the eyes of the 'north'. But while the Polo, and particularly AN, was accused of having turned into the staunchest champion of the demands of the parasitic south, the Ulivo was accused of being the coalition of big

industry¹¹. There was some truth in the Lega's accusations: the FI and AN had indeed progressively taken the place of the DC in the south as a rightist alternative to the left, and the centre-left was now openly backed by very big names in Italian industry such as Agnelli and De Benedetti, as many industrialists did not look forward to yet another period of strikes and social tension brought about by a second Berlusconi government. The Lega, therefore, asserted its 'anti-southerners' soul when facing the right, while portraying itself as the party 'of the common man' and the party of 'small business' when attacking the left (Biorcio, 1997: 87).

The strategy of the leghisti was overall successful in electoral terms:

Table 2: National Elections of 21 April 1996, Results of the main lists for the Chamber of Deputies.

Coalition	Majoritarian Segment ¹²	Proportional segment	Total seats
Ulivo	42.3%	34.8%	285
RC (Progressisti 1996)	2.6%	8.6%	35
Polo delle libertà	40.3%	42.1%	246
Lega Nord	10.8%	10.1%	59

(Elaboration of Chiaramonte, 1997: 40)

In the race for the Senate Ulivo performed even better gaining 156 seats -i.e. just below an absolute majority *without* the RC. The Ulivo and the RC together could count on 167 senators, while the Polo was down to 116 and the Lega had 27 (Chiaramonte, 1997: 40). The result of the ballot box, however clear in some respects (as the Ulivo now had a right to lead the country),

... needs to be analyzed carefully... The 1996 election undoubtedly saw the Polo per le Libertà beaten. The fact that the various lists composing the Polo obtained more votes (44 per cent, including the Pannella-Sgarbi List) than the Ulivo and Rifondazione Comunista (43.4 per cent) in the proportional quota for the Chamber of Deputies is of little relevance. Victory did not go to the Ulivo coalition, however, which failed to obtain a majority of seats in either the Chamber (45.2 per cent) or the Senate

(49.5 per cent), but to the Ulivo and Rifondazione Comunista. An alliance which had been purely electoral thus became the sole basis for a parliamentary majority. In truth, the Ulivo, which had presented itself to the electorate as a candidate for government without Rifondazione Comunista (despite the stand-down agreement), could have formed a majority in the Senate with the two elected representatives of the SVP [a minor regionalist formation]. In the Chamber, however, they could not do without the Communists, also because any possibility of agreement with the Lega Nord had foundered during the election campaign. Thus, the Polo may have lost the 1996 election, but the Ulivo did not win it outright.

In essence 1996 was a repeat of 1994. Thanks to the majoritarian/proportional mix in the electoral system no parliamentary majority which directly expressed the will of the electorate was produced (counting only the uninominal districts the Ulivo coalition would have taken more than 50 per cent of seats). In 1994 Forza Italia and its leader, Silvio Berlusconi, had to try and hold together two political formations (the Lega Nord and AN) who had not even been allies during the election campaign. In 1996 two groupings which had marked the political distance between them by producing separate programs for government would be forced to form a parliamentary majority (Chiaramonte, 1997: 39).

It is also worth noticing that while Ulivo candidates in the majoritarian districts always gained more votes than the proportional lists which backed them, therefore attracting support from outside their political area, exactly the opposite happened to the Polo: they suffered a 3.7 per cent average loss of votes in every district, with the Lega, the neo-fascists of MSI- Fiamma Tricolore and the Ulivo all benefiting from it (ibid., 44). Even when Ulivo did not *directly* benefit from this flow of votes moving away from the Polo, it often profited from it *indirectly*, as its candidates 'could come through on the rails' because the right's vote had been split (Parker, 1997: 126). Finally, even if the left had good reasons to worry -as the Polo had attracted more votes in the proportional segment- the PDS had become once again the best supported party in the country, getting 21 per cent of votes (0.5 more than FI, a small and yet symbolic victory).

The Lega Nord performed very well indeed at these elections: it was 'one of the most remarkable successes achieved by a non-traditional party in post-war European history' (Cento Bull and Gilbert, 2001: 109). Not only did the party manage to send to Parliament 87 representatives, which was a significant achievement given that Lega was running on its own in a single-member constituency system¹³, but it ended up being the most voted single party of the north on the proportional ballot paper (Biorcio, 1997: 86). Moreover, this time Lega managed to 'steal' more votes from the FI than it lost to it (ibid.). The future looked bleak, though: the party was clearly not in a position of to blackmail the winning coalition, as the Ulivo had the numbers to govern (providing it could secure the backing of Rifondazione)¹⁴ and the relationship with the right could hardly have been more tense.

Moreover, the electorate of the Lega had continued to grow *on itself*, in terms of *both* social and territorial distribution: firstly, there had been a reduction of votes from the well-educated middle classes and a corresponding rise among artisans and industrial workers (Beirich and Woods, 2000); and, secondly, the support for the Lega had only risen in those areas once ruled by the DC where the party had *always* being strong, i.e. the small provincial towns of the industrialised and wealthy 'deep' north of post-fordist economy (Diamanti, 1997). Here the Lega reached peaks of 42 per cent. In the big cities like Milan, Turin or Genoa, and where the left had always been strong (as in Bologna) the Lega had often *lost* votes this time, never getting more than 10 per cent- surely not enough to claim it could speak on behalf of *this* north (Biorcio, 1997: 91). If being *emiliano* had meant for a long period 'being a leftist', as a majority of people voted Communist or Socialist in the fifty years following the end of WW2, being *lombardo*, *veneto* or *piemontese* still did not necessarily mean being *leghista*. Even the 'north of the north'- i.e. the north of the soon to be 'declared' nation of 'Padania', was profoundly divided between the Lega, the Ulivo and the Polo.

4.6 The challenge of a separatist Lega

The premiership of Prodi, who had presented himself as the outsider of politics -a card Berlusconi could no longer play in 1996- in reality represented continuity with the technocratic governments of Ciampi and Dini: not only did both these previous 'presidenti del Consiglio' serve in his government, respectively as Minister of the

Treasury and Minister for Foreign Affairs, but, more importantly, Prodi followed in their steps by putting public finances and the joining of the European single currency on top of his agenda. This was indeed consistent with the policy of sound and prudent management of public finances, giving away nothing in terms of cuts in taxation, that had characterised the technocratic governments of the preceding years. Before considering some of the initiatives of the Prodi government, this thesis focuses on the changing strategy of a Lega that was turning to separatism. The discursive strategies through which the nation of Padania (named after the river Po, which runs throughout northern Italy) was brought to life in the period 1995-1998 are indeed the object of this research and will be analysed in some detail in chapters to come. What follows here is thus a summary of some significant *events* in the Lega's construction of its 'nation'.

Interestingly, gone was the reassuring demeanour of people like Maroni or Pivetti, who, placed by the leader at the heart of the Republican institutions¹⁵, had spearheaded a change in the tones of the Lega in 1993 and 1994 and had been seen as the reassuring and moderate face of the movement. 'In' came a renewed talk of the *irreconcilable* differences between northerners and southerners. While in the first session of the 'Parliament of the North' Bossi's keyword had still been 'federalism' (Bossi, 1996: 109-113), since October 1995 the differences between the two areas of the country (in terms of culture, as well as economic performance), coupled with the alleged unwillingness of politicians to reform the state, were said to be too much to bear¹⁶. The separation of the north from the south, and the consequent creation of two states had become, it was now claimed, a 'necessity'.

The new found radicalism of the LN became apparent in the pages of the daily 'La Padania', launched on 8 January 1997 and in other publications of the period, where the following themes dominated:

1. An incessant polemic against 'politicians in Rome' which confirmed the nature of the Lega as a fundamentally populist movement (Biorcio, 1997), which had to be seen as speaking on behalf of the 'common man'.
2. Very negative representations of the south and its people, a strategy reminiscent of the Lega of the eighties. Plenty of data were offered to the reader of the Lega's publications about the economic gap (which was

widening, as we have seen) between the north and the south of the country. Southerners were exposed as often dependent on the 'hand-outs' of the state -if not employed by the inefficient public administration¹⁷. 'Italy' became synonymous with the 'Mafia'¹⁸ while the north was talked about in terms of its productive realities and hard-working people.¹⁹

3. The struggle against immigration from non-EU countries. Immigrants were always represented as a threat, either to the identity of northerners or indeed to their personal security (see above), while the increasing flow of people trying to enter the country illegally was depicted as nothing less than an 'invasion'. However, it must be said that in quantitative terms the propaganda of the period is still clearly focused more on southern Italians than foreign immigrants, as chapter 5 will demonstrate.
4. A willingness to rediscover the culture, the history and the languages of the 'peoples of the north'²⁰, whose differences were recognised but continuously played down in favour of what was alleged to *unite* them. Northern Italians were now re-positioned as members of a new community, the nation of Padania, which was said to embrace the whole of northern Italy and parts of the centre (Oneto, 1997; these claims will be discussed in chap. 7).
5. The distancing of the party from the traditional positioning alongside the left-right axis. This was a move meant to deepen the gap now separating the LN from the Polo and give the Lega back its 'identity'. Also, as we will see, the Lega increasingly aimed at speaking on behalf of the 'nation of Padania' *as a whole*. This move was well rooted in the propaganda of the Lega Lombarda of the eighties, a party that had aspired to represent all Lombards, regardless of their political beliefs. However in 1993-1994 the Lega had increasingly been perceived as a right-wing party, due to its choice of partners and extreme economic liberalism; because the aim of the leader was for the party to re-position itself, now the propaganda machine of the movement either insisted on the party being 'in the centre'²¹, or rather claimed that it just represented 'the north'²². Far from being a particularly revolutionary move in political terms, the Lega's attempt to avoid being positioned on the left-right axis, its claim that the movement spoke its mind on behalf of the ordinary man against taxes and politicians, its refusal to see itself as 'extremist' were all themes common to the propaganda of European movements of the so-called new right (Mudde, 2000: 7; Kitschelt, 1997).

In May 1996 the 'Parliament of the North' was renamed 'Parliament of Padania'. In Bossi's own words, the 'final' phase in the life of the party had begun and 'independence' was now the declared objective of the movement (SOFLN: 1998: 127-132). The 'Government of Padania' was also created and the leghista Pagliarini elected 'Prime Minister'. Although these and other initiatives that followed were clearly intended as a provocation, their importance in symbolic terms should be noted. A new nation was ready to 'come to life', first of all in the minds and hearts of the *leghisti*, and was already defined by its own political institutions.

Between the 13th and the 15th of September 1996 the nation of Padania was 'born' through the 'ceremony of the ampoule', whereby some water taken at the source of the river Po -the symbol of the new nation- was taken to the mouth of the river near Venice. The emotional trip of Bossi along the river was marked by three days of rallies, speeches and demonstrations. Padania was declared a federal independent republic on the last day in Venice, where in the final highly-charged symbolical event staged in front of the Lega's supporters a number of known leghisti MPs, senators and local administrators swore allegiance to each other and to the movement.

Overall the huge demonstration announced by the Lega was not as massive as Bossi would have liked it to be, and the four million people alleged to have taken part in it existed only on the pages of the party's publications (e.g. SOFLN, 1996: 137). As pointed out by Cento Bull and Gilbert, 'the police estimated between 400 and 700,000 participated' (2001: 111), and yet Bossi had still achieved what he wanted by becoming the main focus of the media's attention during the usually uneventful (in political terms) summer months (Diamanti, 1996: 96-98; 1997a: 77-78). Events like the demonstration of the Lega on the river Po and the 'swearing of the pact' in Venice, highly charged with symbolism, had turned the party into a 'nationalist' movement, making the independence of the 'never-heard-of-before' Padania not only a legitimate theme of discussion in articles as well as debates, but indeed *the* issue the country now had to resolve. A notion that still had to be 'sold' to the leghisti militants *themselves* -i.e. the idea that Padania existed as a 'nation'- and one that certainly had not yet won the hearts of the northerners -as only one out of four people of the 'deep north' agreed on the idea of independence (Diamanti, 1996: 77-81)- had been put under the spotlight due to the Lega's manipulation of the media.

The declaration of independence caused a swift reaction from the judiciary: with the search of the national centre of the LN in September which followed the demonstration on the river Po, as well as similar searches of militants' houses in November, the law took issue with a party illegally advocating the splitting of the country (SOFLN, 1996: 149). The Lega was also watched carefully by the judiciary and the Minister of the Interior because of the creation of a 'Guardia Nazionale Padana' manned by volunteers: although not many believed the party could really set up a proper army, the memory of other militias of the past made some people uncomfortable. The Lega defended itself by claiming that the 'Guardia' was meant to be a security service keeping order during demonstrations and political events. Later on Bossi even turned it into a 'peaceful organisation' alleged to be at the service of 'Padanian society', a sort of 'Salvation Army' (the so-called *esercito del sorriso*). However, the belligerent attitude of these volunteers wearing uniforms did not vanish and, with the Guardia taking part in vigilante anti-immigrant patrols, in the months to come the Lega was forced to reassure public opinion.

Whatever the legal problems faced by the Lega -Bossi himself was at the centre of various investigations in this period (SOFLN, 1998)- it is interesting to notice how determined the party was in proposing Padania as an entity that could now be *imagined*: the trick was to 'rob' the state of all its fundamental prerogatives *in the realm of the symbolic*. We have mentioned the creation of a Parliament and of a 'sunshine' (as opposed to 'shadow') government; as explained below, the party went so far as to organise *its own referendum* on the secession of Padania and *its own elections* of a Padanian Parliament.

These are also the years in which Padania was given its own flag and its own 'national colour' (green). The attitude of the party may seem playful to an external observer, especially if we take into consideration 'jokes' such as the Padanian currency (the 'scudo padano', the only currency used at Lega's events), the 'Padanian number plates', the tournaments of Padanian football, not to mention the beauty-contest 'Miss Padania', obviously intended to rival the better known 'Miss Italia'²³. Certainly there was a playful attitude among the *leghisti* of the period and an apparent willingness to grab the headlines, however the objectives of all this playing around were very serious indeed. After its own 'independent' Union (the

'Sindacato Padano') the Padania was thus given its own 'national' media. These were:

1. The already mentioned *La Padania*, also available on line, which took the place of 'Lega Nord' as the official paper of the movement at the beginning of 1997. Here a lot of attention was given to the minor towns and villages of the 'deep north' where the Lega was strong, with the rest of Italy being talked about only when there was bad news to be reported (crime, new taxes, the underdevelopment of the south and so on).²⁴
2. The magazine 'for the family' *Il Sole delle Alpi* first published in September 1997.
3. 'Radio Padania Libera', which never managed to reach all areas of Padania and nonetheless claimed in 2001 a respectable 300,000 listeners per week.²⁵
4. Finally, and naturally, a Padanian TV, 'TelePadania', hosted by a network of local TVs at the same time of the day, which started its programmes in October 1998, and which since 2000 is available on satellite.

That never-forgotten objective of the Lega Lombarda, i.e. to open schools where children would be taught by teachers born in the north, who would speak 'our own language'²⁶, was to be turned into reality in this period, too. The first 'Scuola Padana' opened its doors in September 1998.

4.7 A radical Lega under the government of the Ulivo

In autumn 1996 the Prodi government was busy trying to get the budget through Parliament. Given that Prodi and Ciampi wanted to bear down on public finances without being seen as privileging any social group, it is no wonder that, in the end, nobody seemed satisfied. Rifondazione voiced its anger for the additional taxes imposed on employees; the Polo mobilised the self-employed and small business owners; finally, the Unions were not impressed by the lack of generosity of what was supposed to be a centre-left government (Parker, 1997; Walsh, 2000: 130-137).

The budget was finally approved, although it ended up being not quite as tough as the government had planned. In fact, the government's strategy was not without its risks: Prodi wanted to keep to a conservative-style fiscal and economic policy which would convince EU finance ministers of the seriousness of the Italian government and possibly allow Italy to join EMU, while at the same time be seen working together with the Unions (as opposed to the Berlusconi government) as well as trying to keep Rifondazione on board. The Communists, although ready to compromise up to a certain point, wanted the government to be seen to be at least 'moderately leftist' and pushed for money to be put into the creation of jobs (unemployment was still high as we have seen).

'Certainly the re-entry of the Italian lira into the Exchange Rate Mechanism of the European Monetary System on November 25 gave an important morale boost to a government that was looking increasingly beleaguered in the face of internal and external pressure' (Parker, 1997: 137) as it meant that Italy had a better chance to join EMU with the first wave of countries. At the end of the negotiations conducted by Ciampi, Italy was allowed to re-enter ERM at the very competitive rate of 990 liras against the mark (Walsh, 2000: 137); this had been a much needed performance by the finance minister, given the huge difference the weakness of the lira had made to Italy's exports throughout the 1990s.

In February 1997 Lega celebrated yet another congress that was meant to confirm the secessionist line taken by the secretary; the LN changed its name to 'Lega Nord per l'Indipendenza della Padania' and Bossi further tightened his grip on the party by making sure that the regional branches could not act of their own free will and could not make alliances with the right in regional or local administrations. However, the most spectacular events of 1997 as far as the party was concerned were to be staged just before and after the summer.

On 25 May 1997 Lega held an unofficial referendum on the possibility of secession. The quite explicit question posed to voters read 'Do you want Padania to become a federal independent Republic?'. The party maintained that 4.8 million residents of Padania turned up to vote and that 97 per cent of them had said 'yes' to secession (SOFLN, 1998: 158). Although these figures could hardly be taken at face-value, as the event was organised by the Lega itself, it was the first time that the north had

been given an opportunity to state what it wanted: the value of this act in political terms was apparent. And if the north had 'made up its mind', it was now inevitable for it to be represented by its own independent Parliament. As the original 'Parliament of the North' was manned only by Lega's own representatives, a Parliament of Padania claiming to speak on behalf of the 'nation' had to include other political forces.

The question was how to convince other parties to take part in elections which would have legitimised the existence of a new 'nation'. Naturally, nobody took part, with very few exceptions. The first 'elections' for the Parliament of Padania organised by the Lega were 'held' on 2 November 1997, thanks to an army of volunteers which manned 'polling stations' all over northern Italy. Alleged to have attracted a high participation rate -with the party claiming that over six millions votes had been cast (SOFLN, 1998: 155)- the elections for the Parliament *appeared* to have been fought by various 'Padanian' parties, such as the 'Padanian Communists', the 'Padanian Catholics' and many others. However, despite appearances, the candidates of all these 'movements' were puppets controlled by Bossi and invariably came from the ranks of the LN – i.e. Leoni, a very old friend of Bossi's, who was now leader of the 'Padanian Catholics'. The only exception were two minor political formations (among them the controversial 'Radical Party') that took part in the 'elections' for their own reasons and possibly to make the front pages.

The radical turn of the Lega had understandably pushed the party to the margins of Italian politics. If the Ulivo had refused a stand-down agreement in 1996 because the movement was not prepared to close down its 'Parliament of the North', certainly the new-found extremism of the separatists, and the repeated warnings of various institutions (now controlled by the centre-left), such as the Minister of the Interior, that any illegal action would be promptly repressed (Diamanti, 1996: 99-102) had done nothing to improve relationships. If a rapprochement with the left was not likely, befriending the right at this stage was equally unthinkable: no matter how fast the National Alliance had allegedly developed into a democratic, post-fascist party, still something they were hardly prepared to discuss, as Italian nationalists, was the possibility of splitting up the country. Whether Bossi had expected a growing support for the secessionist ideal that failed to materialise²⁷ or whether he had just decided to 'play with fire' so as to avoid seeing the movement surrender to Forza Italia, at

the end of 1998 it appeared that only some further change of direction could bring the Lega out of the political 'limbo' in which it had cornered itself.

4.8 The abandonment of the separatist dream

On 14 September 1998 Bossi addressed an audience of leghisti at the now traditional end-of-summer event in Venice. Only two years after Padania was 'born', Bossi plainly admitted that the isolationist strategy inaugurated by the election campaign of 1996 and the struggle of the Lega against the two main opposing coalitions had not paid off and that the movement needed to find alliances (Passalacqua, in *La Repubblica*, 1998). The idea that Padania existed was not officially rejected, however these declarations opened the way to a talk of 'devolution' signalling, *de facto*, a return to more moderate positions.

In terms of strategy, apparently the proposal of the secretary was to create an electoral coalition with the 'Padanian bloc', i.e. those parties alleged to represent Padanian society and its 'productive' categories which had come out of the elections of the Padanian Parliament one year before. This would have broken the Lega's isolation and given more strength to it, so that the party could find itself in a better position from which to negotiate strategic alliances with the parties 'of Rome' on specific issues. The reasoning of the secretary, one that became the official party line shortly afterwards, was that the party on its own just did not have enough strength to set the north free and would need to acquire such strength through 'the bloc' (e.g. Anonymous, in *La Padania* 1998; SOFLN, 1998: 170).

Despite the rhetoric of those days, the secretary knew only too well that the parties of the 'blocco' existed only in the pages of *La Padania*. The function of these 'parties' had been similar to that of the Padanian flag, the 'currency', the government of Padania and all the other symbols of the nation-state with which Lega had been toying during these years in order to give visibility to the project of an independent entity soon to be created. The truth was that these movements of the 'blocco' had no real organisation, no militants, and they could not attract much support outside the already established following of the Lega, as we have seen above²⁸. The very names of these 'parties' (i.e. 'Comunisti Padani', 'Pensionati Padani' etc.)²⁹ gave visibility to a nation which not even all *leghisti* believed could become a reality (see

chap. 8). With hindsight, given that at the regional elections 2000 the Lega Nord found itself, yet again, allied to the 'Polo', it could be claimed that Bossi was just looking for a way to break the isolation of the party, and that talking about the 'blocco' gave him an excuse to discard separatism and move back towards the centre.

After two years of very radical speeches, and after a congress just a few months before (February 1998) in which the hard line had been confirmed once again, there was no doubt that the sudden U-turn of the LN had to be explained to the militants. As the D'Alema government, which replaced Prodi, was sworn during the very same days as the Lega's conference, many thought that the first objective of Bossi was indeed some form of tactical collaboration with the left (e.g. anonymous, in *Il Foglio*, 1998; Cavalera, in *Il Corriere della Sera*, 1998b; see also the interview with the leghista Gnutti in the same issue). This was not to happen, though, and yet Bossi did not want to approach the right either at this stage.

Hostilities between Bossi and the secretary of the Liga Veneta, Comencini, broke out precisely on the issue of the relationship with the right. Given his efforts to form an alliance with the FI in the Veneto region and his reservations on the new strategy of the 'blocco', Comencini was accused of having sold his soul to Berlusconi (e.g. Cavalera, in *Il Corriere della Sera*, 1998a). Faced with the possibility of a strong opposition in the forthcoming federal congress of the Lega Nord, Bossi resorted to his usual, in such cases, accusations of betrayal. Comencini was exposed as the one who was trying to split the movement³⁰ and 'direct rule' over the party in Veneto was imposed by Milan. The leader of the Liga fought back in pure 'legghista' style: on the pages of *La Repubblica* (Marozzi, in *La Repubblica*, 1998) he reminded Bossi that his party had been a successful autonomous movement well before entering the alliance with the Lega Lombarda which gave birth to the Lega Nord, arguing that Veneti were a proud people unwilling to lose their autonomy to the Lombards.

Leaving aside the rhetoric of both leaders, it is important to consider the issues that were pushed to the surface by this struggle. First of all, the fact that both the secretary of the Lega Nord and his opponent could resort to typical 'legghista' keywords and still oppose each other exposed a real contradiction in the party: while Padania was still an entity to be constructed and which the party was striving to

'imagine', local and regional identities had provided *strong* means of identification to northern Italians for centuries. Even the leghisti themselves, although increasingly defining themselves in terms of the 'north', still attached great importance to their region and their local community (Biorcio, 1997: 126-132). Secondly, the Lega, while attacking the principles of 'centralisation', was itself a very centralised organisation, with the centre keeping a watchful eye on the periphery and not willing to put the party line to the test of real debate. Militants were trying to follow the changes of direction of the secretary, however they were not given a real chance to influence his decisions. Thanks to his very firm control of the media and the organisation of the party, as well as his alleged charisma, Bossi has always found it relatively easy to make his point of view finally prevail. However, the fiction of conferences invariably subscribing to the decisions of the leader repeatedly exposed the lack of internal democracy in the party. The Lega's past is crowded with people who have been expelled for refusing to sing to the tune of the leader; it is also a party that the militants just cannot imagine led by anybody else but Bossi, such is the charisma of its father-founder (Biorcio, 1997: 236-248). This is true to such an extent that the origins of Lega are always presented in quasi-religious terms, thus fading into an almost mythical past. And yet the coming to maturity of such a party, the creation of 'internal currents' and the holding of proper 'open' conferences would possibly destroy it, as this is a movement that has always given *meaning* to its followers by supposedly telling them a *truth* which can only, by definition, be singular.

The strategy of the 'blocco padano' was formally approved by the Lega's conference in October 1998. In the following years it became clear that this conference had indeed inaugurated a 'return to moderatism' that took the Lega back 'to Rome'³¹. In those days the government of Massimo D'Alema, taking the place of Prodi's, was sworn in. Prodi had fallen due to yet another disagreement with Rifondazione, which was effectively holding the coalition to ransom³². However, before leaving the political scene, the Prodi government managed to obtain results on various fronts, by:

- a) taking the country into EMU with the first group of EU members in May 1998;
- b) successfully pushing through reforms aimed at a rationalisation of social assistance;

- c) approving the so-called 'pact of work' (Ferrera and Gualmini, 2000) which, among other things, legalised temporary work in Italy.

The experience of Romano Prodi had revealed that an alliance between the centre and a visibly divided left was anything but ready to pass the test of time. Although the left would maintain the control of successive governments until the elections 2001, the fall of Prodi dealt a (possibly) final blow to the project of an Ulivo coalition turning into a big party of many different souls, on the model of the American Democrats.

Notes:

¹ We should rather talk of 'two' souths, with regions such as Puglia outperforming all the others, especially in terms of export growth-rates (Istat on line, 1998)

² A category which was three times disadvantaged, such as that of young females resident in the south had very few chances indeed of finding a job. In 1997 the 'youth unemployment rate' in this category was 64.9 per cent and in 1999, when part-time and temporary work had started to spread everywhere else in the country, this figure had been reduced only very slightly to 64.5 per cent (CENSIS, 2000: 221). The figures given ('tasso di disoccupazione giovanile') represent the percentage of young people (between the ages of 15 to 24) seeking work compared to the total work force of the same age; people who are not *willing* to work (arguably a quite large number of females in the traditionalist south) are, therefore, not taken into account for the purposes of this survey. However, the diffusion of illegal work in the south also needs to be taken into account, as people officially seeking work were sometimes in employment- albeit they had no guarantees and no rights.

³ Many people have a regular job and work illegally in their spare time, therefore pushing the total number of illegal jobs up.

⁴ Bossi's *j'accuse* against the first Berlusconi government has been reprinted in Bossi, 1996: 85-89.

⁵ The leader of the Lega Nord, with his unmistakable gusto for 'making a scene', went as far as to accuse Berlusconi of organising a coup to reinstate himself as PM ('Declaration of confidence in the Dini government' on 24 January 1995, reprinted in Bossi, 1996: 90-96). A poster of February 1995 (reprinted in Lega Nord ed., 1996: 74) even claimed that the Lega had thwarted a forthcoming dictatorship.

⁶ The other obvious question that could not be asked at that stage is why he has allowed Berlusconi to become 'Presidente del Consiglio' for the second time in 2001, given that all Berlusconi has done in the meantime to resolve his 'conflict of interests' is to donate his corporations to members of his own family.

⁷ See the poster of March 1995 on which the Lega shouted: 'Never a fascist Milano!' (reprinted in Lega Nord ed. 1996: 76) or the headline of the daily *Lega Nord* on 24 April 1995: 'Warning, they are fascists!'.

⁸ The fact that such a reform could not have been agreed and passed through Parliament in the few months of existence of the first Berlusconi government stands to reason.

⁹ As demonstrated by a survey published at the beginning of 1995 by *Il Corriere della Sera* (see Diamanti, 1996: 163)

¹⁰ This was not much of a novelty in a country which had been governed by the DC for about fifty years.

¹¹ A notion clearly expressed in the poster splashed across Milano in March 1996 (reprinted in Lega Nord ed. 1996: 90).

¹² In a few cases the RC presented its own candidates in majoritarian districts *despite* the agreement with the Ulivo, as some Ulivo candidates (such as the ex-DC De Mita) were deemed impossible to 'stomach'.

¹³ Although parties which did not join a coalition risked being wiped out, due to the reform of the electoral system which had taken place, the Lega had the major advantage of its support being concentrated in specific areas, thus making it possible for it to come out as the winner in certain constituencies.

¹⁴ This, of course, proved difficult to achieve, and if Prodi lost his job in October 1998 it was indeed because the RC withdrew its support. This event caused a split in Rifondazione and the creation of a new pro-Ulivo Communist Party.

¹⁵ Maroni had been Minister of the Interior in the Berlusconi government and Pivetti speaker of the lower Chamber of the Parliament elected in 1994. While Maroni remained faithful to the Lega's leadership (albeit spending some time in the shadows, unhappy about divorcing the Polo) Pivetti was thrown out of the party as she did not agree with the separatist turn.

¹⁶ In the posters of October 1995 the term 'nation of the north' appeared repeatedly, and in November the party came 'clean' with yet another poster, this time representing a big, red

heart: 'There is a road in our hearts: independence of the north' (all reprinted in Lega Nord ed., 1996: 81-83)

¹⁷ A section of the magazine 'Quaderni Padani' has also been devoted to providing empirical data on which the claim for independence can be grounded. It is called 'La Rubrica Silenziosa', and provides the reader with data such as the number of companies working in the north as opposed to the south of Italy, levels of unemployment, criminality-rates, and so on. A discussion of these themes follows in chapt.6.

¹⁸ See the more than explicit poster of October 1996 (unpublished, available at the national centre of the Lega Nord) which gives the viewer a choice between 'the honest Padanian and the Mafioso Italian legality'.

¹⁹ See the numerous articles entitled "Gente di Alessandria", "Gente di Parma", "Gente di Treviso" etc. (People of ... Parma, Alessandria, Treviso) in the monthly magazine *Il Sole delle Alpi*, which were meant to introduce the reader to the different productive realities of northern Italy.

²⁰ See the cultural pages of *La Padania*.

²¹ A poster published just after the fall of the Berlusconi government (understandably entitled 'We are here') positioned Lega 'in the centre' between the two opposing coalitions (reprinted in Lega Nord ed. 1996: 75).

²² Which was exactly what Bossi told his audience at the first meeting of the 'Parliament of the North' (Bossi, 1996: 109).

²³ For examples of the 'lira padana', which predated the 'scudo padano', see appendixes 1 and 2.

²⁴ Even the weather report was focused on Padania.

²⁵ Data provided by the national centre of Lega Nord in April 2001.

²⁶ See the 1986 poster 'scuola coloniale, basta!', reprinted in Lega Nord ed., 1996: 14.

²⁷ Diamanti (1997) reminds us that successive surveys have shown how Lega's voters always turn out to be moderates (often ex-DC). He suggests that the increasing legal problems faced by Lega as a consequence of acts such as the creation of the 'Guardia Padana' have hardly increased the appeal of the movement in the eyes of many, who may have 'used it' to voice their anger, but were probably not ready to take too many risks by facing the 'carabinieri' at the end of a political rally.

²⁸ They were so blatantly 'artificial' that a few years later it would be very difficult indeed even for a very patient reader to find any mention of them in the pages of *La Padania*.

²⁹ See the list of the groups which managed to elect representatives to the Padanian Parliament in SOFLN (1998: 156-157).

³⁰ See Mauri, in *La Padania* 1998b, interviewing the leader; see also the 'neo-Stalinist' article again by Mauri, in *La Padania* 1998c, where the author 'revealed' the true aims of Comencini by publishing 'incriminating' extracts from a personal letter addressed to him.

³¹ See anonymous (most probably the Director, Ferrara), in *Il Foglio*, 1998. Besides, that the Lega had decided to stage a 'return to Rome' and to mainstream politics was admitted during the conference by the leghisti themselves (e.g. Formentini's speech, as reported by Cavalera, in *Il Corriere della Sera*, 1998 b). As Cavalera points out, the same speech would have caused a lot of resentment if delivered one year earlier.

³² In a personal conversation with the author, James Newell noted that Prodi was holding Rifondazione to ransom too, by saying: 'either go along with our policies, or face the unpopularity you will suffer if you bring a centre-left government down, thus opening the way to a return of Berlusconi' -which is, incidentally, what eventually happened. And yet one cannot help noticing that the RC was punching well above its weight: it was a relatively small party that found itself in a position not dissimilar to that of the Socialists of the 1980s.

CHAPTER 5

Defining 'Padania' through political propaganda: a content analysis

5.1 Introduction to Chapter 5

The first chapter of the present thesis considered how national identities had allegedly been created through a central education system administered by the state (Gellner, 1983; 1987), and as an ideal response to the needs of a capitalist economy (Williams, 1983). That discussion also covered the centrality of language -specifically 'print-languages'- in the emergence of national identities (Anderson, 1991), as well as the role played by religion (Hastings, 1997) and the affinities between the national imagination and religious thinking (Anderson, *ibid.*). It was pointed out then that there is agreement among scholars on the centrality of factors such as 'language' or 'a myth of common descent' in creating, nurturing and sustaining national feelings, although writers may differ when assessing the *specific* role of such factors in particular historical contexts¹; such assessment, in fact, depends as much on the theoretical frameworks ('modernism', 'perennialism', 'ethno-symbolism' etc.) these writers employ as it does on their own reading of data and documents.

Although the following section provides a tentative 'list' of factors which normally play a fundamental role in the definition of national identities, and therefore need to be valued and are sometimes given new meanings by nationalist rhetoric, it is thus apparent that not all these 'ingredients of nationhood' are always at work and that they operate in very different ways in nationalist propaganda, depending on the context in which the communication takes place. To quote Tambini, these factors are 'flexible' (Tambini, 2001: 10). And yet it would be difficult to imagine a nationalist movement that can do without all these factors in its 'identity-work'. The aim of this chapter is to clarify which themes were put at the centre of the Lega's propaganda in a specific period, and which were focused upon in those articles of the party that were specifically aimed at defining who was the 'Padanian'. This task was accomplished by employing quantitative content analysis. After a brief discussion of what factors the author sees as fundamental in creating and sustaining national

identities, this chapter will justify the use of the method mentioned above and present the results of a study carried out on a sample of the party's publications.

5.2 Factors contributing to the 'creation' and nurturing of national identities

The first *sine qua non* of the nation is 'spatial localisation'. The idea of a 'motherland', and the consequent centrality attributed to the border, are central elements of the national imagination whether or not a people control 'their' land through 'their own' political institutions or not. Moreover, even when a people are dislocated and at times unable to return to the place they call their 'home' (e.g. refugees), still they regard such a place as their own. At times this becomes a mythical land they *will* eventually go back to –if only in the imagination (Cohen, 1997). The Jews were in such a situation for many centuries. Art, and particularly painted landscapes, connect 'the imaginative geography of landscape and the imagined community of the nation' (Daniels, 1993: 243) thus playing an important role in the celebration of an environment that is claimed as 'typical' of *a specific nation*, so that it can be appropriated.

A second factor -clearly related to the above- is 'contact with co-members'. A 'space' only becomes a 'place' through interaction and communication, i.e. by generating memories that are shared. Naturally 'spatial localisation' and 'contacts with co-members' also define other communities of normally smaller size (e.g. the region, the county or the municipality), however, if contact with co-members is just as essential to generating a concept of regional identity as it is in nurturing national identities, on the other hand in the case of sub-national communities borders are rarely charged with the same *intensity of meaning*.

A third factor binding people together in the 'nation', and therefore routinely insisted upon by nationalists, is the often unquestioned belief that people share *common ancestors* with co-nationals *and only with them*. The fact that populations in various parts of a country could be the heirs of very different peoples of the past does not necessary constitute a problem for nationalists, as more than one ethnic group and culture can be *officially* recognised as having contributed to what a people have

become at present. As will be seen in chap. 7, this is openly the strategy of the Lega itself, according to which a *wide* variety of peoples, languages and cultures played their role in the creation of what a theorist of 'Padanism' defines as the 'Padanian koinè' (Oneto, 1997). What counts is that people understand themselves as the heirs and descendants of some distinctive peoples of the past, whether one or many, and that foreigners are not allowed to claim the same peoples as *their* own ancestors: we may share *some* grand-fathers and thus be related, however the 'koinè' that constitutes my culture and genetic identity I claim as mine and mine alone, whether rightly or wrongly.

Fourthly, the role of language must be insisted upon, as it is language which draws the line between 'us' and the unintelligible 'barbarian'. Clearly it is true that not every nation can claim to be characterised by its own peculiar language. Indeed, often nations are bi- or even multi- lingual; however, the scale of the effort put by modern European nation-states into imposing unified languages within their borders, as well as the recent polemics about the hegemony of English, bear testimony to the centrality of the issue in symbolic terms. That is to say: some nations may speak more than one language, but that does not diminish the role of language in differentiating between peoples and in creating communities.

Fifthly, common traditions, rituals, myths and national symbols (such as national holidays and flags) are usually crucial. The first chapter treated them as 'signs' of club membership, i.e. boundary-making devices that can be 'filled' with very different meanings. They give visibility to the claim that people share a common history and common ancestors, and firmly place the nation in a distant -if at times re-invented- past.

Sixthly, this thesis has discussed at length the role of common values and a common culture, transmitted primarily through a common education. It is obviously a problem to differentiate this element from the one just mentioned, as a common culture is perpetuated also *through* common traditions and rituals; however, such culture has a personal –as opposed to social- dimension, too. Moreover, culture also needs to be recognised as 'material culture' (Williams, 1981). For the purposes of the content analysis presented below 'culture', 'traditions' and 'a common history' will be treated as one and the same category.

A further element -one that will reveal itself as fundamental to the definition of 'Padanness'- are 'common enemies'. Once again, national identities are not the exception here: arguably all identity-work, whether done by parties, cultural and sub-cultural movements, clubs or groups tends to rely, more or less heavily, on a clear sense of distinctiveness, thus playing on the alleged danger posed by 'others'. 'Once it is understood', warns Judith Butler, 'that subjects are formed through exclusionary operations, it becomes politically necessary to trace the operations of that construction and erasure' (Butler, 1992: 14). As we will see below, there is no subject that is more straightforwardly constructed through practices of exclusion than the 'Padanian' subject.

5.3 How to study 'Padanness'

Below we will consider the nature of a content analysis carried out on the Lega's propaganda with the aim of assessing what were the themes which dominated the 'identità padana' in the nationalist period. A discussion of the methodology thus follows below (and continues in the next chapter).

The categories employed in any analyses, including quantitative content analysis, are defined by researchers on the basis of what they already know and what they want to find out. Any categorisation is a way of asking specific, and often very limited, questions of the reality under investigation. Thus there is always a *qualitative* moment in any research which necessarily precedes even a quantitative study (Mudde, 2000). In the case of the present analysis, the following determined what *specific* categories could be devised in order to investigate how the Padanian identity had been constructed through the Lega's propaganda:

- a) the writer's knowledge of the literature on nationalism presented in chapter 1, and thus the factors which often play a role in the propagandists' efforts to define and nurture identities which have been presented above;
- b) an understanding of Italian politics in this period (cf. chapters 3 and 4);
- c) preliminary analyses of *Il Corriere della Sera* and the party's own posters (below).

I carried out a survey of one of the most influential Italian dailies, *Il Corriere della Sera*, based in Milan, to assess to what extent the Lega had been successful in imposing its own agenda on to a paper which had always been, and still is, very attentive to the developments of northern Italian politics and society. The question was: 'to what extent has CdS felt it necessary to consider and debate the very *existence* of the nation of Padania?'. After all, Padania had been practically unheard of until 1995: had the Lega been successful in imposing it, as an *object of discourse*, on this paper? The simple answer is that it had been, quite apart from what was actually said by the paper about Padania and the leghisti². The table below shows how frequently the term 'Padania' appears in a headline of the paper in different periods.

Table 1: Articles of the CdS containing 'Padania' in their headline

01 Feb. 1992- 31 Jan 1994	11
01 Feb. 1994- 31 Jan 1996	8
01 Feb. 1996- 31 Jan 1998	322

(Source: CdS archives on line)

Between the beginning of 1996 and the beginning of 1998 the paper had 'Padania' in one of its headlines on alternate days. This is all the more significant if we keep in mind that the very existence of an entity called Padania, i.e. of a nation embracing only the north of Italy, was (and still is) rejected by all political formations but the Lega.³

Clearly Padania managed to attract the Corriere's attention in the nationalist years. However, a reading of the articles published in CDS in the 'nationalist' period reveals that the issue of what Padania was alleged *to be* and of why northern Italians should regard themselves as *different*, in short the issue of an alleged separate ethnic identity of the 'Padanians', was not given much attention. More than that: when the identity-work of the party was considered, it was only so that it could be dismissed as posturing. CDS paid a lot of attention to Bossi's legal problems (cf. chapter 4), caused by the party's new line (see, for instance, anonymous, in *Il Corriere della Sera*, 1996; Buccini, in *Il Corriere della Sera*, 1996; Girola, , in *Il Corriere della Sera*, 1996),

dedicated much space to painstaking analyses of the relationship between the movement and other political parties (e.g. Cavalera, in *Il Corriere della Sera*, 1996a and 1996b), however treated the claims of 'Padanian' identity, more often than not, purely as a joke (e.g. Biagi in *Il Corriere della Sera*, 1996). Although Padania was given great visibility in this period, observers of northern society such as Biagi just could not quite make themselves believe that this 'nation' had to be taken seriously; 'Padania' was seen as a hoax aimed at keeping the party in the spotlight.

Could it be that much of the responsibility for this was to be placed at the door of the Lega itself? Could it be that the Padania was not being 'filled' with credible *positive* meanings, although it was being used as a colourful weapon against various 'others'? A reading of the Lega's posters printed between February 1996 and September 1998⁴ basically confirmed the centrality of 'difference' and 'opposition' for a definition of 'padanità'. Wall-posters had always been a fundamental means of propaganda for the movement (Lega Nord ed., 1996): it was through them that the message of the party had originally been defined, primarily because a) they were very cheap; b) only a few militants were needed to cover a relatively big area of the north in a few days work (Bossi and Vimercati, 1992: 46 and 47; Monestarolo, 2000: 144). Moreover, posters have always been produced by the party -starting from an idea proposed by the leader- without involving any advertising agencies or external consultants⁵. As a consequence, the party developed its own less than polished style, characterised by the use of a few colours and by the text normally prevailing over the image (Monestarolo, 2000: 144-145), through which its posters differentiated themselves from the more professional -and thus perceived as less authentic- creations of advertising agencies on behalf of the DCI and the PSI first, and now the Forza Italia.

In the separatist period the national centre of the League printed sixty posters (an average of over 20 a year). Of these, 33 percent contained at least one of the following:

1. A mention of Rome defined in *explicitly* offensive terms -e.g. 'Roma ladrona' (Rome thief); 'Roma padrona' (master Rome);
2. A mention of Italy, the state, Italians or southern Italians defined in explicitly offensive terms- e.g. 'l'Italia puzza di cadavere' (Italy stinks as a dead body);

3. A mention of Padania as a colonised state, or Padanians as a colonised/enslaved people- e.g. 'Scuola coloniale basta!' (enough of colonial schools!).

This was an extremely simple preliminary analysis which did not in itself demonstrate that the Lega had *only* focused on 'rejecting the other' at the expense of other themes. However, it did confirm that the Lega had embarked on a political struggle in which the demonisation of the enemy was paramount. The content analysis that follows thus assumes that the party was successful in getting Padania on the public agenda in the north (following the study of CDS), however it sets out to analyse how the *identità padana* was defined and *filled with meaning*. The hypothesis was that such a definition was mainly taking place through opposition and the negation of the 'other', at the expense of 'positive' themes such as, for instance, an alleged common culture or a unitary language.

5.4 Methodology 1: why using content analysis?

The content analysis that follows explores which themes dominated the propaganda of the Northern League in the period February 1996 - September 1998 among a selection deemed to be relevant.

Content analysis enjoys wide recognition as a method for handling very large quantities of material, and is particularly suited to the study of the printed word (Holsti, 1969; Krippendorff, 1980; Weber, 1990 and Bryman, 1994). It is quite appropriate here to remind the reader that quantitative content analysis received a major impetus during WWII precisely because it was seen as apt for the study of political propaganda. Propaganda analysis 'started out as an instrument for identifying individuals as "unethical" sources of influence (Krippendorff, 1980: 16) thus revealing the rhetorical 'tricks' that were (and are, inevitably) employed in political speeches. Berelson famously defined content analysis as 'a research technique for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of the manifest content of communication' (1952: 18): this thesis uses this definition. In fact, this study limits itself to the 'manifest' content of the Lega's propaganda at this stage, leaving more subtle interpretations to chapters 6 and 7, in which content analysis will

be supplemented by textual analysis. The description of content also needs to be 'objective and systematic', i.e. *reliable*: the rules guiding the analysis must be explicit and the analysis should be *replicable*. The aim is to be able to make claims about the dominance of certain themes in quantitative terms in a large corpus of material; in order to be reliable the same claims would have to be made by a different observer using the same categories and coding the text by following the same rules (see 'reliability' below).

This study, therefore, uses CA so that ideas can step forward and be counted. In fact, content analysis is able to assess how frequently units of meaning appear in a text even if they do not appear in *identical* form. It does so by devising 'categories' into which units of meaning 'fall' (see below). Berelson (1952) lists various *uses* of content analysis. Among such uses two in particular reflect the interests of the present research: to describe trends in communication content and to expose propaganda techniques. C.A. can describe *certain* trends in communication content, as the frequent appearance of a theme is testimony to its centrality in the context of a particular discourse strategy. This is clearly true of political propaganda (Holsti, 1969: 10), although, on the other hand, *silences* are also crucial and CA cannot by itself say anything about them (Palmer, 2000).

Content analysis has thus to be seen as invaluable due to its capacity to *measure* the relative weight of chosen ideas and themes, or the recurrence of particular words, in a body of material. The method works *unobtrusively*, as it is applied to messages that have already come 'into the open'. This was particularly important to this study, given the stated objectives of the research. Both CA and the textual analyses presented below (chapters 6 and 7) use data which have been collected in an archive: the writer did not speak to or interfere with the authors of such messages *before* they were produced, neither did he talk to them (or to their audiences) *afterwards* -neither in his role as researcher, through the use of qualitative methods such as interviews or questionnaires, nor informally. This decision stemmed from the desire not to affect the outcomes of a research which was entirely focused on *the message itself*, on how such message was constructed and put across (see the introduction) and *not* on the intentions of the producers of such messages, nor on reactions/interpretations/understandings on the part of receivers. Like other research methods, content analysis is characterised by weaknesses and limits: these will be

addressed at the beginning of chapter 6, where the relationship between CA (a quantitative method) and textual analysis (a qualitative one) will be considered.

5.5 A content analysis of Lega's propaganda: aims and design of the analysis

5.5.1 Aims

The aims of this content analysis are as follows:

To assess which themes (among a selection deemed to be relevant) dominate the definition of the 'identità Padana' a) in the *whole* of Lega Nord's propaganda in the period February 1996- September 1998; and b) in that section of Lega Nord's propaganda which has been *explicitly* dedicated to the definition of this identity in the same period.

This is a thematic content analysis. In Weber a *theme* is defined as 'some clusters of words with different meanings or connotations that taken together refer to some category or issue' (1985: 37). Krippendorff defines 'thematic units' as follows: 'These are identified by their correspondence to a particular structural definition of the content of narratives, explanations, or interpretations. They are distinguished from each other on conceptual grounds and are contrasted with the remaining portion of irrelevant material by their possessing the desired structural properties' (1980: 62 and 63). The basic problem with thematic units is recognising them, because this requires interpretation on the part of the observer, with consequences for the reliability of the analysis which will be discussed below.

5.5.2 Design: categories

In the following analysis thematic units fall in the following categories:

1. *Padani have their own way of production.* Units fall in this category when they contain as their constituent element one statement suggesting that particular economic activities, or the way some economic activities are managed and organised, or a specific attitude towards work, production and investment are *characteristic* of the area named as Padania (or part of it)

and/or its inhabitants. For these units not to fall into category 5 (see below) there must be no stated *opposition* between the economy or work-ethic of Padania and that of other areas in Italy/ other Non-Europeans countries.

E.g. a) '[Talking about Padova] ne apprezzo l'operosità: è bello uscire la sera alle 8.30 e scoprire che non sei l'unica ad avere finito di lavorare a quell'ora... perché tanti, tantissimi lasciano il lavoro tardi' (Giusy Locati, interviewed by Negri in *Il Sole delle Alpi*, 1997: 36); b) '... peculiarità padane: senso dell'organizzazione, del risparmio e dell'iniziativa imprenditoriale...' (Zilio, in *La Padania*, 1997b: 1); c) 'E' proprio questa integrazione territoriale, una cultura produttiva all'insegna della flessibilità e dell'innovazione... e l'apertura internazionale.... che hanno consentito lo sviluppo produttivo di quest' area' (experts of the 'Union of industrialists' of Treviso, interviewed by Parenti in *La Padania*, 1998: 5).

2. *Padani have their own languages /dialects.* Units which contain as their constituent element a mention or description of those languages/dialects which are (or have been) spoken in Padania fall into this category. For these units not to fall in Cat. 5 there has to be no stated opposition between these languages/dialects and Italian, languages and dialects of southern Italy or languages of other countries.

Examples: a) A detailed description of the languages and dialects of Padania by Oneto in *Il Sole delle Alpi*, 1998b; b) 'La parola <<anguana>> è di derivazione celtica... strettamente legato al provenzale aigua o all'antico francese aigue. A queste sono legate le lingue padane' (Piolini in *Il Sole delle Alpi*, 1998: 70); c) [about dialect]: 'Questo antico linguaggio popolare, questo modo di comunicare, radicato e perfettamente aderente al sentire profondo di una comunità, che molti chiamano dialetto e altri vera lingua, è soggetto da tempo a scarsa attenzione...' Regianini in *Lega Nord*, 1996: 9).

3. *Padani have their own history, culture, way of life, traditions, symbols.* Units fall in this category when they contain as their constituent element a reference to an alleged connection between one or more element(s) from list 1 *and* one or more from list 2:

List 1: a) events which took place in the north of Italy; b) populations who inhabited the area in the past; c) traditions, customs, symbols, ways of life which are said to have been peculiar to one (or more) of the peoples living in the area in the past;

List 2: a) events happening nowadays, b) peoples living in the area now; or c) contemporary cultures of Padania. For these units not to fall in Cat. 5 there has to be no explicit opposition between the mentioned events, cultures, ways of life of Padania and those of other areas in Italy/ Italy as a whole, other extra-Europeans countries.

E.g. a) 'Il leone marciano è simbolo per eccellenza della Repubblica Serenissima. Un simbolo sostanziale e non un emblema casuale e folklorico... (follows a lengthy account of how the lion was adopted as the symbol of Venice). Così alla spada sguainata di Alberto da Giussano si affianca anche quella del Leone... Proprio come accadde ai tempi della Lega Lombarda, uniti, assieme, verso la libertà della Padania (Comencini in *Lega Nord*, 1996: 9); b) an article about the 'fairies' who are typical of traditional tales and stories of northern Italy and what is left of them in popular culture (Piolini in *Il Sole delle Alpi*, 1998: 70-71); c) [Padani,] 'Un popolo che ha il vessillo più antico in uso al mondo. La Croce di san Giorgio ha accompagnato i nostri liberi guerrieri sui campi di Legnano nel 1176 e sulle mure di Gerusalemme nel 1099 e forse anche molto prima' (Oneto in *Quaderni Padani*, 1996: 8).

4. *Padani are those who descend from ancient Padani.* Units fall in this category when they contain as their constituent element the suggestion that present Padani are genetically related to some populations inhabiting the area in the past. For these units not to fall into Cat. 5 there has to be no explicit opposition between the features allegedly inherited by Padani from peoples of the past and features which are said to be characteristic of people living in other areas of Italy/ other Non-Europeans countries.

Examples: a) 'A volte mi viene da immaginare i nostri antenati, cacciatori erranti con frecce e zagaglie nella pianura padana...' (Valla, talking about the

area of Monviso, in *Quaderni Padani*, 1996: 6); b) '... è anche dimostrato dagli studi sui residui genetici che ci ricordano che ancora oggi tutti noi Padani siamo prevalentemente Liguri' (Oneto in *Il Sole delle Alpi*, 1998b: 67 and 68); c) 'Analoghi risultati sono stati raggiunti... mediante l'esame sistematico del DNA... Così si è appreso che la penisola <<si distingue in tre grandi aree con diverse connotazioni genetiche: il nord, con l'eredità dei Celti in eminenza etc.>>' (Moscati, quoted by Oneto, 1997: 55).

5. '*Padani/Northerners are not (they are different from) Italians, Southerners or Non-Europeans*' or '*Padania is not Rome, Italy, Southern Italy, (any) Non-European country*'. Units fall in this category when they contain as their constituent element a stated difference, or opposition between: a) Padania/Padani, their interests, culture, aspects of their present or past way of life on the one hand *and*, on the other hand: b) the Italian state, the Italian capital, Italy as a whole, Southern Italy, Non-European countries; and/or c) people living in these areas, their interests, as well as aspects of their culture and 'way of life'. Any stated opposition between *the party Lega Nord (as opposed to Padania and Padani)* and the south of Italy, Italy as a whole, Italian political parties and foreign immigrants is not counted.

Sub-category 5a consists of those units stating a difference/contrast/opposition between Padania/Padani and the state, Italy, Italians or Southerners, while sub-category 5b consists of the units stating a difference/contrast/opposition between Padania/Padani and Non-Europeans countries/peoples.

Examples of units falling into sub-category 5a: a) 'Questo stato vergognosamente debitore nei confronti delle imprese, dei lavoratori autonomi, di tutti coloro che, specialmente al nord, versano le tasse, deve restituire a tutti, fino all'ultima lira, i crediti d'imposta' (Piazzo in *Lega Nord*, 1996: 3); b) 'Sveglia Nord! Padania, in piedi! I tuoi soldi finiscono nelle tasche della mafia, dei partiti corrotti, i tuoi guadagni da cinquant'anni alimentano un sistema che ingrassa solo i palazzi romani...' (anonymous, interview with Pagliarini in *Lega Nord*, 1996a: 3); c) [On the decentralisation of state education]: 'A questa richiesta democratica e federalista è sempre stato

risposto che essa andrebbe bene nell'Italia del Nord mentre nell'Italia del Sud direttori didattici e presidi andrebbero in mano alla mafia e alle clientele locali più o meno malavitose. Forse è vero. Ma questa obiezione è la conferma della necessità del federalismo' (anonymous, in *Lega Nord*, 1996b: 6).

Examples of units falling into sub-category 5b:

'[A summer of rapes] fatta di sangue e di abusi, di donne picchiate e violentate... Tutti episodi con un unico comune denominatore: la firma. Quasi sempre straniera e soprattutto clandestina. Nel Belpaese, a patto di non esserne cittadini, c'è posto per tutti' (Acquarone, in *Il Sole delle Alpi*, 1997: 34); b) 'Torino ha visto aumentare ogni giorno il degrado, favorito da quella immigrazione extracomunitaria che il Sindaco-fantasma non perde occasione di esaltare e sovvenzionare a spese del contribuente sub-alpino' (Borghesio, in *La Padania*, 1997: 3); c) [Talking about asylum seekers]: 'non si tratta di veri profughi bisognosi, ma di criminali che vengono qui per dedicarsi ad attività illecite nella maggior parte dei casi sfruttando le loro donne e facendole prostituire' (Formentini, quoted by Roselli, in *La Padania*, 1997: 3).

6. *All others*. This category attracts those *sampling units* (see below) in which none of the above mentioned themes appear either as *primary* or as *secondary* (see below).

Notes:

1. General categories like these are almost impossible to define. For example, the idea that Padania is characterised by a peculiar economy thanks to the originality of its system of production can be insisted upon in a wide variety of ways. Sometimes, as Holsti suggests, 'the analyst would find it virtually impossible to enumerate exhaustively all the words and combinations of words that may denote the presence of such concepts' (1969: 99).
2. Categories are mutually exclusive (Holsti, 1969: 95). Ambiguous sentences have been broken into "pieces", their different parts being considered as falling into different categories whenever this was necessary, appropriate and possible.
3. Cat. 5 has been divided into sub-categories in order to assess which of two 'others' can be deemed to be more significant for a definition of 'padanità'

through opposition. Italians and Southerners have been grouped into the same sub-category as it is not always possible to ascertain whom the writer is talking about.

4. A category had originally been devised to qualify the presence, even sporadic, of a 'non-essentialist' conception of Padanian identity hinging purely on the sharing of the Padanian space through work and relationships. The theme had been defined as 'Padani are those Europeans who inhabit Padania', and units were to fall in this category when expressing a conception of 'Padanian' identity whereby belonging to this would-be-nation was said to be a matter of a) being European (as non-Europeans are *always* excluded); b) living in the country for X years and/ or committing to it. The category has now been eliminated from the tables as it revealed itself to be irrelevant, due to such a 'neutral' conception of identity being almost impossible to find in this propaganda.

This categorisation is justified by the desire to ascertain to what extent the Padanian identity is defined in positive terms, is filled with positive meanings (Cat. 1-4), or is rather exclusively based on the opposition to an 'other' (Cat. 5). Among the positive definitions which were selected the one defined by Cat. 1 is justified because of the explicit theorisation of the peculiar work-ethic of the 'homo Padanus' and of the originality of the Padanian way of production which are celebrated by some leghisti writers. Given the economic success of certain areas of Padania which was discussed in chapters 3 and 4, it seemed important to 'measure' the relative weight of this theme. The definition of Cat. 2 and 3 was grounded in our discussion of nations in chap. 1 as well as the brief outline of the attributes of national identities presented above. The aim was to ascertain the role of language and a common culture in the definition of the 'padano'. As for Cat. 4, the aim was to assess to what extent the claim of a 'Padanian' identity had been grounded on 'blood' (or even 'race') at this stage. This was seen as a particularly interesting question given the further radicalisation of the party towards the end of the century on issues of immigration. Cat. 5 is meant to assess the claim, constantly repeated by the detractors of the Lega, that all this movement really did was to exasperate the cultural distance between north and south on the one hand, the rich and the poor worlds on the other, through the demonisation of southerners and foreigners.

5.5.3 Design: units

Krippendorff describes *sampling units* as 'those parts of observed reality... that are regarded as independent of each other... so that the inclusion or exclusion of any one sampling unit as a datum in an analysis has neither logical nor empirical implications for choices among other units' (1980: 57); in this study these are full articles of various lengths published in different publications (which are described below). The recording unit -i.e. 'the specific segment of content that is characterised by placing it in a given category' (Holsti, 1969: 116)- is a sentence, or a fraction of a sentence, whenever it makes sense (if the whole sentence cannot be included). Context-units 'delineate that portion of the symbolic material that needs to be examined in order to characterise a recording unit' (Krippendorff, 1980: 59): in this analysis these are the articles. It is common for an article to discuss some economic activities -which are said to be peculiar to Padania- and oppose them to the economic realities of southern Italy only after a few sentences, if not at the very end. This comparison poses some problems to us: how are the first sentences to be considered? Do they fall into Cat. 1, or rather Cat. 5? The checks on reliability conducted by means of the 'blind repetition technique' (see below) revealed that category 5 often posed problems precisely because it was sometimes impossible to determine exactly where the 'oppositional stance' -which is the reason of existence of the category- actually made its first appearance in the context of an article. The context unit being the *whole article*, it seemed appropriate that such passages should entirely belong to Cat. 5. In the example above, what initially appears to be an analysis of some economic features of Padania, reveals itself to be a means to differentiate it from its 'other': this being true, Cat. 5 prevails. The same rule applies to the other categories, as 'symbols codetermine their interpretation and... they derive their meanings in part from the immediate environment in which they occur' (ibid.). Once these matters were settled, the coding of the material became more reliable.

5.5.4 Design: how to count

The method of 'counting the lines', popular among content analysts, is not suitable to the present analysis as lines come in various lengths in this literature. In fact, even different sections of the same magazine or newspaper sometimes present lines of different length. As a consequence, a different method had to be devised: the one chosen identifies the *principal* and *secondary* theme in each article. A theme was

classified as *principal* when it was to this theme that more space had been dedicated (in terms of number of lines) *in the context of the article in which it appeared*. The *secondary* theme was the one which classified as *second best*. When themes were third, fourth best etc. they were ignored. It was felt that it was important to keep track of when themes classified as secondary as well as principal, as a particular theme may recur very often, and yet always be outweighed by another one.

This method showed clear strengths as it allowed the researcher to decide which theme was principal and which one secondary just on the base of the number of lines dedicated to them, so as to preserve the quantitative aspect of the analysis. At the same time, such a method made it possible to compare the results of the analysis of different publications even when the length of the lines varied. Furthermore, this method reduced the risk of making mistakes (see 'inter-coder' reproducibility below).

5.6 The sample

5.6.1 Visiting the archives of the Lega Nord

An archive is a set of records, usually kept in some order -and not always for the benefit of academic research. The sample described below was collected in the archives of the Lega Nord, at the national centre of the party in Milan. Although the author has spent weeks in these archives, and sometimes on his own, the material studied does not include private (and least of all 'secret') documents that the party wanted to hide from public view. Moreover, the author resisted the suggestions of the head archivist that he could talk to various *leghisti* who worked in the centre that she could have introduced him to, and only contacted people in order to collect *factual* information. The reasons have been explained above. Indeed as a matter of principle there would have been no *need* whatsoever to visit the archives of the Lega, had all the material been available in libraries, or else on line. However, by visiting the archives:

- a) The writer got instant access to the *whole* corpus of material relevant to this research. The problem of missing issues of a paper (or the text of a speech) only presented itself a few times in about 6 weeks of research carried out on

the premises over two subsequent visits. This made it far easier for the author, firstly to decide what material to use, and secondly to collect a sample that was *truly* random⁶ once such a decision had been made.

- b) The author could copy documents that had indeed belonged to the public domain *in the past* (speeches given at conferences; wall-posters) but were no longer easily available elsewhere.

5.6.2 Description of the sample

The sample used is dual: a 'random sample' and a 'thematic sample'. In the random sample a large number of articles is used to establish thematic continuities in the Lega Nord's delineation of the new cultural identity of Padania; n = approximately 450 articles (maximum sample).

The random sample is made up of articles published in the period February 1996-September 1998 in *Lega Nord*, that later became the daily *La Padania*, and in *Il Sole delle Alpi* (from September 1997, issue 1, to September 1998). These publications are described below (see 'thematic sample'). The author claims that such publications are representative of the Lega's propaganda, as they enjoyed the largest circulation among the party's publications of the period, and as they were both *official* mouthpieces of the movement. After all, Umberto Bossi was 'Direttore politico' of *Lega Nord/ La Padania* - as the paper itself stated- and the 'Direttore responsabile', the person who would 'lead the team' on a daily basis, was Gianluca Marchi, in whom Bossi has placed his trust. In fact, he was made Director of *Il Sole delle Alpi*, too.

The sample is constituted by two issues a month of each publication, from which five articles have been analysed. Both the issues which had to be picked each month and the articles to be read have been chosen by using a random number table. This method was preferred to 'systematic sampling', which involves 'selecting every kth unit of a list into a sample after determining the starting point of the sequence at random' (Krippendorff, 1980: 67) in order to avoid possible bias: in fact, with 'systematic sampling' there is always the possibility that the length k would coincide with some cyclical regularities (ibid.).

Whether the size of the sample allows for generalisations to be made about the whole population is always a daunting question, especially when dealing with a virtually infinite population. Here the sample has been checked for appropriateness by using the 'split half technique' (ibid.: 69; also Gunter, 2002: 212), and is therefore seen as able to represent the entire population of political propaganda published by the League in the period considered (with the exclusion of regional and local publications).

In the 'thematic sample' a large number of articles *explicitly* dedicated to the cultural identity of Padania have been assembled from various publications of the movement, including two (1 and 2 below) that enjoyed a very limited circulation in the period considered. The aim here is to study the thematic continuities of the Lega's delineation of the new cultural identity of Padania *only* in those sections of the party's propaganda which have been dedicated to a definition of this identity, and see if there are relevant differences between the strategy employed here and the one of the propaganda as a whole.

The thematic sample is constituted by the following publications:

1. *Padanità*. Very few copies of this paper were published during the period, and yet this is significant as the definition of the *identità padana* provides the reason for its very existence. *Padanità* ('Padanness') was published for the very first time at the end of the period covered by this research, so that only four issues could be included in the present analysis (March 1998- September 1998). Total material analysed: about fifty pages (60 articles).
2. *Quaderni Padani*. This is published every two months by 'La Libera Compagnia Padana', an organisation created to study and promote the culture and identity of Padania. The editors of this publication put forward how important it was to discuss the culture and history of Padania in a period in which some federalist movements (read: the Lega Nord) were raising the awareness of this nation among its people, however by focusing on the economic and social aspect of their protest at the expense of cultural issues (Anonymous in *Quaderni Padani*, 1995: 1-2).

Although officially independent from the organisation of the League, this magazine has been included in our analysis for a variety of reasons:

- a) the chief editor of *Quaderni Padani*, Gilberto Oneto, is a personal friend of the leader of the Lega Nord⁷, writes for media of the movement such as the daily *La Padania* and *Il Sole delle Alpi*, takes part in the transmissions of 'Radio Padania Libera' and was made 'Minister of Culture' in the 'sunshine' Padanian government (see chapter 4). Moreover, Oneto is the author of the book *L'Invenzione della Padania* (1997) that has been used extensively in chapters 6 and 7.
 - b) The *Quaderni* are sold by Lega's supporters to other militants at the rallies of the movement and at the party's national centre, together with the Lega's own publications⁸. In other words they are seen as publications of the movement *by the militants themselves*. Every single page of *Quaderni Padani* is dedicated to the definition of the Identità Padana. A 50% sample of this publication (alternate, whole issues), from March 1996 to September 1998 has been analysed (about 150 articles, 400 pages).
3. *Lega Nord*, weekly paper, then replaced by the daily *La Padania*. A 50 per cent sample of this newspaper (alternate issues), from March 1996 to September 1998 has been used to locate articles dealing with the definition of Padania. *La Padania* claimed a circulation of a hundred thousand copies in the year 2000⁹. Total material analysed: 250 pages, about 500 articles.
 4. *Il Sole delle Alpi*. A 50 percent sample of this monthly magazine (alternate issues, from the first issue in 1997 to September 1998) has been used to locate articles dealing with the definition of Padania. *Il Sole delle Alpi* claimed a circulation of twenty thousand copies in the year 2000¹⁰. Total material analysed: 100 articles, 250 pp.

5.7 Reliability as 'stability' and as 'inter-coder reproducibility'

5.7.1 Reliability as 'stability'

It is always necessary to assess the extent to which an analysis represents variations in real phenomena, rather than the prejudices of the analyst. This is all the more necessary in this case, as we are dealing with thematic categories which are elusive and extremely difficult to define.

For Krippendorff 'to test reliability, some duplication of efforts is essential. A reliable procedure should yield the same results from the same set of phenomena regardless of the circumstances of application' (1980: 129). The reliability of this research has been tested on a portion of the sample before the analysis took place. The first test employed the so-called 'blind repetition technique' whereby the same coder (the writer, in this case) analyses the same material twice at different points in time and finds out if s/he is being consistent with her/himself (ibid. 130 and 131). This is the weakest form of reliability and it is known as 'stability' (ibid.). If not even the same coder can make the same judgements twice, then there must be a problem with the way categories have been defined and with their general appropriateness in dealing with the material under study. The results of the 'blind repetition' exercise done by the author on a sample of eighty articles taken from the thematic sample (40 from *Il Sole* and 40 from *La Padania*) were as follows:

Table 2 (Reliability as stability)

Comparison between first and second reading, categories as principal

LaPad/Il Sole	Perc.age (%) 1st reading	Perc.age (%) 2 nd reading	Discrepancy (%)
1 pr	/	/	/
2 pr	/	/	/
3 pr	29	25	4
4 pr	/	/	/
5 pr	61.2	70.9	9.7
6 pr	9.8	4.1	5.7

Table 3 (Reliability as stability)

Comparison between first and second reading, categories as secondary

LaPad/Il Sole	Perc.age (%) 1 st reading	Perc.age (%) 2 nd reading	Discrepancy (%)
1 sec	3.2	/	3.2
2 sec	/	/	/
3 sec	6.4	12.9	6.5
4 sec	/	/	/
5 sec	9.6	6.4	3.2
6 sec	80.8	80.7	0.1

Overall, although the conclusions to be drawn on the basis of these readings would have been similar, categories 3 and 5 being the only two that were considerably represented in the sample¹¹, there were, nonetheless, differences that needed to be addressed. In particular, the two readings differed as to the size of Cat. 5, which was partially caused by some exchanges between 5pr and 5sec. Above (see 'Design: units') we discussed what had been done to address this problem. The reliability of the analysis was, as a consequence, greatly improved, as confirmed by the second reliability test below.

5.7.2 Reliability as 'inter-coder reproducibility'

The second test was aimed at comparing the coding carried out by two different interpreters of 80 more articles taken from the thematic sample (40 from *Il Sole* and 40 from *La Padania*). This procedure is appropriate to assess 'reproducibility', i.e. a stronger form of reliability defined as 'the degree to which a process can be recreated... using different coders' (Krippendorff, 1980: 131). Reproducibility is obviously a much stronger indication of reliability than mere stability, as it involves using different interpreters.

The results of the test were as follows:

Table 4 (Inter-coder reproducibility)

Comparison between first and second reading, categories as principal.

Il Sole/La Pad	Perc.age (%) 1 st reading	Perc.age (%) 2 nd reading	Discrepancy (%)
1 pr	6.4	7.2	0.8
2 pr	/	/	/
3 pr	19	22.2	3.2
4 pr	/	/	/
5 pr	42.2	38.4	3.8
6 pr	32.4	32.2	0.2

Table 5 (Inter-coder reproducibility)

Comparison between first and second reading, categories as secondary.

LaPad/Il Sole	Perc.age (%) 1st reading	Perc.age (%) 2 nd reading	Discrepancy (%)
1 sec	3.2	2.2	1
2 sec	0.5	/	0.5
3 sec	5.6	6.9	1.3
4 sec	/	/	/
5 sec	12.6	11.6	1
6 sec	78.1	79.3	1.2

Although there were differences between the two readers (which were expected, given the thematic nature of these categories) the changes introduced after the first test had had the effect to improve the reliability of the analysis. In fact, discrepancies like the ones shown above are not as such to invalidate the results of the analysis. If anything, the question which should be asked is why the two readings did not differ to a greater extent, given the amount of interpretation required by a thematic content analysis.

Arguably, this similarity is also a function of the technique employed for counting, which greatly reduces the discrepancies between different coders. In fact, a category is always recorded as principal whether the lines highlighted by the coder are 78 or 82, as long as there is a consistent gap between it and whatever category classifies as secondary (when a secondary category appears, which is often not the case). Problems may, and do arise, therefore, only when: a) coders completely disagree on the interpretation of an article -which is rare, due to the simplicity of the language employed by the party (Iacopini and Bianchi, 1994); or b) when the principal and secondary category are of a similar size, as in this case it becomes vital that both coders count exactly the same number of sentences as instances of a particular category.

On the other hand, this analysis is only valid insofar as it gives us an opportunity to make comments on the general trends which emerge in this propaganda. It does not make any sense to try to read a variation of 0.5 per cent, as this is well within the average margin of error which is here 0.92 per cent; moreover the results presented below are very straightforward and easy to read, with the unquestionable preponderance of only two categories (a tendency already revealed by the tests). It can thus be safely stated that this content analysis brings to the fore what was a very clear-cut choice of the party, i.e. to base their communication strategy only around a few key themes.

5.8 Results of the analysis

5.8.1 Random sample: results of the analysis

The results of the content analysis are presented below. As far as the random sample is concerned, the majority of themes (mainly coverage of the acts of government, controversies with other parties, foreign affairs, and so on) have nothing to do with defining identity, thus falling in Cat. 6. The situation is reversed in the case of the thematic sample (see below) as only articles dealing *with* the identity of Padania were singled out in this case. As a consequence, here Cat. 6 tends to be very limited.

Table 6: Analysis of the random sample, *Il Sole delle Alpi*

(categories as principal)	Perc.age (%)	categories as secondary)	Perc.age (%)
1 pr	2.6	1 sec	1.3
2 pr	1.3	2 sec	1.3
3 pr	14.4	3 sec	/
4 pr	/	4 sec	/
5 pr	10.5	5 sec	2.6
6 pr	71.2	6 sec	94.8

Sub-categories (within cat 5):

5a pr	10.5	5a sec	2.6
5b pr	/	5b sec	/

Different categories are represented here, however they appear only sporadically, with the notable exception of categories 3 and 5. This will be confirmed to be the general trend elsewhere, too. Cat. 3 is here the most represented: indeed the presence of cultural and historical topics can be explained by considering the aims and target audience of this publication. As the Director himself explained (Marchi, in *Il Sole delle Alpi*, 1997), in fact, *Il Sole* wanted to avoid talking about politics all the time and entertain the *whole* family¹². Category 5 is also strong, and the Padanian identity is presented as the 'other' of Italians and southern Italians, with no attention given to extra-Europeans.

Table 7: Analysis of the random sample, *Lega Nord/La Padania*

(categories as principal)	Perc.age (%)	(categories as secondary)	Perc.age (%)
1 pr	0.9	1 sec	0.9
2 pr	/	2 sec	/
3 pr	1.4	3 sec	/
4 pr	/	4 sec	/
5 pr	22	5 sec	0.9
6 pr	75.7	6 sec	98.2

Sub-categories (within cat 5):

5a pr	17.3	5a sec	0.9
5b pr	4.7	5b sec	/

Here we are dealing with the flagship of Lega's publications, the once weekly *Lega Nord*, then daily *La Padania*. This newspaper outweighs all other publications in terms of circulation and now allows the Lega to comment on political events on a daily basis. Here Cat. 5 is the only one to show a considerable presence, and within it sub-category 5b is a mere third of 5a. Overall, there are no doubts that here the Padanian identity is *constantly* defined by means of opposition, which vindicates the perceptions of CdS discussed above.

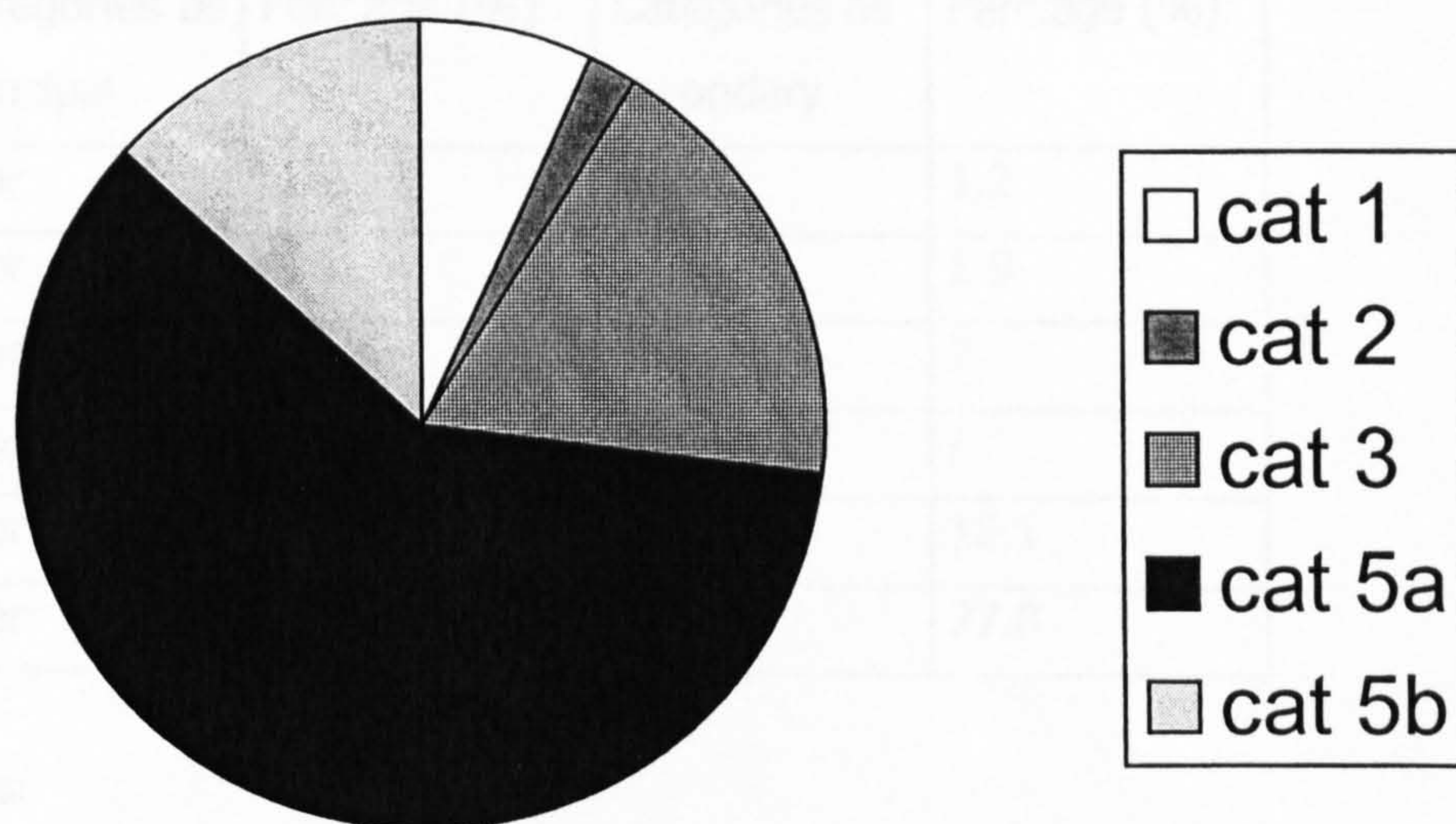
The analysis of the random sample is of fundamental importance as it gives us an opportunity to assess what is the relative weight of the various themes in the propaganda of the Lega. The table below should clarify things further by showing the overall comparative results of the analysis, where figures express the relative weight of each category in relation to the total (with the exclusion of Cat. 6). A score of 2 has been awarded to every instance of a category as *principal*, 1 when it appeared as secondary: the total obtained by summing up these scores equalling 100 per cent, the relative weight of each category has then been calculated. The table tells a story to which we are becoming accustomed, with the clear preponderance of Cat. 5a, a

considerable presence of cat 3 and a cat 5b which is worth mentioning, although in no way dominant.

Table 8: Overall comparative results of the random sample.

Categories	weight
Cat 1	7
Cat 2	2
Cat 3	18
Cat 4	0
Cat 5a	60
Cat 5b	13

Table 9: Comparative overall presence of categories (random sample) with the exclusion of cat. 6



5.8.2 Thematic sample: results of the analysis

More categories than before make an appearance below, as articles have been included in this sample only when *explicitly* addressing issues of identity definition.¹³

Table 10: Analysis of the thematic sample, *Quaderni Padani*

Categories as principal	Perc.age (%)	Categories as Secondary	Perc.age (%)
1 pr	/	1 sec	/
2 pr	14.2	2 sec	8.5
3 pr	41.4	3 sec	15.7
4 pr	/	4 sec	1.4
5 pr	41.4	5 sec	18.5
6 pr	3	6 sec	55.9

Sub-categories:

5a pr	41.4	5a sec	15.7
5b pr	/	5b sec	2.8

Table 11: Analysis of the thematic sample, *Lega Nord/La Padania*.

Categories as principal	Perc.age (%)	Categories as secondary	Perc.age (%)
1 pr	1.2	1 sec	1.2
2 pr	5.1	2 sec	1.9
3 pr	15.3	3 sec	7
4 pr	1.2	4 sec	/
5 pr	58.8	5 sec	12.1
6 pr	18.4	6 sec	77.8

Sub-categories:

5a pr	54.4	5a sec	10.9
5b pr	4.4	5b sec	1.9

Table 12: Analysis of the thematic sample, *Padanità*

Categories as principal	Perc.age (%)	Categories as secondary	Perc.age (%)
1 pr	/	1 sec	/
2 pr	8.3	2 sec	16.6
3 pr	16.6	3 sec	/
4 pr	/	4 sec	/
5 pr	33.3	5 sec	25
6 pr	41.8	6 sec	58.4

Sub-categories:

5a pr	33.3	5a sec	25
5b pr	/	5b sec	/

Table 13: Analysis of the thematic sample, *Il Sole delle Alpi*.

Categories as principal	Perc.age (%)	Categories as secondary	Perc.age (%)
1 pr	4.8	1 sec	7.3
2 pr	/	2 sec	4.8
3 pr	34.1	3 sec	/
4 pr	2.4	4 sec	/
5 pr	34	5 sec	12.1
6 pr	24.7	6 sec	75.8

Sub-categories:

5a pr	29.2	5a sec	9.7
5b pr	4.8	5b sec	2.4

The variations between different publications say a lot about their nature and target readership, but do not alter the overall picture we have already seen, in terms of

what categories have been shown to prevail. As far as *Quaderni Padani* is concerned, it has been stressed above that each and every article of this publication focuses on a definition of the 'identità padana', given the editors' belief that issues of identity had not been thoroughly discussed among northern separatists. This explains the considerable presence of cat 2pr and the fact that categories are this time much better balanced. However, even in this case, the reader is confronted by the usual predominance of issues of history and culture, as well as the rejection of difference.

This is a trend that is repeated across the whole of the thematic sample. While *I Quaderni*, perhaps not surprisingly, do not pay much attention to the claim that Padania is characterised by its own 'way of production', in *Il Sole*, which dedicated one of its sections to exploring the different productive realities of the 'nation', Cat. 1 is present. *La Padania* is the other publication where the category makes an appearance. Here issues concerning the economy are indeed debated frequently, however the analysis shows that in general it is rare for writers to ground their 'identity-work' in the specific productive realities of the north. We have spoken of Cat. 2 with reference to *I Quaderni*. The category is not marginal in *La Padania*, too, as again a section of the paper was dedicated to issues such as forgotten 'histories' and languages to be rediscovered; in *Padanità* the category is also of noticeable size, especially as secondary, however it is again overtaken by the usual 3 and 5, as it happens elsewhere. Category 4 is basically non-existent, neither here nor in the random sample, while Cat. 5a confirms its overwhelming preponderance across both samples. The case of *La Padania* is particularly significant as here the category almost reaches a staggering 60 per cent while remaining the strongest of all as a secondary category, too. This is because *La Padania* was (and is) meant to be the mouthpiece of the party, as pointed out above, and thus focused (and still focuses) on the daily political struggles with other parties, as well as the polemics with the central state and the south through which the Lega -it is apparent here- strove to attract votes and build up its image. Also, it is in *La Padania* that 5b shows some considerable presence.

5.9 Conclusions of Chapter 5

This content analysis asserts that the idea of Padania was built on 'exclusion' and defined through it, although neither a definition of Padanian identity hinging on

blood and race, nor a particular focus on *foreign* immigrants have been noted in the separatist period. In fact, despite the passionate rejection of multiculturalism in Bossi's books and speeches since the very beginning of his experience as leader of the Lega¹⁴, it is quite rare –although not unseen– for the Lega Nord to exploit 'traditional racism' (i.e. an ideology assuming that cultures and communities are genetically determined) until the end of the nineties. This has already been noted by Biorcio (1997: 146-149) and Gomez Reino-Chacafeiro (2002: 124) and was confirmed by the present research. As discussed in the next chapter, the refusal of the 'other' could be better characterised as 'xenophobia of the professional man', a refusal underpinned by a disdain for 'uncivilised', 'underdeveloped' people who are said to lack a western work-ethic¹⁵. Not that the Lega has ever been on good terms with foreign immigrants, of course:

- a) the issue is, in fact, further complicated by the violence of the language employed against foreigners, about which a quantitative analysis such as this one says *absolutely nothing*,
- b) The Lega's posters suggest that after 1998, when the separatist rhetoric was abandoned, the foreigner became indeed a *main* target. An analysis of the 30 posters published by the League between October 1999 and March 2001 supports this assertion. In this period one finds only two posters containing offensive definitions of Rome, Italy, Italians or southern Italians (about 7 per cent), while *five* (17 per cent) attack immigrants and two (7 per cent) target homosexuals¹⁶. That is to say: if a thorough analysis of the propaganda of the post-separatist phase confirmed what, at this stage, are just suggestions, then the Lega would be exposed as still insisting on the rejection of the other, although changing its targets. The following chapters will discuss why the author thinks this is indeed the case.

We now hold as a certainty that the Padanian identity was constructed through exclusion: what is needed at this stage is an in-depth analysis of the party's propaganda which eventually enables us to discuss what this specific case-study says about nationalism (cf. chap. 8). In the chapters that follow this research thus focuses on the themes which have been exposed as the dominant ones in quantitative terms: history and culture on the one hand, difference and exclusion on the other.

Notes:

¹ E.g. the role of religion in differentiating between the British and French identities (Colley, 1992).

² For a definition of 'agenda setting' see Cohen, 1963: 13.

³ Admitting the existence of Padania as a nation would have opened the door to re-writing the Italian constitution (in fact, the 5th article forbids the partition of the country). In May 1996, after the general elections won by Romano Prodi, the deputies of the Lega in the Camera dei Deputati tried in vain to re-name their group as, firstly, 'Parlamento Padano', failing that 'Gruppo Padania Indipendente'. Both names were rejected by the President of the Chamber as they suggested the actual *existence* of entities (a concurrent Parliament, a nation other than Italy within its borders) which the Constitution does not contemplate (see Atti Parlamentari, Camera dei Deputati, XIII legislatura, 22 May 1996). The *leghista* group had to settle for 'Lega per l'indipendenza della Padania' (League *for* the independence of Padania), a name giving expression to a political objective rather than stating a matter of fact -therefore deemed acceptable by the Presidency.

⁴ Some of these wall posters appear at the end of Lega Nord ed. (1996), the others are available at the national centre of Lega Nord in Milano.

⁵ Personal conversation with Mario Cavallin, responsible for the graphics of the party, in April 2000.

⁶ A sample is truly random when *each* unit in a population has exactly the same chances of being selected.

⁷ Personal conversation with Gilberto Oneto in April 2001.

⁸ Personal conversation with the manager of the store of the national centre of the LN, April 2001.

⁹ Data provided by the national centre of the Lega Nord in April 2001

¹⁰ Data provided by the national centre of the Lega Nord in April 2001. However it should be noted that, according to some employees of the party, in this case the figures provided might have been conflated by the editorial team (although no-one was able to indicate the extent of this phenomenon).

¹¹ Cat. 6 does not count, given its 'catch-all' role.

¹² For some time in the index of contents of each issue different colours signalled which articles had been written 'for him' (the father), which for 'her' and which for the kids. The decision to categorise articles in this way reveals a great deal about how gender and parental roles were conceived within the editorial team of the magazine, of course, if not within the Lega itself; indeed such clear categorisation would deserve to be studied in some detail. In fact, as we may expect from a movement fighting against homosexuality and the lack of values of an 'upside-down' world, all articles covering politics belonged to the blue section (for him), articles about personal relationships, the care of the body and how to look after children were supposed to be 'for her', while music, drug related problems and sex is what apparently interested the kids ('grown-ups', one would assume). The idea of the colours only lasted until issue no. 7 and was then abandoned. The editorials of Marchi also became more politicised after a while, signaling a change in *Il Sole* which reflected the radicalisation of the Lega throughout 1997.

¹³ The judgment of inclusion has been based on the article's headline.

¹⁴ Good examples are the speeches 'The multiracial society is against humanity' given at the Party's conference of Segrate in 1989 (re-printed in Bossi, 1999: 129-130) and the chapter on 'immigration and racism' in Bossi and Vimercati (1992: 141-150).

¹⁵ We are not saying that the propaganda of the Lega is totally blind to colour: on the contrary, it can be argued that the term 'nero' (sometimes 'negro') maintains negative connotations in this literature, and that colour remains a central marker of difference. And yet allegedly backwards nationalities (e.g. the menacing Albanese), irreducibly 'other' cultures (the Islamic 'threat') and a perceived different attitude towards work (the southern Italian 'parasite') all play a role that is far more important than race and genetics, as will be seen in the next chapter.

¹⁶ Available at the national centre of the Lega Nord.

CHAPTER 6

'Terroni' and 'Extra-communitari': The 'unprofessional other' in the propaganda of the Lega Nord.

6.1 Introduction to Chapter 6

The core of this chapter consists of a textual analysis of a series of Lega documents: this analysis, and its relation to what has been done above, are explained in the next section. After a discussion of the methodology we will thus consider how the 'other' was posited in the *propaganda leghista*, by looking at the representation of both the southern Italian and the foreign migrant before, during and after the nationalist period.

6.2 Methodology 2. Content and textual analyses

Analyses of party propaganda often come in the form of what is presented as a 'close', attentive reading of one or more texts which have been judged by the observer to be representative of the production of a particular movement; at times, the writer makes it explicit why a particular document needs considering (e.g. Cento Bull and Gilbert, 2001: 113), while at times the unspoken assumption is that certain texts are representative of a political era (e.g. Cheles, 2001). As seen in the preceding chapter, content analysis confirms the centrality of party mobilisation against migrants (first of all *internal* migrants) for the Lega, as proposed by Balbo and Manconi (1992) and Biorcio (1997), while also revealing the significance of the theme of a common culture and history in the process of 'imagining' Padania. However, the method of CA is limited by well-known characteristics:

- a) Firstly, a content analysis says nothing about the *context* in which messages are received and their varying interpretations by different readers¹. This is hardly a problem here anyway, as the present research is neither concerned with evaluating the impact of the Lega's propaganda on voters, nor with the

effectiveness or otherwise of the party's strategies. This study only focuses on how Padania has been 'constructed' and 'communicated' through political propaganda, i.e. on the *message* itself, as explained in the introduction.

- b) Secondly, while insistence on a theme is a quite good indication of its importance in the context of the propaganda of a political movement –this being the justification for undertaking a quantitative analysis in the first place– the language used, as well as the style of communication, are obviously crucial, too, and yet the CA presented above says nothing about them.
- c) Thirdly, the quantitative analysis presented above is not able to investigate if the party's handling of the themes studied by the present research *changed at all* throughout the years. In fact, while the party's deployment of the history of the north does not seem to have evolved, the discussion of immigration and difference *certainly has*, and in a relatively short period of time, as found by the qualitative analysis presented below.
- d) Fourthly, CA does not address the relationship *between* themes in the Lega's discourse. For instance, it is reasonable to ask whether the party's discussion of the 'problem' of immigration has been informed by their understanding of the peculiarity of the Padanian economy, or whether their claim of a common Padanian history relies at all on the issue of a common language, and so forth.
- e) Finally, 'context' also means the relationship between propaganda and the political events that take place outside the world of 'discourse', whether at the level of national or rather of that of party politics. The CA is silent on this, too.

Manning and Cullum-Swan (1994: 463) point out that 'The dominance of quantitative methods has resulted in an underdeveloped theory of qualitative textual analysis'. Furthermore, all qualitative methods, whether employed in the social sciences or in communication studies, suffer from limitations *themselves*, which are the obverse of those of quantitative methods –i.e. lack of reliability and an apparent over-reliance on the intuition of observers and their ability to perceive unstated -or also *partly stated*- links/similarities between the data. Whilst this is undeniable, on the other hand qualitative methods offer the opportunity to analyse issues and themes in some depth, and, crucially here, by listening to the people who are the object of the investigation expressing themselves in their own words, as has been pointed out by scholars within the social sciences (e.g. Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983; Silverman

ed., 1997; Alasuutari, 1998) as well as communication studies (e.g. Alasuutari, 1995; Newbold et al. eds., 2002). Moreover, even if a quantitative CA offers some degree of reliability -as discussed in chapter 5- it is, on the other hand, bound to the categories chosen beforehand by the interpreter and judged as able to reveal something of the reality under investigation (Mudde, 2000: 22-23). This is in itself -and inevitably- a qualitative operation (as pointed out in chapter 5) because these categories proceed from a previous interrogation of the material at hand and a reflection about what needed to be uncovered:

codes are organising principles that are not set in stone. They are our own creation, in that we identify and create them ourselves. They are tools to think with. They can be expanded, changed or scrapped altogether as our ideas develop through repeated interactions with the data. Starting to create categories is a way of beginning to read and think about the data in a systematic and organised way. (Coffey and Atkinson, quoted in Mudde, 2000: 23).

Thus a qualitative moment preceded the content analysis and made it possible, and a further qualitative analysis now follows it. By combining the strengths of both quantitative and qualitative methods, the present research, therefore: asks CA, first of all, to provide a reliable indication of what were the themes dominating the Lega's propaganda in the period under analysis, among a series of themes which had been selected, and then further explores the two themes which have emerged as dominant by deploying a textual analysis of the same political material.

By embracing a comparative method, the textual analysis which follows in this and the next chapter seeks isomorphism in various instances of communication, as well as establishing a dialogue between documents of the same period so that they can illuminate and clarify each-other. In so doing, the work presented in chapters 6 and 7 complements the quantitative study introduced above in the following ways:

- 1) It considers and discusses the recurrence of key ideas in different contexts. Such recurrence does not always and necessarily depend on the same word being used. At times the same word may appear, at times it does not, however its meaning is inflected by context. It is indeed crucial to notice and

reflect upon such co-occurrence of key terms and/or (partial) changes of meaning and/or contradictions in the party's documents. For instance, terms such as 'difference', 'diversity', 'heterogeneity' are here (and in chapters 7 and 8) revealed as central to the Lega's discursive strategy in the creation of Padania. Despite the Lega usually rejecting 'other' cultures with the aim of preserving northern Italian identities -as this research has just demonstrated- a contradiction opens up in so far as the terms mentioned above are at times (and by influential writers) employed to describe 'positive' features of Padania. If southerners and foreigners are seen as a threat insofar as they 'contaminate' the Padanian identity, a 'lack of homogeneity' *within* the borders of Padania is also -and often- celebrated as a value. Contradictions such as this need to be explored by comparing different uses of concepts in different contexts. Another example of a comparison between different documents is the discussion of the term 'postmodern' that follows below. This research claims that the significance of the term in the propaganda of the party can only be appreciated when linked to 'post-ideological' and understood with reference to an Italian pre-1990s political environment that saw voters identifying strongly with different political cultures, quite apart from what actual parties were able (and willing) to 'deliver'.

- 2) It addresses what has been listed as the second weakness of the present CA ('b' above), i.e. its obliviousness to the style and choice of terminology characterising the party's propaganda. A close reading of the material will reveal what specific terms have been employed in the definition of southerners and foreigners, by considering similarities and differences in the treatment of the two groups: for instance, the use of dialect in a particularly offensive poster of 1998 will be discussed below. Furthermore, chapter 7 will uncover what was said by the Lega about the populations which were alleged to provide the ancestry of Padanians.
- 3) It addresses point c above by considering how the Lega's discourse *evolved* and changed through time, when it did. It will emerge that there is a radicalisation of tones in the anti-immigration discourse of the party towards the end of the period covered by this research, a stance that was destined to harden even further at the turn of the century. Such notation will be grounded on an analysis of the language used by the Lega since the end of the period, which suggests a movement towards essentialism.

- 4) It pays attention to the relationship between the various themes which are central to the Lega's rhetoric (point d above) and to their coherence or otherwise. For instance, in chapter 6 an inward-looking, defensive approach to migration will be exposed as being at odds with Lega's understanding of Padania as a very modern, open-minded, post-fordist productive reality. This apparent contradiction will need further exploration in the last chapter of this thesis (chapter 8), where the debate on nationalism and globalisation will again take centre-stage.
- 5) Finally, the discussion that follows here and in chapters 7 and 8 explores the links between discourse and political events, as they have been presented to the reader in chapters 3 and 4.

6.3 The evolution of the anti-other discourse: 'southerners' before 1996

While chapter 3 looked at the rapport between the Lega Lombarda and the Liga Veneta in organisational and financial terms without focusing on their propaganda, this section will pay some further attention to the *ideological* convergence between the message of the two parties in the period preceding 1996: this will introduce the analysis of the period covered by this thesis (1996-1998).

Even before the 'separatist years', the principal 'enemy' of the northern Italian –in the words of both the LV and the LL- was not the African nor the Albanian, but indeed the Italian from the south, the 'meridionale' or 'terrone'². By resorting to a populist and simplifying rhetoric, the Liga Veneta had striven to revive the regional identity of the people of Veneto and turn them against the central state in the pursuit of regional autonomy, giving voice to a perceived political marginalisation of areas whose economic importance and average income were growing fast, but whose political weight was claimed (by the *leghisti*) to be non-existent.

Following in the Liga Veneta's footsteps, the LL took issue with southerners, too. The struggle of both movements against the widespread practice of the 'confino obbligatorio', whereby convicted 'Mafiosi' were taken to a town in the north after having served their sentence, as they were banned from their region of origin, offers

a good case-study. Both movements based their opposition to this practice on the claim that they did not want a 'southern Mafioso culture' to be disseminated in the north (cf. chapter 3). However the 'criminal southerner' was most certainly not the only target of these movements during these years: it seems that the 'terrone' hard-worker had to be made to leave as well. The first programme of the Lega Autonomista Lombarda, in dealing with unemployment demanded that Lombardian workers should be given *precedence* when trying to get a job in Lombardia; furthermore, it proposed "the creation of an economic environment that could make it easier for immigrants to go back to their father-lands" (reprinted in Vimercati, 1990: 151); naturally, at this stage the 'immigrant' means the southern Italian (cf. chapter 3). The Lega Autonomista Lombarda was thus trying to exploit the prejudices of northern Italians against southerners in order to make the front pages and justify the party's claims for autonomy (according to Bossi himself, in Bossi and Vimercati, 1992: 174).

In the first statute of the party³ the *leghisti* (i.e. Bossi and a few others, at this stage) claimed that the political leadership of the country had found an easy solution to both unemployment and the underdevelopment of the south: they had decided to displace masses of southerners at the expense of the Lombards, their culture and their way of life. Thus the Lega constantly represented Lombardia as an economically dynamic community which was exploited, silenced and humiliated by the 'hegemony of Southerners'⁴. While the north was modernising its productive structures to compete in the global market, southerners were happy to rely on the assistance of the state (paid for by the north), or alternatively worked in the unproductive sectors of the bureaucracy and the public service by emigrating to the north (Bossi and Vimercati, 1992: 171- 183). Following the logic of the LAL, the struggle against the inefficiencies of the bureaucracy had thus to go hand in hand with the opposition to the mentality of southern Italians, the two being two sides of the same coin.

It should be noted that there has been a certain consistency in the message of the Lega since its origins: the southerner has always been either dangerous, or parasitic or, at best, unproductive. The more moderate tone adopted by the Lega in 1993 and 1994 (following its new found respectability as a party with firstly local, and then national governing responsibilities), did not characterise its style for long, as already pointed out elsewhere (cf. chapters 3 and 4). After the fall of the first Berlusconi

government, the Lega Nord turned into a separatist movement and the opposition to the South was again placed at the core of their strategy (cf. Biorcio, 1997: 134). There has not been any 'substitution effect' of the anti-southerner with an anti-foreigner rhetoric in the separatist phase, the two strategies rather reinforcing each other, and the former having provided the latter with many of its defining themes -as Gomez-Reino Cachafeiro claims (2002: 122) and as this thesis confirms.

6.4 A 'Mafioso' state, an unprofessional southerner: the year 1996.

As we have seen above (cf. chap. 4), the period leading to the elections of 1996 (won by Romano Prodi and his 'Olive-Tree' coalition) had been eventful for all political formations, and perhaps especially challenging for the Northern League, given the party was running an election outside (and in opposition to) both the coalitions of the right and the left.

In this section the discussion of anti-southerners propaganda will be based on the analysis of two wall-posters published at the end of 1995 (appendixes 3 and 5) and a series of articles published in *Lega Nord*. As Cheles notes, the poster is 'a quintessentially Italian medium' (2001: 125): given the multitude of parties in the country, many of which unable to control large resources, while being refused air-time by a public broadcasting service that was in the hands of the big governing parties, this is not surprising. Moreover, there was a centuries-old Catholic tradition of using artistic forms for persuasive ends in the country, one that had been given new impetus by the fascist regime itself (ibid.). However, the Lega saved this medium from oblivion in an age in which all other formations were relying more and more on television, as has already been stressed. The importance of wall-posters for the *leghisti* is in fact confirmed by the decision of the Lega to publish them in book form (see Lega Nord ed., 1996)⁵. As far as the articles are concerned, one of those discussed below shows striking similarities with one of the posters just mentioned in its argumentation, while the second is included because of its date of publication: it came out just after Padania had been declared 'independent' (cf. chap. 4) and it was intended to spell out precisely what sort of community Padania *would become* now that it had found its freedom.

Appendix 3 shows a poster printed in December 1995 which is a recycled version of one originally published in 1988 (Appendix 4). Under the banner: 'Independence North' (grammatically incorrect in Italian as it is in English), the flag of the party carries the image of the leader of the original Lega Lombarda (Alberto da Giussano) and the slogan 'Republic of the North'. Below, the 'northern hen' lays golden eggs which are then collected by a peasant-looking middle-aged woman epitomising the capital of the state.

There are important changes here since the version of 1988:

- a) The golden eggs do not symbolise the hard-work of Lombardia alone anymore, given the new strategy of unity of all Padanians proposed (and at times imposed on the party)⁶ by Umberto Bossi since the creation of the Lega Nord out of pre-existing regional formations;
- b) The concluding sentence in Milanese dialect ('The tricolour we do not want') has gone;
- c) Gone was also the rhyme on the right hand side, so that the attention of the viewer was now attracted by the simple and yet effective message conveyed by the cartoon alone. The rhyme read 'The Lombard hen lays golden eggs for Rome and further down! All of them end up fried in a pan and never come back to us!'
- d) Interestingly, also the 'centre' and the 'south' of Italy were gone, as if magically 'wiped off' the map. Although northern Italy was still called 'nord' and not 'Padania' -as will be the case just a few months later- the vanishing of Italy was consistent with the new strategy adopted by the Lega in this period, whereby Padania started being proposed as a nation *in its own right*, and no longer the north of 'another' country. What were the borders of such nation was made clear in yet another poster published a few months later, where the 'rest of Italy' had been wiped off the map once again.⁷

Overall, the tone of the poster was meant to be funny -after all the north itself was represented as a hen⁸. However, it was not a coincidence if Rome was here personified by a peasant-like middle-aged woman. The significance of this choice will indeed become apparent later, once more examples of 'southern backwardness' have been discussed.

So far, we only know that Rome exploits the north. But for what purposes? Where does the money go?

There is an answer in the poster shown as appendix 5: here the 'north' was sliding into a tricoloured funnel where it got minced by 'the wheels of the state' (the taxman?) and was thus 'miraculously' reduced to money. The coins and notes coming out the bottom of the funnel were then dissipated, it was suggested, in one of the following ways:

- 1) 'bogus disabled', a reference to the unusual number of people retired on grounds of disability in some areas of the south (a concept insisted upon in the same period, e.g. 'La Rubrica Silenziosa' in *I Quaderni Padani*, Anno 1, no. 2, Autunno 1995);
- 2) the Mafia, i.e. through companies taking out contracts with the state or local administrations;
- 3) waste, a reference to the many public works started and only half-finished -or also the money spent by the state to maintain a PA which was alleged to be useless;
- 4) 'assistenzialismo', whereby the state poured large sums of money into providing for sections of the population in particular areas by giving them 'hand-outs' or by supporting their economy. The policy of 'assistenzialismo', an all time favourite of the Christian Democrats, was aimed at securing the political support of the population in poor areas by turning whole towns into 'parasites' of the central administration.

At the bottom one finds (yet again) the slogan 'The tricolour we do not want', although this time in Italian -the only language all Padanians share, after all. It was the state -clearly epitomised by the tricolour -which was accused of stealing and then wasting the money of the north here, not the southerners, however the poster nonetheless asserted the opposition between north and south. In fact, firstly, it was only the money of the north that was alleged to have been dissipated, and, secondly, all the alleged causes of waste (with the possible exception of no. 3, which is very generic) were inevitably associated with the south in political discourse.⁹

It is easy to imagine what must have been the force of such arguments in the Italy of the mid-nineties when keeping in mind how ramified and all embracing had been the network of corruption unearthed by the 'Mani Pulite' investigations (cf. chapter 3). Interestingly, the wall-poster just seen was reprinted in *Lega Nord* on 26 February 1996 (p. 2), next to an article titled 'People, break the chains of the colonialism of Rome' by Gabriella Poli. This is the first article we will consider in this section.

In Poli's piece the opposition between north and south became the opposition between the *European culture* of Padania on the one hand, and 'Rome' on the other; the capital was accused of *dissipating* what Padania had produced with its hard work. The article spelt out those defects of Rome and the south (backwardness, a culture of illegality and parasitism) which the poster had mentioned. Showing that this propaganda could reach high degrees of internal coherence, the writer, in the usual derogatory tones, talked of the existence of a 'north, Padania' which could not afford to 'miss the train to Europe' (ibid.), and the Rome of 'centralism, corruption, waste, the Mafia, the vote of exchange, unjustified disability pensions, a culture of rights in the south and duties in the north' (ibid.) as its opposite.

'Missing the train to Europe' was a very popular metaphor in Italy at that time: it meant being excluded from the first group of countries joining the EMU, which, as we have seen, was a very realistic prospect indeed given the massive amount of debts the country had (and still has) to re-pay. Cento Bull and Gilbert (2001) repeatedly point out that the Lega gambled on Italy being left out of the first group of countries joining the EMU and was prepared to capitalise on it. This is confirmed by Bossi's speech at the congress of Assago (Bossi, 2002): had Italy been left out, it would have been easy for him to claim that Padania was missing a vital appointment only due to the irresponsible administration of Roman politicians -a charge not far removed from the truth, providing one agrees to think of politicians as a 'whole', as a 'class', as many populist movements across Europe do (Biorcio, 1997). Furthermore, in contrast to Britain, in Italy terms such as 'Europe' and 'European' had a long history of being associated with positive values in political discourse. Europe was still seen in these years as the place of efficient social services, of systems of justice working properly, of strong currencies, prudent administration and so on¹⁰.

The article discussed below employed dichotomies in many ways similar to the ones just seen, despite the source of all virtues being this time 'the West'. This piece was written by Malaguti and Piazzo and published in *Lega Nord* on 16 September 1996, i.e. just after the mass-demonstration in which Padania was 'declared' a sovereign independent Republic by the party. It is a work of special significance precisely because it was intended to explain what Padania *was*, and what *it would become* once 'independence' had been achieved. Just by juxtaposing all the statements made in this article about Padania/Padanians on the one hand, and Italia/Italians on the other into two columns of a table, the alleged differences between the two areas emerge as binary oppositions, where the values of one group is informed by the associations made with the other.

(Note: line numbers between brackets)

<i>Padania</i>	<i>Roma/ the system/ the state/ the country</i>
free, federal, sovereign, independent (2, 3)	colonialist antidemocratic centralising (26, 27)
No longer prepared to live without its freedom (83- 85)	Profoundly antidemocratic (104, 105)
No longer prepared to see its values wiped out by the state (85- 87)	Not defending the citizen against [series of problems] (98- 103)
Soon will be free, definitely free (146, 147)	Not on the citizen's side (97, 98)
No longer afraid (158- 159)	Deceiving its own people, since 140 years ago [unification] (27, 28)
	Based on the relationship between big finance, protected industry of the north and the Mafia (88- 92)

*Padanians**Italians/ southerners*

Are Western [in terms of values] (109)	Characterised by a Mafioso system of values (113- 115)
Believe in democracy, co-operation, solidarity (110-112)	
Will rule themselves (10, 11)	
Will show a productive solidarity (11- 13)	
Different Padanian peoples will be protected (13- 15)	
Cultural and moral heritage will be preserved (15- 17)	
Will be free (17, 18)	
Will have a right to balanced information (18, 19)	
Will no longer be slaves of Rome (7, 8)	
Will never serve anyone anymore (9, 10)	

If one wanted to reduce this material further (to a few keywords), given that many of these adjectives are indeed related, one would be left with the following table:

*Padania**Italia*

Free	Oppressive
Federalist	Tyrannical
Independent	Liar
Preserving traditional values	Based on a neo-feudal economic system

<i>Padanians</i>	<i>Italians/ southerners</i>
Believe in Western values	Mafiosi
Their culture/values will be protected	
Free	

Taken together, the documents presented so far are thus very consistent in the way they define the party's discourse. This could be summed up as follows: 'southerners colonised the north through migration and by controlling the Italian tyrannical state apparatus; they now exploit Padania, and the money they steal from hard working northerners is not even used to aid their own land, rather being wasted in a variety of ways. This happens because southerners are distinguished by a parasitic/ backward culture that makes them different from Europeans and Westerners. Padanians instead, culturally and economically linked to Europe, are projected towards a future of freedom and federalism'. This discourse is further developed below, where the 'Europeanness' of Padania is also better specified.

6.5 A 'Mafioso' state, an unprofessional southerner: the congress of 1997

The 3rd Ordinary Congress of Lega Nord which took place in Milan between the 14th and the 16th of February 1997 struck one as being obsessed with a definition of the differences between Padania and Italia, Padanians and southerners. Many speakers, no doubt due to the political climate -as the Lega of 1997 was struggling to affirm the existence of a national community deemed not to exist by the other political formations- used the occasion to solemnise, rather than debate, their recently 'found' community¹¹. An event which was intended to celebrate the new isolationist and separatist line of the party hinged yet again on the usual repertoire of criticism of the immigrant.

Overall, the opposition between Padania and Italia was consistently grounded on the supposed differences of 'mentality' and culture between the two areas already seen above, although the sketchy picture already considered acquired some further details. It is worth taking a closer look at parts of the 'thesis' presented by Lega Nord Trentino to the congress, as this paper sets for itself the task of shedding light

precisely on the *essence* of the Padanian identity. The translation of a selection of the most significant parts of the document follows below:

1. European conscience means awareness of the differentiation from other continents (always respecting the identity of other people); it means differentiation which manifests itself on the political and cultural levels, at the level of school, democracy, rights of the individual, protection of the environment, protection of public health and defence of minorities, at the level of values, behaviour, of the 'forma mentis', of art, music, quality of life in the cities and historical heritage. All this happens at a different level, without contradiction with the European identity, also in Padania. Padania differentiates itself from the south of the peninsula due to its peculiar characteristics... (Lega Nord Trentino, 1997: 2)

2... (the south and Rome, it's clear by now, reject a modern culture, because unable to understand the processes [sic]¹² and because they are tied to pre-modern values and interests, while Padania and the Lega Nord are already in the post-modern and the post-ideological) (ibid., 3)

3. However today the denied identity which needs to be claimed back is the one of Padania, one which implies a differentiation with the south and with Rome the slave-driver. Its conscious affirmation has very tangible political consequences as our adversaries have only now theorised [sic]¹³. Our identity, the one of the Padanian nation, which is together with the Europe of regions our destined community, manifests itself in opposition to the south, at the historical (from the Celts to the free cities etc.) and economic levels, at the ethnic and social levels, at the level of culture and values. These are values, ideals, ways of behaving, feelings which are very widespread, which coexist with a European identity, with a cosmopolitan attitude of Padani that one would not notice in the culture and behaviour of the south. In Padania the ideal of political freedom has been developed to such an extent that one cannot compare it to the end of the boot [i.e. the peninsula]; even the class struggle has been mitigated in Padania thanks to its widespread business activity, while in the south this conception, typical of the nineteenth century,

organic to the centralising state, still exists and still divides that society between the rich and the poor, between businessmen and workers, it breaks down communities and the common feeling (ibid., 4)

4. Instead in Padania there is an almost Calvinist work ethic, which is the opposite of the aristocratic, ancient idleness of the Romans¹⁴. The 'homo faber' of Padania finds his opposite in the 'homo ludens', the playful man of the south. The sense of responsibility towards oneself and the family, towards the young generations, the solidarity between generations in the north, the pride of being self-made and to project oneself towards Europe and the world finds its mirroring opposition in the south, in the insolent and beggar-like request of 'assistenzialismo', which is treacherously presented as solidarity, as well as the vocation of parasitism which is encouraged by the central state. Similarly in Padania the sense of the state (of ancient tradition), the value of participation, of democracy and the affectionate care of the place find their correspondents in the south in a double-legality, the one of the Mafioso clan and the one of the state, and in the tendency to look for a 'dux' or be ruled by an oligarchy (ibid., 5)

Passage no. 1 introduces a conception of the Padanian identity as non-exclusive and multilayered. As noted by Linda Colley (1992), identities are not like 'hats', i.e. it is possible (indeed inevitable) to wear more than one *at the same time*. By defining myself in terms of my occupation, for example, or my family status, I am neither negating nor downplaying my regional or national origin. Similarly, the allegedly European values praised here are not meant to clash with the 'Padanness' of northerners, but rather to provide the framework within which 'Padanness' can be fully appreciated. That the writers felt they did not need to specify in what ways would European schools, for example, be different from those in other continents, is also significant. The authors are here referring to a common sensical understanding of Europe as the source of all 'civilised' virtues (democracy, respect for individual rights, etc.) which introduces us to the much more explicit section of the document which is concerned with shedding some light on the differences between north and south. The explicitness and directness of the delegates' tone here can be explained

by keeping in mind that their audience is made up of 'believers' whose identity the congress is supposed to celebrate, and not voters to be convinced. In passage no. 2, the opposition between Padania and Rome/ the south is justified in terms of *degrees of modernisation*. If defining Rome, Italy and/or the south as backwards (here, 'pre-modern') is, as we have seen, fairly common among 'leghisti', the term 'post-modern' employed here seems to take the discussion a bit further. The term itself is not given a clear definition in this paper, however its significance becomes more apparent if one links it to 'post-ideological'.

In the same year *Quaderni Padani* published an article, entitled 'The end of ideologies' which dealt at some length with the notion of 'post-ideology' (Straneo, 1997). After having explained (albeit perhaps succinctly) what 'historical materialism' is about, the author here suggested that after the failure of the Marxist regimes of the east, the world was inevitably heading towards the 'post-ideological' (and rightly so). A 'post-ideological' society, argued the writer, was one in which pragmatism prevailed, where people focused on how to 'make things work', rather than wasting their time with all-embracing systems of thought that belonged to the past.

Of course it would be naive to accept that the Lega is a post-ideological party: what the movement does, after all, is to propose an extreme neo-liberalism in the economy, coupled with a very conservative stance on social issues¹⁵. However, this is precisely what the Lega means with 'post-ideology': a practical, down-to-earth, business friendly attitude which even rejects the division of society into different social classes characterised by rather different interests. Read against the grain of the party's political production, the reference of Lega Nord Trentino to a post-modern, post-ideological Padania, one opposed to a backward 'rest' of Italy, thus becomes clearer: on the one hand there is a south which is 'unable to understand the processes', i.e. unable to see how quickly the world is changing. This south is 'tied to pre-modern values' (a reference to southern conservatism) and pre-modern 'interests' (again a reference to the almost feudal system denounced above, i.e. the 'Mafioso' mutual 'understanding' between some financial sectors, the big industry and some criminals). Opposed to this state of affairs there is Padania, a 'nation' characterised by a very modern economy, where people share a down-to-earth, 'aware of the real problems' approach to 'what is needed'.

That the Lega Nord has taken more than one lesson from Thatcherism (just as Silvio Berlusconi did) is also apparent from the passage that follows (no. 3), which strikes one for its theorisation of the relative absence of class conflict in the north. Here the idea of an 'organic community' of workers is crucial for an understanding of the 'identikit' of the Padanian. The Padanian model of diffuse micro-capitalism, sometimes defined as 'Third Italy', so often celebrated by the Lega, has allegedly created a society where employers and employees have given up on fighting each other in the superior interests of competition with the rest of the world. Bossi might well ignore what 'communitarianism' means¹⁶, however the dream of the 'knowable community', as Williams (1983) once called it, is very present to the mind of the leader and other leghisti writers. This dream, as we will see in the last chapter, is all the more significant when the small, 'knowable community' rooted in its traditions becomes the bulwark against globalisation.

Clearly, the jury is still out on whether this depiction of Padanian social harmony can be accepted: after all, this is a country in which the Communist party had strong roots only *in Padania*, so much so that even the 'Red Brigades' were originally based in Reggio Emilia, while many of them studied in Trento, and the group started its activities by acting and proselytising *in the north* (Tessandori, 1977; Franceschini, 1988). However, although class conflict has characterised the big cities of the industrial north, it is true that the climate was rather different in the so-called 'deep north' of diffuse industrialisation that the Lega wanted to represent. This is a discussion that will be taken further in chap. 8.

Passage no. 4 brings together much of what has been said so far. Once it had been demonstrated that the differences between north and south could not be bridged, the Conference attendee heard about the Padanian 'work-ethic', an idea that the leader Bossi had already insisted upon a few years earlier (Bossi and Vimercati, 1992: 160). The Padanians, as the Calvinists in Weber, were here said to be driven by a sort of 'religious fervour' in their quest for economic success: in the case of the Calvinist, as it is well known, this was due to the assumed correspondence between success in this world and happiness in the next, wealth being seen as a *sign* that the successful person was in the grace of God; in the case of the Padanian, the obsession with work proceeded from his¹⁷ love of the country and of the generations to come, to whom this wealth had to be passed on.

The introduction of the allegedly Padanian 'Protestant work-ethic' serves us well here: it will be shown in the next section how this ethic and the right business mentality were also allegedly lacking among immigrants from abroad.

6.6 Straight out of the jungle: a portrayal of the extra-communitario before 1996

It was since the eighties that the Lega Nord had started speaking out against migration from outside the EU, although it is in the nineties, and particularly at the end of the decade, that the party became obsessed with the issue. If the radical tones of its propaganda may have caused the LN some embarrassment at the time when it entered a national government for the first time and found itself in the position of having to represent a whole country, including the much despised southerners¹⁸, the attacks against the 'extra-communitario' have undoubtedly been easier to wage. Foreigners were perceived as being both weaker (at the end of the day they could not vote), and yet even more threatening than southerners. As the country was becoming the door to Europe for many migrants, given the length of its coasts, and a favourite destination in itself, too (cf. chapter 3), the Lega followed a trend also common to other European movements (e.g. the 'Vlaams Blok') and ignited the fears of an 'invasion' of northern Italy by illegal immigrants. Yet this research has shown (cf. chapter 5) that in quantitative terms foreign immigration, however important, *did not* become the dominant issue of the Lega's political discourse in the years considered by this study. However, the rhetoric of the party when dealing with migrants and the crudeness of its language need studying. A close look at the words of the leader Umberto Bossi in 1992 will thus contextualise the analysis that follows, i.e. a study of the representation of the non-EU immigrant (the 'extra-communitario') and of the similarities between this and the representation of the southern Italian:

Some colleagues in the Senate asked me: 'what about the immigration of self-employed workers, didn't you take this into account?' Let us try to be serious on this! Self-employed workers? What sort of self-employed workers might actually come from the Arab countries or Africa? People

trading in lighters or washing windscreens? We just do not need them. In general terms, anyway, even if there were self-employed workers showing a real professionalism, it is much better that they remain in their home-countries: in Italy there is already not enough financing for our own artisans and businessmen. We really don't need an invasion of foreign pretenders, who obviously would end up being privileged on the basis of the usual misunderstood term: solidarity (Bossi and Vimercati, 1992: 147).

Presented in these terms, the debate going on in Britain, Germany or the USA regarding 'selected immigration', predicated upon the idea of letting in only certain workers on the basis of their skills, is being given a quite different spin. The message of the secretary could hardly be simpler and louder here: there are *no* 'professionals' in Africa.

This passage is of utmost interest for a variety of reasons. Firstly, and crucially, it claims to be grounded on *common-sensical wisdom*, hence the 'ma cerchiamo di non scherzare!', i.e. 'let's try to be serious on this' or 'let's avoid wasting time with jokes', which brushes aside the obviously absurd notion that self-employed immigrants could ever come from any other place but the West¹⁹. Secondly, the inadequacy of the African or Eastern-European who moves into a modern society was here predicated, not on charges of criminality, but rather on their supposed *lack of professionalism*, an idea further insisted upon by referring to the only sort of 'professional' jobs these people might be involved in, i.e. basically begging. This strategy acquires particular significance, as will be seen below, if we keep in mind the opposition between the business-minded Padanians and their non-professional 'others' discussed in some detail above.

What is certain is that, given the actual weakness of immigrants in terms of their influence and political weight in the Italy of the period, and given the absence of effective legislation protecting minorities, the party was absolutely free to be more than explicit about what 'had to be done' to get rid of them. The solution put forward was, in some cases, both disarmingly simple and hardly unheard of (see the policies of the British National Party): it was 'repatriation'. Thus, if Cento Bull and Gilbert are probably right when pointing out that until 1996 Lega Nord fitted the definition of a far-right party only 'imperfectly' (2001: 124), in our view there are not many doubts

about the appropriateness of the definition *since* 1996, and even more so after the abandonment of the separatist strategy and the rapprochement with the Polo.²⁰

In dealing with the LN's representation of the foreigner after the 1996 watershed, three texts will be considered: the first one is 'Padania, identity and multiracial societies'²¹; the second is a very significant wall-poster which caused much debate in the summer of 1998 when it was first released (appendix 6); the final document is an article again published in *La Padania* in the summer 1998 (appendix 7). Also in this case, the article illuminates the content of the poster.

6.7 Straight out of the jungle: a portrayal of the extra-communitario after 1996

6.7.1 The dangers of the 'melting pot'

'Padania, Identity and Multiracial Societies' is so extreme that one is left wondering whether the party had really radicalised its position to such an extent in the second half of the nineties, or whether the authors were rather not fully aware of the openly fascist overtones of their pamphlet (even Nazi overtones, according to Escobar, 1999). As this publication was re-printed in 1999, as well as having been made available on the party's website, it is safe to assume that there had been a conscious decision to play the race card on the part of the leadership.

Before highlighting some of the key issues raised by this pamphlet, it is worth looking at how it was laid out. The document was divided into the following paragraphs:

1. An introduction, entitled as the pamphlet itself, which was aimed at revealing how immigration was facilitated by a 'secret' alliance of forces (the 'immigrationist lobby'). This section was underpinned by the usual 'conspiracy theories' and 'siege mentality' which characterised so much of the party's production (e.g. SOFLN, 1998), with worrying echoes of the 'Mein Kampf' (again Escobar, 1999).
2. A section providing data on the declining birth rate of Europeans (Italians and particularly Padanians, contrary to expectation, being at the bottom of the list

in terms of fertility-rates). The vanishing of the family as the central pillar of society was denounced.

3. A *j'accuse* against the notion of a multiracial society.
4. A discussion of the rise of criminality, here alleged to be caused by immigrants (for some data, see chap. 4).
5. An analysis of the destabilising effects of immigration on the social fabric of European and Padanian communities.

Other parts of the document dealt with more strictly national issues, such as the opposition to the immigration law of the then governing centre-left.

The 'extra-communitari' might have been seen as dangerous, however they were nothing but instruments in the hands of powers that they could not influence, let alone control: the powers of 'mondialismo'²². The global conspiracy which brought the immigrant to the Italian shores was led, on the one hand, by international financial corporations, on the other by their ally 'the international left': while the former aimed at creating a rootless, community-less global worker to be displaced where s/he could fulfil the needs of capitalism, as well as a global consumer who would abandon any preferences for what was produced locally, the left was after the votes of the foreigners; hence they campaign firstly for their arrival, and secondly to give them rights of citizenship.

The aim of this army of foreigners was quite clear for the authors of this document: they simply wanted to take the place of the 'popolo padano', as it had happened already at least in some districts of a few Italian towns, areas turned into the 'Bronx' as the *leghisti* would have it (ibid., 4). Shortly, the invasion from the outside would turn the Padanians into a *minority* in their own land. If the immigrant was brought to us due to the global conspiracy just mentioned, his/her presence was more than tolerated by that entity which had always tried to wipe out the ethnic awareness of the Padanians (since the great migrations of southerners to the industrial towns of the north in the sixties), i.e. the state (ibid., 4). Deprived of their traditions and languages by state education (which, as the reader certainly remembers, was said to be in the hands of southerners), unaware of their roots -as the pride of belonging to the 'ethnie' had been replaced in Europe by feelings of shame and insecurity -the Padanians had been left defenceless *vis a vis* the assault of the foreigner (ibid., 11).

Alarming, this was all part of a 'strategy' in which Third World populations, at the beginning of the document defined as being *also* victims of this conspiracy, had now become evil enemies who could take the Europeans 'hostage' by 'infiltrating' their society in order to destabilise it from the inside (ibid., 18). The outcome of this process of migration would be the loss of a distinctive culture, and even of an independent foreign policy (ibid., 18)²³, not to mention a society which is no longer a 'community'.

It was indeed, again, the state, unsurprisingly, which aimed at creating a society simply seen as a *space* filled by whoever happened to inhabit it (ibid., 13). Here the neo-fascism of this propaganda became particularly obvious, as the real foundation of 'community' was explained, just after the 'differentialist' vision of the party had been announced. These *leghisti* claimed -understandably so- that in order to have a community in the first place some sense of solidarity between its members was vital. We saw earlier that the Lega Nord Trentino recognised solidarity as a feeling characterising the Padanians, as opposed to southerners. What is interesting in this document is that such solidarity was now explicitly grounded on *blood*. Upholding an idea of community and citizenship based on *ius sanguinis* (ibid., 25), the writers explained that people are 'just a dot in a History written by the generations which predate us' (ibid., 5). There is a sacred tie then between community-members of today, their ancestors and (significantly) their still *unborn children* (ibid., 13), a tie of real solidarity which should not be confused with the empty unrealistic solidarity with 'everybody and anybody' imposed on Padanians by the left.

A 'natural community'²⁴, then, could exist only when people shared the same origins, i.e. ancestors, and thus accepted that they were only *using* resources that they would have to pass on to their children. Who these ancestors were (the Gauls perhaps? The Longobards?) was not specified in this document; but we would be mistaken in assuming that it was necessary for the writers to make themselves clear on this in order for their rhetoric to be effective. As argued at length in chapter 1, in fact, trying to identify and name alleged ancestors is only interesting insofar as one wants to deconstruct the alleged historical antecedents of a nation -which is, incidentally, what this research will do in the next chapter; however for the purposes of political rhetoric a generic reference to *the* ancestors (with a capital 't') is normally sufficient as it is generally seen as self-evident.²⁵

The second neo-fascist argument was the claim of a Lega 'differenzialista'. In itself, the claim was neither new nor original: from the differentialist perspective, movements such as the Lega quite simply defend difference *vis a vis* a cultural uniformity brought about by globalisation and Americanisation²⁶. However, what made the Lega's message particularly 'extreme' was that here the 'different cultures' of migrants were *never* associated with positive values and constructive behaviour. Just in this pamphlet (which is only 30 pages long) foreign cultures were associated with: criminality (pp. 4, 15, 16, 17, 23 and 24); b) rape (p. 11); c) 'the libanisation of our countries' (p. 18).

This goes some way towards explaining why the 'differentialist citizen' should *aprioristically* prefer members of his/her own *ethnie* to members of 'other' ethnic groups (as argued on page 12). Such a totally negative vision of the 'other' also explains the radical solution to the loss of identity proposed in this document, i.e. the repatriation of the non-EU foreigner (ibid.: 16).

It must be said that overall this document was hardly consistent. If on page 26 the authors suggested that Padanian regions should start organising the 'civilised' repatriation of 'extracomunitari' -even by allocating funds to be used by the immigrant to start a new life- and should impose extra-taxes on companies employing a foreign work-force -thus making it very unlikely for anyone to employ 'extracomunitari' anymore- on page 27 a new law was proposed for the 'regulation' of fluxes of migration. This proposal contained, once again, ideas which were unworkable to say the least, and nonetheless not consistent with the goal of repatriation: the employer of a foreigner, for example, was expected to become legally and financially responsible for the rent of the worker, as well as for eventual damages inflicted by him/her to a third party (page 28). However absurd this may sound, this proposal logically implied that the foreigner would be allowed to stay under the tutorship of an employer. Furthermore, before employing an immigrant who had only just arrived the employer had to *prove* (it was not explained how) that no European citizens, including those who *did not* live in the province, and no already resident immigrants, were ready to take the job; while being again totally void of sense, this proposal implied that new arrivals were indeed still *possible*, despite not being welcomed.

While somehow oblivious to the needs of the business sector of the north, as we have seen, the Lega of the separatist phase still placed the values of enterprise and professionalism at the very *core* of its propaganda. Our claim in this thesis is that these values were central to the definition of Padanians and differentiated them from their southern and foreign 'others'. Before bringing these ideas together, it is worth focusing on what is perhaps the most vulgar, explicit and far-right wall poster ever published by the party²⁷. Here not only the violence of the language employed should be noticed, but, interestingly, the notion of the 'useless' other -well introduced by Bossi in that passage of 1992 that was quoted at the beginning of the preceding section- went hand in hand with the obsession with crime and rape just seen in 'Padania, identità e società multirazziale'.

6.7.2 *'They are coming in their millions!': the invasion of 'unprofessional others'*

The heading of the poster we consider now (see appendix 6) read: 'Let's stop them! They are coming in their millions', an idea reinforced by a 'stop' sign right in the centre of it. At the bottom of such poster one finds an insulting invitation (which cannot be translated literally) to 'go away', obviously addressed to the people represented in the picture. This is followed by a request to the reader to endorse a proposal for a referendum that could 'send them back to their home-countries!'. The five characters appearing here, all of them representations of the 'extra-communitario', were made to speak a very bizarre language, the analysis of which is crucial to the understanding of the communication process. The roots of the terms selected clearly derived from some northern Italian dialect (popular expressions such as 'sballare' or 'ciullare'), however the apocope, plus the accented 'a' at the end, gave these utterances a distinct African flavour, as this was how Africans were expected to mangle words in Italian, according to popular perception. This use of the language was crucial: it was not 'just' another way of teasing the immigrant, seen as unable to speak properly, but it greatly added to the force of the statement made, i.e. -as we will see shortly- 'these people cannot contribute to our way of life'. The possibility that the immigrant was normally educated -as statistics showed in this period (chap. 4)- was not even contemplated. These people had learned what little 'language' they knew not in the classroom, but on the streets.

The five characters in the picture ask (from top left, anti-clockwise): 'do you want to have sex?'; 'do you want to rape (or 'be raped?'); 'do you want to wash?' (read: 'do you want your windscreen to be washed?'); 'do you want to buy anything?'²⁸; and finally 'do you want to get high?'.

The 'occupations' of these people can then be grouped into three categories:

- a) *criminal*, i.e. the rapist (from the Middle-East) and the drug dealer (possibly eastern-European, because not black);
- b) *of dubious morality* (the only woman here was a prostitute);
- c) *useless* (the obviously Muslim guy washing wind-screens, the young African man selling fake -see the 'Armadi' label-designer-clothes). One is inevitably reminded of Bossi's cry at the beginning of the nineties: 'what professionals may ever come from Africa?'

Following exactly the same pattern, Di Ferdinando in 'a tranquil week-end of fear' (La Padania, 1998, cf. appendix 7) provided the reader with an inventory of the problems he said were caused by illegal immigrants (clandestini): 'Starting with the wind-screen cleaners waiting at traffic lights to the drug-dealers in public parks, illegal immigrants are always ready to waylay you. Here are all the risks run by a family in its own city' (ibid., 3). A series of pictures placed next to the article insisted on the underlying themes of the poster just seen, with a few additions (see c and f below). The captions were as follows:

- a) At the traffic lights: the nightmare of the wind-screen cleaner;
- b) In the park: syringes and drug dealing;
- c) bag-snatching: roads are not safe anymore;
- d) tram: at night-time the risk of being attacked;
- e) prostitution: degradation, problems for public health and criminality;
- f) street-fighting: people risk their lives for a few coins;
- g) unregulated trade: smuggling and damage to legal businesses.²⁹

We should not be led astray by the distinction made here between legal and illegal immigrants, on the assumption that 'being a clandestine necessarily leads to crime' (ibid.). As we have seen above, elsewhere it was the Lega itself which rejected the 'hypocritical' distinction between 'legal' and 'illegal' immigrants, because the position

of many had been regularised thanks to the emergency measures of a state the Padani should not recognise as their own (Mussa ed. 1998: 4). Furthermore, as posited by the party, 'if tomorrow five million legal immigrants should arrive in Padania, what should we do? Should we gladly accept them without a complaint just because they have got a piece of paper in their pockets, one stamped and given to them by a trivial state that is betraying its own citizens?' (Ibid.).

The strategy of 'trapping' the 'Other' into the image of the 'criminal', or of the 'useless', would hardly surprise anybody anymore. It was demonstrated earlier that this strategy had underpinned the Lega's portrayal of southern Italians, before being turned against foreigners. While the 'extra-comunitario' and the southern Italian were obviously not talked about in the same terms, what was crucial is that both gave Padani the opportunity to define themselves *in terms of opposition*.

Analysing political speeches in a completely different context, Fairclough reminds us that 'enterprise' has three senses in English:

1. activity: 'engagement in bold, arduous or momentous undertakings';
2. quality: 'disposition or readiness to engage in undertakings of difficulty, risk or danger; daring spirit';
3. business: when modified by 'private' or 'free', 'private business' (1992: 187).

In Italian 'impresa' shares with its English equivalent senses 1 (as in: 'un'eroica impresa') and 3 (as in 'libera impresa' or 'impresa privata'). As a quality (sense no. 2) the English meaning would be much better conveyed by 'spirito di iniziativa'; and yet even in Italian senses 1 and 3 necessarily *imply* a taste for danger and risk-taking. Taken together these different meanings of 'enterprise' are what Fairclough defines 'the meaning potential of enterprise' (ibid.). While the ambivalence of the term (which, as we have seen, persists in Italian, too) can be *reduced* by the context, this configuration of positive meanings in the speeches of the Secretary for Trade and Industry in the Thatcher government effectively re-valuated, says Fairclough, a once discredited private business sector by constantly associating it with 'culturally valued qualities of <<enterprisingness>>' (ibid., 188). Arguably, the same happened in the Lega's propaganda: it is true that explicit definitions of 'impresa' or 'professionalismo' were difficult to find among these pages, however they were not needed; insofar as

the Lega could exploit the common-sensical association of 'enterprise' with those values of risk-taking and dedication already seen above, the efficacy of its strategy of communication was guaranteed.

Given the political climate of the nineties, the impact of the Mani Pulite investigations and the damages caused by a still highly inefficient bureaucracy to the economy of the country (cf. chapters 3 and 4), it is not really surprising that in the industrial districts of the north 'private' became synonymous with 'virtuous' and 'efficient'. The great achievement of the Lega was not to rediscover 'enterprise culture', though this has arguably happened too, but rather to instil into people's minds that 'public' (and therefore, of course, 'corrupted' and 'parasitic') meant 'southerner', and that 'southerner' meant 'public'. Much of the Lega's propaganda of these years was just a consequence of this original choice. Furthermore, once the notion of the useless unproductive 'other' had become widespread, it was easy to attach the same label to foreign immigrants, too. This is why I call the attitude of the party towards the 'other' as 'xenophobia of the professional man', as discussed in the conclusions of the present chapter.

6.8 Back to blood and religion? Anti-islamism at the end of the century.

At the end of the last century the sometimes openly fascist tones of some exponents of the Lega were given even more space in the pages of *La Padania, I Quaderni* and the other means of propaganda that have been discussed so far. A particularly easy target, because of the very deep-rooted hate which is able to awaken, and because it makes it possible to attack the 'extra-communitario' without having to refer to colour or race, is Islam. Although the years after 1998 fall outside the scope of this research, it is worth mentioning the issue of anti-islamism before coming to a conclusion.

In 1999 De Anna could show in *Quaderni Padani* an anti-Islamic rage of such crudeness to have been for long the exclusive patrimony of the very extreme right:

The war that we thought had been won once and for all... is going to break out again and this time not at our borders but well inside our land. It is a new war and our enemy's best ally is not the Muslim world, but rather ourselves, us idle, stupid, fat, us rich merchants of wealth who in an orgy of self-destruction are welcoming millions of individuals inside our homes, people who do not only refuse to identify themselves with our civilisation, but must despise it due to their faith, and have a duty to destroy it... today Islam, repeatedly defeated through the centuries, is acting on two fronts in respect to the West: the front of international terrorism... and that of the 'soft', sly, almost 'homeopathic' [sic] conquest, obtained through the migration of millions of desperate people, people who are deprived and left out of the history of the world due to their religion -as the Koran does not allow scientific research and, therefore, progress- people who are thrown into the heart of Western civilisation (De Anna, 1999: 97 and 98)

It is worth noticing the charges of backwardness brought against Muslims, this time justified by the alleged antipathy of the Koran for scientific research. The issue of the West as a superior civilisation due to its economic and technological achievements was here, once again, central to the Lega's discourse. However it is also apparent that a text like this represents a shift in the Lega's rhetoric that will become even more pronounced after September the 11th 2001³⁰. Significantly, this article is followed by an interview with a priest who is introduced as follower of Martin Lefebvre. After 1998 then, the struggle against the 'extra-comunitario' increasingly assumed the tone of a deadly clash of civilisations; on the outcomes of this struggle was now alleged to depend the survival of *Christianity*, a theme which had not been dominant in the Lega's production of the years considered by this research³¹. Furthermore, the idea which still emerged in 'Padania, Identity and multiracial society' (discussed above) of an immigrant who was him/herself a *victim* of an international conspiracy, was, at the turn of the century, definitively lost. Immigrants became an army which was *consciously and actively* pursuing the destruction of 'us' (even more importantly, they *had to* destroy us, as these were supposed to be the orders of the Prophet); the clash between 'us' and 'them' became a war of total annihilation.³²

6.9 Conclusions of Chapter 6

In the period 1996-1998 the southerner, 'Mafioso' or 'parasite', and the foreigner -the drug-dealer, prostitute, useless peddler from abroad- were both rejected due to their *irreducibility* to the entrepreneurial spirit and business-like attitude towards life which was said to characterise Padania. It was truly a matter of mentality, what Raymond Williams would have called 'a whole way of life' (e.g. 1992). The Padani were said to have preserved their 'European', 'Calvinist' mentality *despite* the flow of migrants from southern Italy, as the leader of the LN himself pointed out (Bossi and Vimercati, 1992: 160), because these cultural traits were now deep-seated in their communities.

The northern 'way of life' was grounded on values that, according to Giovanni Meo Zilio, a leghista intellectual, southerners *themselves* would recognise as peculiar to Padanians: 'an attitude for organisation, saving and enterprise, attachment to (if not obsession with) work, simplicity and concreteness, the value of the word given, sobriety, discretion and moderation, straightforwardness and frankness in interpersonal relations' (Meo Zilio in *La Padania*, 1997a: 1). It is useful to compare this passage to what the writer himself put forward just a few months later. Here the differences between northerners and southerners were talked about in even more explicit terms: '... [people talk of] laboriousness, productivity, enterprising spirit, sense of business organisation, efficiency, responsibility all prevailing in the north, contrasted with indolence, unproductiveness, disorganisation, ineffectiveness, irresponsibility, fatalism, 'assistenzialismo' prevailing in the south (Meo Zilio, in *La Padania* 1997b: 1). Some other examples of this strategy were discussed above, but many others can be found (e.g. 'Brenno', in *Quaderni Padani*, 1997; Pagliarini, speech at the Federal Conference 1998; Lembo, in *La Padania*, 1998).

On the basis of the analysis following up from the quantitative study presented above, one may thus conclude that until the end of the nineties, rather than being characterised by racism, the propaganda of the Lega gave voice to, channelled and defined a 'xenophobia of the professional man'. It was an attitude towards the 'other' that was grounded on the pride of northerners for the growth they had achieved since the fifties, particularly in areas such as the north-east; it instigated a perception of the 'other' as incapable of playing a productive role in the context of an advanced post-fordist society due to his/her lack of education, as well as 'primitive'

nature. As this thesis discusses below (chap. 8), this perception of the 'other' was at odds with the productive reality of the north, heavily dependent on immigrant labour, and the plans of northern industrialists. However, it responded to fears of a loss of identity that were equally grounded in the sense of community characterising certain areas of the north.

Thus, while there were instances of quite clear-cut racism in these publications and while there was evidence that the Lega's supporters were more racist than those of any other Italian movement but AN (Biorcio, 1992b), usually the differences between the north and the south(s) were insisted upon by *avoiding* any direct reference to biologically reductionist racial theories. Although no political movement, even one as disciplined and centralised as the LN, can be always absolutely consistent, this thesis claims that it is usually only after the 1998/1999 watershed that the Lega started to exploit what could be called a 'traditional' racism³³; it was rather the presence or otherwise of a modern, Western, 'Calvinist', entrepreneurial approach to life which differentiated the Padanian way of life from the cultures of various 'others'.

Although it is not my aim here to predict how the Lega will develop and how it should respond to its present crisis, the risks implied by the strategy outlined above were there for all to see. By claiming that 'professionalism' and the 'values' of the enterprise were at the core of the northern-Italian identity, the Lega was in fact playing right into the hands of Silvio Berlusconi's party Forza Italia. The media tycoon's propaganda relied very heavily on the idea of bringing the values and experiences of the enterprise into government³⁴. Worryingly for the Lega, the party's obsession with the values of Western capitalism -particularly in its so-called 'Protestant' variety- only legitimised the even more forceful defence of enterprise culture put forward since 1994 by 'Forza Italia'. This movement was, without any doubt, much better suited to speak of business values and push forward a transformation of Italy along neo-Thatcherite lines (e.g. Forza Italia ed., 2001: 104-105), given Berlusconi's more moderate tones, his own history as a successful, self-made (crucially 'northern') entrepreneur, and, for that matter, Bossi's own failure even to finish his studies (Bossi and Vimercati, 1992). Bossi is probably aware that the party runs the risk of losing its identity to Forza Italia, and this may go some way towards explaining the abandonment by the Lega of the 'rational', 'Western', 'down-

to-earth', business friendly language and its adoption of a rhetoric that seems to become more extreme by the day (Giordano, 2002).

And yet some would argue, on the contrary, that it is *precisely* the movement's abandonment of its traditional constituencies, the abandonment of a liberal, reformist language and the obliviousness of the grievances of small scale capitalists in the north which is *causing* the present crisis of the party (Cento Bull and Gilbert, 2001). Cento Bull and Gilbert make it absolutely clear that the Lega of the beginning of the nineties had openly sought to give voice to the needs of the small industry in the north, as the DC had done for so long before being wiped out by 'Mani Pulite' - particularly in the Veneto region (Cento Bull and Gilbert, 2001). The Lega's policies, they claim, 'were tailor-made for the small business sector in its industrial district configuration' (Cento Bull and Gilbert, 2001: 91; also Diamanti, 1995). Contrast that with Bossi's present obsession with immigration. It is quite obvious that the immigrant is not driven to Italy (and particularly Padania) by secretive pacts between multinational corporations and Communist Refoundation, but rather by the same 'small and medium sized businesses that have been the backbone of the Lega's support' (Cento Bull and Gilbert, 2001: 134).

One of the striking contradictions of the Lega thus lies in their efforts to sell a radical anti-global, anti-immigrant rhetoric to the *same people* who are thriving on globalisation and immigration. The Lega of the end of the nineties seems to have gone back to the utopias of its first programme (reprinted in Vimercati, 1990), when it dared to put forward that industry should be bound to and *not try to exceed* the chances for development offered by local labour forces. How has the Lega found the courage to propose such views to the much celebrated businessmen and workers of the 'Third Italy' is a mystery that will need to be addressed again in chapter 8.

Notes:

¹ To be fair, the method was never meant to reveal anything about the reception of messages, interested as it is only in *manifest* content.

² The latter is a term, the origin of which is uncertain, that is clearly offensive, despite the Lega claiming that it is no longer perceived as such by southerners (Meo Zilio, in *La Padania*, 1997a: 1).

³ Available at the national centre of the Lega Nord, Milan.

⁴ See the posters of the period 1988-1989 in Lega Nord ed., 1996: 19, 24 and 26.

⁵ On posters in Italian political communication see Cheles, 2001, who nonetheless provides an analysis of the Lega's strategies which falls short of expectations; on the Lega's style in its posters see Iacopini and Bianchi, 1994; on the reasons behind the choice of the poster as the principal medium of the party's propaganda, especially, but not exclusively, when the movement was in its infancy, see the Introduction to Lega Nord ed., 1996: 3; finally, scholars should not forget that the Lega's posters are always created by following a suggestion of the leader himself (personal conversation with the man responsible for the graphic arts of the party, Mario Cavallin, in April 2001), and can therefore be said to act as a non-mediated link between 'the Chief', as he is known within the party, and the base. That Bossi relies heavily on this medium is also confirmed in his interviews (again Iacopini and Bianchi, 1994: VII). Finally, on the importance of cartoons like the one discussed below for the recruitment of new members see Tambini (2001: 40).

⁶ Comencini, the well known leader of the Liga Veneta, left Lega Nord in September 1998 once his position had become untenable precisely because he was claiming that the people of Veneto had a right to choose their regional and local alliances without having to seek approval from the centre. The year after Comino, leader of the Lega in Piedmont, was thrown out by Bossi for the very same reasons.

⁷ See the wall-poster 'Grande Padania' of February 1996 (in Lega Nord ed., 1996: 88).

⁸ By the end of the eighties the Lega's fondness for representing the 'Padano' in the shape of an animal had become clear. Elsewhere the Lega, willing to make the point that Lombardia was paying into the public purse much more than it was getting in return, ironically ordered the 'Lombard donkey' to 'go on paying' in what became one of its better known posters of the eighties ('Paga Somaro Lombardo', reprinted in Lega Nord ed., 1996: 21).

⁹ Whether rightly or wrongly is not a question which needs to retain us here.

¹⁰ This perception started to shift in the period under analysis here. For instance, the survey conducted for *Limes* in January 1998 revealed that only 54 per cent of northerners saw the joining of a single European currency as both necessary and advantageous (Diamanti, 1998). This is still a high percentage when Italy is compared to 'Euro-sceptic' countries such as Britain, however the tendency since 1997 is for the enthusiasm of citizens to decline. This is even more so after the launch of euro notes and coins, as many Italians believe that inflation has risen sharply as a consequence of such event. Interestingly, it has been Lega Nord itself, and its leader in particular, who have spoken out more often and more openly against the 'bureaucrats in Brussels' after the formation of the second Berlusconi government, even forcing the pro-European foreign minister Ruggiero to resign from his post on 5 January 2002. In the meantime, Britain seems to have gone the opposite way: if there is still strong opposition to a common currency despite the quite successful launch of the euro, the perception of Europe as the place of better transport, better health systems etc. has become so common place in British political discourse that even the Tories feel they have to take lessons abroad about how to run public services.

¹¹ See in particular the speeches by Serena, Wilde, Michielon, and Lega Nord Trentino -the complete collection of speeches (theses of the conference) being available at the national centre of Lega Nord in Milan. One should not forget that the Lega's conferences are consciousness raising, identity-defining events, rather than the place where different conceptions of the party are put forward and would-be leaders struggle for hegemony. Even the conference of September 1998, which sanctioned the *de facto* abandonment of the separatist strategy, did nothing apart from ratifying the line put forward by the leader in the weeks preceding the event and presented by *La Padania* as the *only* sensible one the party could choose (Anonymous, in *La Padania*, 1998).

¹² '(il Sud e Roma, è ormai chiaro, rifiutano una cultura moderna, perchè incapaci di comprendere i processi ...)'.

¹³ 'La sua affermazione consapevole ha riflessi politici molto concreti come solo ora hanno teorizzato gli avversari'.

¹⁴ The authors wrongly assume that the Latin 'otium' corresponds to the Italian 'ozio', the term used in this document that can indeed be translated with 'idleness'. In reality for the Roman aristocrat, mentioned in the speech, 'otium' was time spent *away* from public duties, and nonetheless filled with less than idle activities, such as studying and writing.

¹⁵ What one may call 'social conservatism' the Lega defines instead as 'fighting against an *upside down* world'. In September 2000, for instance, the *leghisti* produced yet another poster that eventually achieved some notoriety as it invited people to 'stop the red nazis' (available at the national centre of the party). The poster voiced the party's strong opposition to the approval by the Council of Europe of a right of adoption for homosexuals.

¹⁶ As claimed by Damian Tambini (e-mail exchange, 2001), who has interviewed Bossi more than once.

¹⁷ As an object of discourse, the Padanian is normally a 'man' in this propaganda.

¹⁸ The reference here is at the first Berlusconi government (see chapter 3); it was a man of the Lega, for instance, who acted as Minister of the Interior in 1994.

¹⁹ Not only the 'migrant entrepreneur' is a reality in Italy since the beginning of the '90s, but his/her areas of activity are not at all confined to 'selling the ethnic experience', in all its diverse forms (e.g. 'the Unione degli artigiani della regione Friuli Venezia Giulia' quoted in anonymous, 2003c).

²⁰ See the new immigration law proposed by Bossi and Fini and approved by Parliament in 2002.

²¹ 'Padania, identità and società multirazziali' was edited by Mussa and published by the party in December 1998; the pamphlet is available at the national centre of Lega Nord and on the party's website (www.leganord.org). Being such an extreme document (see below) it is no wonder that it has already received some attention from scholars (Cento Bull and Gilbert, 2001: 127- 133; Escobar, 1999).

²² The term often accompanies 'globalizzazione' in the Lega's propaganda, however it would be wrong to treat them as synonyms. Despite the fact that the two terms appear in different contexts in the party's discourse, 'mondialismo' suggests a globalisation not just driven by American bankers and multinationals, but aimed at creating, as it is explained in this publication, a rootless universal consumer. So it could be argued that 'mondialismo' is globalisation turned against difference and local cultures.

²³ The communities of immigrants, it was claimed, turn themselves into pressure groups which inevitably affect the foreign policy of the host country towards their own country of origin, or perhaps countries of similar culture and religion (*ibid.*, 18).

²⁴ A term which also appeared in the 'Carta dei diritti dei cittadini padani', published on 15 September 1996 (see SOFLN, 1998: 141 and 142).

²⁵ In fact, the 'Declaration of Independence and Sovereignty of Padania' of 1996 insisted on the concept: 'it is since time immemorial that we inhabit, till, work, protect these lands we inherited from our ancestors...' (SOFLN, 1998: 138).

²⁶ A discussion of the contradictions of the party when theorising 'difference' –which at times is invested with positive and at times with negative values- follows in chapter 7, as announced above.

²⁷ Available at the National Centre of Lega Nord.

²⁸ 'Vú cumprà' was the less than flattering epithet reserved to black immigrants before the invention of 'extra-communitario'. While the former referred to what many 'visible' immigrants of the 'first wave' effectively did (itinerant commerce), the latter, as we have seen, means 'immigrant from without the EU'.

²⁹ See also Brenno, in *Quaderni Padani*, 1998, very similar in his argumentation.

³⁰ There are plenty of examples in recent times, e.g. Anonymous in *La Padania* on line, 12 Sept. 2001; Anonymous, in *La Padania* on line, 14 June 2002.

³¹ Moreover, both *La Padania* and Umberto Bossi have repeatedly attacked the Catholic Church.

³² The article just mentioned was opened by some passages of an unidentified novel the author of which did not lack some sense of humour. Here a nun was pictured waiting for yet another attack to be waged against the Abbey she had decided to defend -a gun in her hands. Who the attackers might have been would have become clear by reading the article that followed.

³³ According to Gomez Reino-Chacafeiro, a tendency to turn cultures into *quasi-biological* attributes of groups had always been present (2002: 124).

³⁴ Significantly, Berlusconi presented his 2001 election manifesto pledges, published in various daily newspapers, not as a 'manifesto', but as the 'Contract with the Italians'.

CHAPTER 7

The Celts, the Longobards and Alberto da Giussano: 'anti-imperialist' ghosts in contemporary propaganda

7.1 Introduction to Chapter 7

The second dominant theme of the Lega's propaganda in the period covered by the content analysis presented above (cf. chapter 5) is that of a 'history and culture in common'. It is to this theme that this chapter is dedicated, as it puts forward an in-depth analysis underpinned by the same guiding principles as the ones of the preceding chapter, thus opening the way to considering what the identity-defining strategies of Lega Nord have to offer to theorists of nationalism, national identities and globalisation -a topic covered in chapter 8.

In *L'Invenzione della Padania* Gilberto Oneto emphasised the importance of history in the definition of the new (or 're-born', depending on the point of view) identity of Padania. The main contentions of this fundamental book have already been summarised by Cento Bull and Gilbert (2001: 113- 116) and do not need to be repeated yet again; therefore, the focus here will only be on Oneto's discussion of the alleged *common history* and *common culture* of Padania. Apart from Oneto's book the analysis is based on publications that were central to the party's communication strategy, such as *La Padania*, *I Quaderni Padani* and *Il Sole delle Alpi*, all of which have already been introduced in chapter 5. The writers mentioned below are *padanisti* (i.e. people keen on reviving the culture of Padania) of some standing within the movement.

This chapter will focus on the three entities that clearly dominate the 're-discovered' past of Padania, according to the *leghisti*: the Celtic populations who settled in the north in prehistoric times, against whom the Romans fought a relentless war spanning several centuries; the Longobards, who in the 6th c. AD achieved control of the north -and parts of the south- against the wishes of the Byzantines and the papacy; and finally the original Lega Lombarda led by Alberto da Giussano, an

alliance of free cities which fought the alleged 'tyranny' of Frederick the Red Beard, eventually turning against his grand-son Frederick II. To distinguish the latter from the *party* Lega Lombarda, from which the Lega Nord originated (cf. chapter 3), the abbreviation HLL (historic Lega Lombarda) will be used below.

Although other Germanic populations, among the many which invaded Italy after the collapse of the Roman Empire, were also mentioned in this literature (e.g. the Visigoths), there is little doubt that the peoples and historic figures just mentioned dominated the rediscovery of the past by the party¹. There is a notable exception, though, and that is the Republic of Venice.

The Republic, which after all lasted over a millennium, has always been *fundamental* to the identity of the 'mother of all Leagues', the Liga Veneta. In fact, articles on Venice and its history abound in these publications (e.g. Oneto in *Il Sole delle Alpi*, 1998a; Beggato in *Il Sole delle Alpi*, 1998; Balsimini in *Il Sole delle Alpi*, 1998) and Umberto Bossi himself had to pay tribute to the centrality of the Liga by placing its symbol (the Lion of San Marco) on the flag of the unitary Lega Nord, side by side with Alberto da Giussano. However, while the Celts, the Longobards and the HLL are all posited as the ancestors of *all* Padanians, the Republic of Venice is understandably seen as the heritage of the Liga Veneta alone -not just because the party Lega Nord is dominated by the Lombards (see chapters 3 and 4), but rather due to the fact that the Republic covered only a small part of the would-be nation of Padania. Also, despite many northern dialects being of 'Gaelic' origin, the 'veneto' is a very distinctive dialect (or language) grounded on a solid literary tradition². The *Repubblica Veneta* and its alleged heritage will thus be excluded from the analysis that follows.

In the next three sections a short historical account of the descent of Celts and Longobards into 'Padania' is put forward, as well as a discussion of the HLL. Events are presented to the reader *as reported by the Lega*, at times through the Lega's *own words*, however when the party's version of events contradicts academic sources and more authoritative accounts, the author will say so, normally in the footnotes³. Such discrepancies are common in the case of the Celts: because they themselves did not produce written accounts of their descent into Italy, nor provided descriptions or analyses of their own cultures (Grassi, 1991: 10-13), their

experiences, values and religion are all easily re-appropriated and reinterpreted in the light of contemporary needs and sensibilities. One of the main claims of the present chapter, substantiated by a discussion of the alleged Padanian religious sensibility and culture, is that the Lega used historical events and reconstructed cultures as tools which were 'convenient', given the strategy of 'differentiation' that had been adopted.

Once these populations of the past have been introduced through the words of the Lega, the discussion will focus on the party's use of symbols and myths to give visibility to a culture alternative to the Italian one. Furthermore, we will consider the alleged legacy of the populations mentioned above in terms of contemporary northern religious feelings and culture. Finally, the chapter will expose how 'difference', that had been rejected as a value when personified by the migrant, was at times put at the very *core* of the Padanian identity.

7.2 Forgotten fathers: the Celts

Mascetti claimed to follow Livius' account by maintaining that the Celts entered northern Italy in the 6th c. BC (in *Quaderni Padani*, 1998: 4)⁴. Percivaldi (in *Il Sole delle Alpi*, 1998) and Sabattini (interviewed by Ferrari in *La Padania*, 1997) suggested instead that proto-Celtic people were already in the country in the 8th, or perhaps the 7th c. BC⁵. This would explain why the leader *Belloveso*, wrongly alleged by some of these sources to have descended into the peninsula either in the 6th or in the 5th c. BC (see Mascetti, *ibid.*), found it relatively easy to settle there, given the similarities between the Celtic populations who were following him and their 'cousins' who had already settled in Italy⁶.

It was Belloveso who put down the foundations of the actual Milan ('Mediolanum' meaning 'place in the middle of the plain') and it was thanks to the second wave of Celts and their victorious struggle against the Etruscans that Padania was finally turned into an area that here was said to have become 'homogeneously Celtic' in its culture and *ethnie*. According to Oneto 'this very powerful *imprinting* [original in English] resisted two thousand years of difficult historical challenges, occupation, <<cultural cleansing>>...' (1997: 54)⁷. Belloveso and his Celtic people (called

'Insubri') were followed by other Celts in the years to come (i.e. the *Senoni*, *Salassi* and others) (Mascetti, in *Quaderni Padani*, 1998: 5 and 6).

The Romans did not regard these populations as natural friends, especially after the fall of the city to these 'barbarians' in 390 BC; the shock was so great that the event soon became legendary⁸. The 4th c. BC was an age characterised by continuous wars which saw the Celts allying themselves to whatever Italic populations the Romans happened to be arguing with. The Etruscans, according to Mascetti (*ibid.*, 7), were no exception, although they had not always been on good terms with the 'Gauls' (as the Celts were known by the Romans). The 3rd c. BC witnessed the first signs of Celtic division: in the famous battle of Talamone (225 BC) the Romans enjoyed the precious alliance of Celtic peoples such as the *Veneti* against other Celts. As Mascetti pointed out (*ibid.*), this episode signaled the beginning of the end for any aspirations for a Celtic world free from Roman domination.⁹

The Romans were now ready to fight a relentless war aimed at the subjection of their enemies; not even the Celts' temporary alliance with Hannibal of the end of the 3rd c. BC (see Stagnaro, in *Quaderni Padani*, 1997; Signori, in *Quaderni Padani*, 1999) could save them from falling, one tribe after the other, under Roman influence¹⁰. When in 120 BC the Romans defeated the *Cimbri* in the memorable battle of the *Campi Raudii*, the Celts of what is now Lombardy refused to support their 'cousins', as by then they had been 'integrated in the Roman cultural and political model' (Mascetti, in *Quaderni Padani*, 1998: 9).

From now on, the Celts increasingly adopted the ways of the Romans, although, according to Oneto (1997: 54), less so on the inaccessible Apennines. Whenever the Romans were able to reach their enemies the outcome was, almost inevitably, mass murder (Lupo in *Quaderni Padani*, 1996)¹¹. Furthermore, it is alleged, the Roman colonisation did not alter the genetic heritage of these populations, as it was carried out almost always by soldiers who, despite having fought for Rome, were of Celtic origin themselves (Oneto, 1997: 54)¹². As the people of the plain went through wars, invasions and epidemics in the following centuries, the mountains of Padania acted as a 'genetic bank': from time to time the peoples of the mountains would come down, following some tragedy, and settle in the plain, thus preserving the 'Celticness' of these populations (*ibid.*, 56 and 57).

The Gauls, the Lega alleged, although not always speaking the same language, lived in communities of similar structure, 'limited in terms of the number of their members and the dimension of the territory they occupied' (ibid., 80). These were communities ruled by elected leaders, and sometimes by women (Percivaldi, *Il Sole delle Alpi*, 1998). They were divided into tribes, among which some had a quite large population –e.g. *Insubri* and *Senoni*– whilst others did not. Yet these de-populated tribes were not at all subjugated to the stronger ones; on the contrary, they 'vigorously defended their diversity and freedom' preserving their autonomy (Oneto, 1997: 80)¹³. They never created a kingdom or indeed a centralised empire, but only came together temporarily, when facing an external threat. As a matter of fact, the Romans took advantage of this love for autonomy and independence, of this unwillingness to be organised into a solid structure, eventually exploiting the Celts' lack of organisation to subjugate them –an operation that took the Romans four hundred years to complete.

Even though some 'barbarians' allied themselves to the Romans and fought their own 'Padanian' brothers, it is the Celtic lasting legacy which determines the 'ethno-linguistic continuity that we have seen to be peculiar to the Padanian region' (Oneto, 1997: 83). In fact, the 'Gauls' did not share a single unitary language, however the toponyms of many a northern locality, as well as the roots of northern dialects (or 'languages') are of a common Celtic origin (Ciola in *Quaderni Padani*, 1997).

In reality, though, the Celts of Padania were not just different from those of, say, Britain, given that the 'Padanian' Gauls had been greatly influenced by Italic populations, and were quite happy to learn from them; the cultural diversity of the Celts of Padania *among themselves* (in terms of languages, relationship with other peoples, material culture) was also very profound. Their unwillingness to create a common front against the Romans was indeed acknowledged by the leghisti (e.g. 'Brenno', in *Quaderni Padani*, 1996); however they never took that as a sign that the Celts might not have seen themselves as a unitary 'ethnie' and culture after all.

It will emerge below that the claim to homogeneity in the north, although constantly repeated (e.g. Grisolia, in *Quaderni Padani*, 1997; see also Reino-Cachafeiro, 2002: 102-103) not least in order to counteract the isolationist tendencies of the Liga

Veneta¹⁴, is so difficult to substantiate that the Lega needed to ground its claims to nationhood on a 'homogenous heterogeneity' instead.

7.3 Forgotten fathers: the Longobards

Conveniently, the origin of the Longobards is mythical, as narrated by the Longobardic historian Paolo Diacono (Percivaldi, in *La Padania*, 1998). Whatever their origin, between 555 and 585 AD Padania was brought together by these 'barbarians' from central Europe, with the 'marginal' (according to Oneto, 1997: 84) exception of a few areas -which included parts of the actual veneto region!- and with the inclusion -no doubt less than welcome in this literature- of parts of southern Italy (Fossati in *Quaderni Padani*, 1996).

The Longobards had something in common with the Gauls: they were organised in 'a sort of confederation strongly characterised by local autonomies and unified in a structure of co-ordination' (Oneto, 1997: 84). Furthermore, the Longobardic families were autonomous and the job of king was elective¹⁵. This literature insists on the idea that until the second half of the 7th c. the Longobards neither showed any interest in the religion of the conquered nor in assimilating their administrative organisation.¹⁶

In the 8th c. the Longobardic reign reached its maximum expansion, but by now the influence of Christianity had become preponderant and the Longobardic culture, of which, once again, little is known, went through a rapid process of transformation. Although quite ready to oppose the Pope when interest dictated, the king Liutprando was, in fact, to be remembered due to his redefining of Longobardic law on the basis of Christian principles (Montagna, in *Quaderni Padani*, 1996). As Montagna rightly pointed out (*ibid.*, 23) this period was troubled by great disunity among the Longobards because Liutprando had to fight the Byzantines and his own dukes at the same time. As is well known, the reign of the Longobards was brought to an end by the Franks at the end of the 8th c.

As with the Celts, by choosing to rediscover the Longobards the Lega grounded its propaganda on a period for which contemporary historical testimonies are very

limited indeed (Renucci, 1974, in Romano and Vivanti eds., 1112). The linguistic legacy of these Germanic populations has been widely acknowledged, and such influence is particularly apparent when considering place-names and terms related to agriculture and daily life; however, as far as 'high culture' was concerned, the Longobards had to bow to the recognised 'superiority' of Latin. As a consequence, the impact of German on the languages of northern Italians having been limited to the sphere mentioned above, not many terms of Germanic origin still nowadays survive in northern dialects, as the *leghisti* themselves have to admit. In fact, when dealing with the issue of languages in his book, Oneto focused only on the (important) legacy of the Celts, but *ignored* the Longobards (1997: 61- 76), while other *leghisti* (e.g. Beretta, in *Quaderni Padani* 1996) admitted that the impact of these people in terms of language had been very limited.

The *leghisti* may perhaps not like it, however if the linguistic legacy of the Longobards is confined to a few hundred words which survived in some northern dialects, their legacy in terms of popular culture is even more difficult to ascertain. In fact, while the Lega was quite keen on elaborating on legends, styles and popular games which were said to be of Celtic origin (e.g. Piolini, in *Il Sole delle Alpi*, 1998; Arensi, in *Il Sole delle Alpi*, 1997), when it came to the Longobards the focus was on history and language. The reader would be hard pressed to find extensive discussions of the cultural legacy left by these populations, who slowly but inexorably adopted the ways of their Romanic subordinates. Even Oneto, when discussing the culture of Padania (1997: chapter 6) kept referring to the Celts but seemed to have become oblivious himself of his Germanic ancestors.

7.4 Forgotten heroes: Alberto da Giussano and the historic Lega Lombarda.

The love-affair with the historic Lega Lombarda of the Middle Ages (HLL) was the first example of the *leghista's* appropriation of the past. Bossi had been inspired by these events in the choice of name for his movement (Lega Autonomista Lombarda, later Lega Lombarda) as well as the symbol of the party: he personally travelled to Legnano, the place of an historic battle of the HLL, to take pictures of the statue of Alberto da Giussano, the leader of the alliance (Bossi, 1999: 35- 37). The HLL was an

alliance of free northern cities (communes), never meant to become a stable federation or a political union. The alliance was intended to act in the defence of the autonomies of the communes against their would-be oppressors. These came firstly in the shape of Frederick I the Red Beard -the German Emperor who was keen to re-establish his authority in northern Italy- and secondly of his grandson, Frederick II.

The party regularly accuses these Emperors of having tried to impose a foreign yoke on the free cities of the north (e.g. SOFLN, 1998: 3)¹⁷, however it is debatable whether this was their intention. Rather than trying to impose direct rule on a part of the country where autonomies were too deeply rooted, the Emperors were after formal recognition of their authority. On the other hand, the Italian communes knew only too well that the two monarchs were the legitimate supreme temporal authorities; the quarrel was, therefore, rather about who (Emperor or communes) had a right to various 'prerogatives' (regalie), which had a tendency to take the form of tributes and taxes to be imposed on the population (e.g. for crossing rivers and roads). This was the issue at stake, as scholars explain (e.g. Procacci, 1984: 29-30) and not, as the Lega suggests, a willingness on the part of the Empire to rule the communes directly from the centre. In fact, the treaty of Konstanz that concluded the first part of the war following the successes of the HLL (see below) stipulated that while the communes would recognise the formal authority of the Emperor –the opposite being unthinkable- they would nonetheless retain their rights of taxation.

The crucial battle defining the first phase of this conflict was the battle of Legnano in 1176, which saw the HLL prevail. The army 'of the north' was here led by the mentioned Alberto da Giussano, unsurprisingly described by Penati as an Arian-looking giant with blond hair (in *La Padania*, 1997). The symbol of the alliance was the oxen-driven cart, the *carroccio* -as the contemporary Lega Nord is also known nowadays. The cart was not only important in symbolic terms, as it hosted the cross and the image of Saint Ambrogio, the patron of Milan: according to Penati (ibid.) this was also a war-machine, and an efficient one for that matter.

It is well known that the victory of Legnano, which had been achieved *despite* some of the communes siding with the 'enemy', did not guarantee a long lasting peace. Fifty years later the cities of the north found themselves in trouble once again, due to the decision of Frederick II to re-start from where his grand-father had left. This is

a man Oneto once defined a dictator and an autocrat (Oneto in *Quaderni Padani*, 1997). The wars that followed should be seen in the context of the opposition between the Emperor and the papacy for the control of the peninsula, a war in which, in reality, many an Italian free-city -and this again might not please the *leghista* historian- sided with Frederick II.

Deeply divided, the communes of the reformed HLL were defeated in Cortenuova in 1237, however Frederick's victory did not prove decisive. Soon afterwards, he was working at a new alliance, one embracing Germans, Sicilians, Tuscans, the English, the French and, crucially, yet again, many a city of northern Italy too (ibid., 30 and 31). The continuous attacks of Frederick's forces against the cities of the north did not break the HLL, though, which ended up victorious. In 1249, after Frederick's own son had been captured by the city of Bologna, Frederick's efforts to subjugate the League came to an end, as did his life the year after.

The modern Lega does not dispute that the HLL constituted only a temporary alliance, but neither does it place any emphasis on what a historian defined as the communes' readiness to return to their *own* oxen-driven carts and to 'resume warring against the others for power, trade and independence, as soon as the external menace was over' (Zancani in Smyth ed., 2002: 220). Indeed, as Zancani demonstrated, the notion of 'Lombardy' itself -as an area extending from eastern Piedmont to parts of the actual Emilia-Romagna- was only established *in this period*, and, *crucially*, only worked as a *geographic expression*, not an identity-defining term.

This is to say that it was the *local*, and not the alliance, that provided identification among the citizens of the north in the era of the communes: 'the allegiance of the <<people>> is to a city and, within a city, to a particular area of it' (ibid., 223). No one was fighting for 'Lombardy', let alone for any conceptions of a 'north'. Thus, if Montanelli was right when pointing out that the HLL could hardly be seen as the forebear of the *Risorgimento* (Introduction to Cardini, 1991), it is equally true that only a leap of the imagination can turn it into a symbol of the *unity* of the north.

7.5 The rediscovery of symbols in the party's propaganda

7.5.1 *The function of symbols*

The Lega Nord deserves to be remembered, among other things, for its rediscovery of means of propaganda that other parties thought incapable of competing with the power of mass mediated and increasingly personalised political communication. In fact, Bossi reinvented the wall poster, as we have seen, heavily relying on the opportunities offered by this cheap and very direct medium to put across his simplified, 'in-your-face' interpretation of the problems affecting the north. Indeed, according to him, at the very beginning of the eighties his political activity was almost reduced to covering Lombardy with political posters, writings and graffiti (Bossi, 1999: 75-80).

Furthermore, Bossi also rediscovered the identity-building 'march' and the 'political rally'. Thus, still in the separatist phase, the Lega marked its change of direction and radicalisation by organising regularly recurring mass gatherings and rallies in places of great symbolic importance such as Legnano (see above), the mouth of the river Po or Venice -as explained in chapter 4.

The re-discovery of quite traditional means of political communication, it must be noted, still fully belonged to, and can only be understood in the context of, the age of an increasing spectacularisation of politics which characterised Italy in the last two decades of the century (see Pezzini, 2001 and Pozzato, 2001). In fact, the demonstration, the public speech where new symbols of a nation-to-be were displayed on flags and T-shirts, or where militants proudly marched-in while playing the Celtic bagpipe, or the poster on which Alberto da Giussano sat side by side with some simple slogans against the Mafia, were all instances of communication *directed at* or *staged for* the cameras and the flashes of the hated press (Biorcio, 1997; Tambini, 2001). Naturally, in the process the sense of being part of the group was built and reinforced among militants and supporters, but these were there primarily to provide the clapping audience that such a television show badly needed.

Internally, these events set the boundary, built the community, defined identity in a period of deep crisis of traditional political identifications in the north of the country (cf. chapters 3 and 4). Externally, the offensive slogan, the rude comment of the

leader, the colourful Celtic or Longobardic dress, the cartoon, the poster that had to be removed by the police¹⁸ all made the front pages, often nationally and always locally, and were welcomed by TV news editors. Perhaps one of the better examples of this strategy was the referendum for the 'independence of Padania' of May 1997 (cf. chap. 4). If the Lega failed to stop people from voting twice and if there were very contradictory estimates of how many people actually took part in the referendum, however the secessionist posturing received much publicity by taking place 'in the usual media hall of mirrors' (Tambini, 2001: 133)

The problem of this strategy, as noted by Tambini (ibid.), is not just that some people might confuse their wishes with reality, thus ending up in serious trouble¹⁹, as this is perhaps inevitable in any struggle of self-defined 'liberation'; the point is that, after a while, the public needs *more* if it is to be entertained yet again. This may explain why the leader seemed to get trapped into a progressive exacerbation of tone in this period, a strategy that generated endless investigations into the activity of the Lega, with the searching of the national centre and militants' houses by the *carabinieri* in September 1996 following the declaration of independence of Padania (cf. chapter 4; see also Antoni in *Il Sole delle Alpi*, 1997; Bonini in *Il Sole delle Alpi*, 1997).

Finally, the usefulness of this strategy can also be questioned because of the risk that it carried of losing credibility, as the radical slogan, the insult, the threat, the setting up of an alternative parliament and of a self-appointed Padanian shadow government hardly impacted on the amount of taxes the angry citizen still had to pay, as well as doing nothing to accelerate the construction of 'that much needed road' connecting the industrial districts of Veneto. Focusing so much on symbolic action was thus a risky business. In fact, Bossi ended up in 1998 with very committed members, his every move followed by the media, however *de facto* completely isolated and with nowhere to go.

7.5.2 'The sun of the Alps'

This section cannot describe and analyse the wide variety of symbols deployed by the Lega on its flags, costumes, publications, up to its own Padanian 'currency', the *scudo padano*. The focus is thus on just one of the Celtic symbols recently re-discovered by the party, 'il sole delle Alpi' ('the sun of the Alps') (see picture as

appendix 8), before moving on and considering the role of symbols as well as what is alleged to bring Padanians together in *cultural* terms.

The *Sole delle Alpi* was chosen as the symbol of the nation, it was adopted by the 'libera compagnia padana' which publishes the *Quaderni Padani* as their own symbol and gave its name to a monthly publication of the movement that this research has repeatedly mentioned. According to Oneto, the symbol was a 'cluster of very powerful symbologies: ...sun, circle, rim, flower, religious sign and -naturally- their complex mixture and sum of connotations' (in *Quaderni Padani*, 1995: 3). The sun and the circle were important in both Celtic and Christian symbology (ibid., 4 and 5); moreover, circles were a recurrent theme among the prehistoric populations that inhabited the Alps (ibid., 6). As the 'sun' was also present in the iconography of the Longobards (ibid.; see also Fiorini, in *Quaderni Padani*, 1997: 14) it is perhaps not surprising that Oneto regarded it as perfect to symbolise the nation.

In addition, and importantly (see discussion below) this symbol was said to be as popular among the lower classes and as common in their iconography as it was unknown among aristocrats (ibid.). Adding to the mysticism of the 'sun', the numbers with which it was associated were three, six and seven: they were all regarded as sacred by a variety of civilisations (ibid.; see also Aloè, in *Quaderni Padani*, 1997: 15).

7.6 Symbols and myths: political mobilisation between the unconscious and active re-invention.

The role of symbols such as 'the sun of the Alps', of common myths and shared historical memories is essential, as seen in chapter 1, for the boundaries of the 'nation' to be drawn so as to include some and exclude others (Smith, 1999: 11). In the next chapter we will consider where all these myths come from.

Interestingly, the work of the Italian Northern League is here echoed by the League of the South in the USA, another contemporary movement that not only calls for the south of the US to secede, but grounds its claims on a supposed Celticness of 'southerners': 'Basing this claim for secession on an understanding that America was

shaped by ethnic division, the LS argues that America's southern states were distinctively Celtic in their origins and composition, whereas the northern states were English' (Hague, 2002: 150). Kneafsey reminds us that ever since the age of the Romantics, the Celts have always been constructed as 'peripheral <<others>> to defining cultural centres' (2002: 135), the latter being large nation-states such as the UK and France. Similarly, the Padanians have suddenly been constructed as a marginalised and exploited Celtic minority.

The belief in common ancestors, heroes, symbols and myths does not need to be grounded in history for it to work for the purposes of political mobilisation, as mentioned in chapter 1 (Connor, 1994). Moreover, historical events and figures acquire new meanings in the context of new strategies of re-appropriation of existing traditions (Williams, 1977: 115- 120). Smith (1986) talks of 'myth-symbol' complexes -i.e. structured systems of interrelated symbols and myths- that provide a community with its distinctive 'mythomoteur'- i.e. a constitutive *political* myth which defines what the nation is and where it is heading by providing an anchorage in the past.

In order to create a community which is recognised by its members as such, a boundary must always be drawn between the 'ins' and the 'outs'. Hence believers recognise one another as members of a community as they share the positive values which are embodied by the 'myth' and the 'hero': 'Nationalist speakers have to adopt rhetorical procedures in order to redefine the <<secessionist>> population as the true community of recognition, while showing that cross-boundary interactions are void of any real national <<fraternity>>' (Sciortino, 1999: 328). The myth creates community, draws the boundary and, crucially, downplays *internal* differences.

Padania's *mythomoteur* does not rely on the deeds of a dynasty, or the legends of a specific caste or class. It is a whole 'people', a whole community which is turned into legend and provides the necessary inspiration. Thus symbols such as the 'sun of the Alps', or the 'lion of S. Marco' of the Liga Veneta are *not* valued due to their association with an aristocracy said to have guided the community in some golden age, as seen above with reference to the 'sun', but rather because of their ability to represent what is theorised as being a 'whole'²⁰, i.e. the 'people', a unity which is the origin of all virtues. In the symbolic complex employed by the Lega's propaganda heroes and historical figures assume importance not *per se*, but rather only insofar

as they are alleged to *embody* the spirit of all Padanians and show the way forward for a *renewal* which is in reality a *return* to previously held values and beliefs. For some, it is an almost *mystic* process of *necessary renewal*.

What I really think is that this symbol [i.e. the sun of the Alps] has emerged from the deep darkness of the popular unconscious and that the flowing of future events will be antithetic to the last millennium. The forces previously submerged and crushed by a world which was haughty and arrogant at first, then treacherous and corrupted, will be able to re-emerge, slowly but inexorably, having become tougher in the darkness, showing a new way to those who have managed to cross unscathed the 'river of decay' of our times... while keeping their torch alight in this long night until a new sun rises (the Vuh people and Gospel) [sic] (Aloè, in Quaderni Padani, 1997: 18).

This understanding of the past and its apparent neo-fascist overtones might not surprise anyone, given what was debated in the preceding chapter (cf. the pamphlet 'Padania, identity and multiracial societies'). And yet, interestingly, the insistence on this equivocal mysticism coexists with the claim that 'rediscovering' the past is an *artifice*, and one that can overtly be proclaimed as such. This is an important contradiction in the Lega's discourse that should not be underestimated.

Therefore, while some *leghisti* refer to the archetypes of an alleged 'Padanian' unconscious, others claim their right to effectively turn what was meant to be a *descriptive* theory -the modernist approach to nationalism, which aims at explaining how nationalists have worked in the past- into a *prescriptive* one, i.e. one showing how things *should be done*. The message here is the following: 'if you want to be free, reinvent!'. As in this passage:

The rediscovery of the Celtic roots of Padania, therefore, has to be understood in the context of a more general 'reinvention' and 'reinterpretation' of one's own cultural heritage on the part of people who do not want to be subjects of the Italian state anymore... thus this exhumation [sic] gives voice to a willingness to escape from the

homogenising fictions imposed by Italian nationalism (Maggi in *Quaderni Padani*, 1996: 21).

This is an extraordinary admission from a nationalist. Maggi was here happy to admit what Gellner has said all along, with the purpose of revealing how nations 'really' came about, i.e. that it is *nationalism* that creates *nations*, and not the other way round. Here the 'myth' and the 'legend' are openly showed to be a *strategy* through which people *who have reasons not to be Italian* can eventually *turn themselves* into Padanians. These *leghisti* are what Robb calls 'the Celts of the spirit -those who choose to be Celtic' (2002: 242).

7.7 'Celts of the spirit'

The Lega can be equated to some New-Age movements in its effort of 'rediscovery', in its claiming an elective affinity with the Celts seemingly grounded only on 'free choice':

*Historians, linguists, anthropologists carry out important research. However, their work cannot explain much when confronted by the freedom of those who want to become Padanians on the basis of motives, calculations, feelings, imaginary tales or whatever (Maggi in *Quaderni Padani*, 1996: 22; the emphasis is mine).²¹*

In fact, Maggi could hardly have been more explicit:

It is apparent that the separatist forces of Padania make an instrumental use -in a high and noble sense- of myths and rites, of the Celts and the Longobards, of discussions of history and identity (ibid., 23, the emphasis is mine).

Elsewhere, another *leghista* spoke of the necessity to 'restore' religious beliefs that he knew had been wiped out completely by Christianity, at least, he said, at the 'cultural level' (Binelli in *Quaderni Padani*, 1998: 31). The approach of the leader has been very similar: Bossi has happily admitted more than once that he was willing to

make a *creative* use of issues such as languages and cultures *if* and *when* they were seen to work, and discard them if they did not. In fact, the speech that the secretary gave to the Conference of Lega Lombarda held in Segrate back in 1989 (reprinted in Bossi, 1999: 123- 126) made it absolutely clear that the *autonomy* of Lombardy was the aim (at that stage), while languages, or rather taxation –or whatever was seen to work, given the flexibility of the Lega (Tambini, 2001)- were the *means* to *obtain* such autonomy (see also Vitale, in *Quaderni Padani*, 1996b).

It is true that nationalist movements always ruthlessly exploit myths and legends in order to mobilise people. Writing against the idea that scholars should question the legitimacy or otherwise of the Lega's claims, Tambini explains that 'all nationalisms are performative' (2001: 9) and that it is the force of numbers and the context in which they act that eventually decide if they are to be successful; differentiating between them on the basis of the legitimacy of their claims means, therefore, missing the point. And yet the case of the Lega is peculiar. In fact, on the one hand there are those who take a traditional stance and ground the Padanian identity on a distinctive history and culture, if not on genetics -the latter being rare, though, as seen in chap. 5. On the other, there are those writers who suggest that the *consequence* of wanting to create a nation is the *necessity* to re-invent and 'exhume' symbols or even languages that everybody accepts have been completely wiped out. The originality of this thinking is that it turns the 'modernist' theories discussed at some length in chap.1 into a 'blueprint' for the future, i.e. into a strategy of reinvention.

In Oneto's book the two positions even coexist: having written seven chapters on why Padania had to be seen as a nation, he bluntly stated that all these elements would have counted for nothing if a willingness to create an independent nation had not been there *in the first place* (1997: 139).

If the past of the Lega is a 'reinvention' that at times openly reveals itself as such, the problem of course is that, far from being empty, it is always-already *filled with meaning*, always-already interpreted. In the case of the 'fathers' mentioned above, the Lega was careful to choose historical precedents which, with the exclusion of the HLL, had not been fully incorporated into the Italian national identity. In fact, from the age of humanism to the present day -with the important exception of the Romantic period in which the Middle Ages were re-evaluated- Italian historians have

been much more sympathetic to, and showed more interest in, the civilisation of the Romans than that of the Celts or the Longobards. This was caused, at least in part, by the scarcity of information about these populations already discussed above, but also, more importantly, and here the Lega has a point, because of the almost automatic identification of Italians with firstly the Roman Empire, and secondly the Byzantine civilisation *vis a vis* 'barbarians' whose German cultures were quite rapidly assimilated. The popular idea that the centuries which followed the fall of the Roman empire -the 'Dark Ages' in English, the 'secoli bui' in Italian- were distinguished by a complete lack of civilisation testifies to this²².

The renewed interest in the 'Padanian' Celts is a very recent phenomenon, ignited not just by the politicisation of this heritage, but by recent excavations, too. Thus the Celts and Longobards, and other populations which we cannot cover here such as the Visigoths, were all 'up for grabs', ready to be 'rediscovered'. And the lack of information about these peoples, together with the fact that what we have is often an interpretation of these cultures put forward by an enemy²³ made them perfect for re-appropriation and creative re-interpretation. However, this operation of re-appropriation in the end was not successful, as discussed in the next chapter, and the Celts failed to strike a chord with the 'northern masses'.

7.8 Common heroes, a common culture?

7.8.1 Religion and identity

The 'barbarians' and the communes thus either provide the key to understanding the separate historical development of Padania as an allegedly *unitary* entity (in the traditional version of Padanian nationalism), or (in a rather 'postmodern' version of the argument) provide the resource to *invent* Padania as a community. However, communal myths need also to generate 'an ethic and blueprint *for the future*. The drama which it [i.e. the myth] unfolds must stir us as a collectivity into action for the attainment of communal ends' (Smith, 1986: 182).

If in the Celts and the Longobards the Padania has found its founding fathers, in Alberto da Giussano, the military leader of the HLL, it has found its hero: his function is to embody characteristics of the community that can still be emulated and be

brought to life. Umberto Bossi who is fighting alone against the tyrannical 'Roman' regime at the beginning of the eighties, a man full of debts and supported only by his faithful (Sicilian) wife (Bossi, 1999) is therefore equated to Alberto da Giussano, the man who led the HLL against the preponderant, better organised forces of the new born Roman Empire. With Alberto da Giussano the Padanians' finest hour is achieved via the refusal to surrender to tyranny, whatever the disparity of forces. In this sense, the hero serves as a 'focal point of comparison with the present' (Smith, 1986: 200), a present where the virtues of Alberto are enacted by yet another lone northern fighter.

How would all this translate into a common culture, shared by the Padanians? If the past is there to illuminate the future, what are the values that the former brings to the latter?

A first crucial claim put forward by this literature is that Padani have inherited from the Celts a *specific* religious sensibility which makes their present Catholicism quite unique. This is especially interesting given that at the end of the period studied by this thesis, as seen in chap. 6, the Lega turned into a vocal anti-Muslim, pro-Christian and pro-Catholic movement -a movement which now identifies Christianity with European civilisation and shows many affinities with conservative Catholicism. Thus the claim of a Padanian 'peculiar', 'original' and even 'heretical' approach to Christianity -as revealed by the discussion that follows below- opens up an interesting contradiction between the cultural fascination with pre-Christian populations such as the Celts and the Lega's recent political strategy of wanting to be seen as a 'bastion' of Christianity against the advance of Muslim cultures. Incidentally, even a quick glance at the Lega's past would reveal that the party has re-discovered its 'deeply felt' Catholic identity very recently indeed: not only the Church has often criticised the offensive and 'egoistic' tones of the party's propaganda, but the party itself has in its turn been critical of both the Church and Catholicism (e.g. Pich, in *La Padania*, 1997). Moreover some leghisti (such as, for instance, Oneto himself) openly admitted that they were attracted by the 'pantheism' of the Celts.

The Celts, it was argued, saw all aspects of nature as *sacred*: every event happening in the natural world was seen as expressing the divine and giving voice to it (Oneto,

1997: 101-104). The Celts' relationship with nature could thus be defined as 'mystic' (Percivaldi in *Quaderni Padani*, 1997) as nature became the source of a spirituality which was *alternative* to that of the Romans and eventually deeply affected the Padanians' understanding of Christianity. According to 'Brenno', 'deeply Celtic is also the sacred relationship with nature [of the Padanians], a respect for everything <<magic>> characterising trees, springs, animals and mountains (in *Quaderni Padani*, 1997: 2; see also Predieri, in *Quaderni Padani*, 1998).

This conception of Padanian identity as being characterised by a peculiar sensibility towards nature inherited from the Celts is of great interest to us, as it seems to focus the discussion no longer on the 'work ethic' of northerners and their hyper-modern productive communities through which Padanians could differentiate themselves from their 'others' -as seen in chapter 6- but rather now on a 'Romantic' conception of the nation. The leghisti writers were here claiming the existence of a kind of 'Celtic sub-conscious' which had made its reappearance among Padanians after centuries of silence. The Celtic symbols (such as the 'sun') that the Lega had rediscovered, a sign of this cultural continuity, had easily and 'naturally' re-emerged, 'Brenno' argued (*ibid.*), because they had always had a place in the Padanians hearts.

The Celts were thus pantheist, and this led to a very strong identification with a *specific* land in which each tree, river or mountain was seen as the home of a series of spiritual entities. This alleged attachment to the Padanian landmarks inevitably attracted the *leghisti* writers (Oneto, in *Quaderni Padani*, 1998; 'Brenno' in *Quaderni Padani*, 1997).

That aspects of the natural landscape were sacred to the Celts (e.g. some rivers and lakes) is beyond doubt (Duval, 1991); less well founded, though, is the claim that this sensibility was completely alien to the Roman civilisation, as Binelli, for one, once asserted (in *Quaderni Padani*, 1998). In fact, when it comes to the relationship between 'man' and 'nature, it could be argued that all ancient civilisations, *including* the Greeks and the Romans, shared a conception of the sacred which was visibly and *deeply* grounded in the material and the natural world; not to mention that all of them were pantheistic, too.²⁴

Bertaggia (in *Quaderni Padani*, 1998) argued that the Celtic legacy had a deep impact on the Padanian conception of Christianity. Northerners were said to have a tendency towards agnosticism, to conceive the Christian faith as serene and rational (as opposed to southerners), and to be very suspicious of priests. This antipathy was wrongly attributed to the influence of the Communist culture on certain areas of the north such as Tuscany and Emilia-Romagna, however it dated much further back in time. The Celtic and German populations of Padania may thus have been assimilated, but their sense of the sacred remained unique, as the success of heretical movements in the north during the Middle Ages would also testify (Oneto, 1997: 102- 103).

Religion is a powerful sign of 'otherness' when there is a conflict to achieve hegemony, or a contested frontier between powers that do not see themselves as being loyal to the same religious authorities (the case of France and Great Britain is a good example, which has been mentioned already in the first chapter). However, in a country which is the *symbol of Catholicism*, one in which the Reform never arrived, the Lega's efforts to claim an original conception of Christianity for the northerners and ground it on Celtic religiosity is open to criticism, to say the least. In fact, historians know almost nothing about the religious outlook of the 'Padanian' Celts (Kruta, 1991b) due to the disheartening lack of written testimonies from the Celts themselves. What information we have about their religiosity comes too often from all too interested sources, i.e. the Romans, as even some *leghisti* are forced to admit (e.g. Predieri in *Quaderni Padani*, 1998). It will suffice here to remind the reader of the importance of the *De Bello Gallico* -written by a very acute, but hardly detached observer of events- for a tentative reconstruction of the culture of these populations.

As in the literature of those 'New-Age', 'New Spiritualists' groups who have discovered the Celts in contemporary Britain (Hale, 2002) the Celts were thus constantly proposed by the Lega as *peoples of nature*, who could still teach modern men how they could find again their *real* selves in a world away from the city, away from the zone of civilisation. However such re-evaluation can be shown to serve *contemporary* discursive needs due to the great difficulties in investigating Celtic spirituality caused by the lack of sources. As for the Lega's obliviousness of the great

divisions among northern cities in the age of the Lega Lombarda (see above), the party's passion for Celtic spirituality reveals itself to be 'convenient'.

7.8.2 Identity through 'difference'

Isolating other aspects of a supposedly unitary culture, did not get any easier for Gilberto Oneto in his *L'Invenzione della Padania*. Despite his efforts, his analysis brought to the fore a *multiplicity and variety* of local cultures whose underlying sense of 'unity' was not immediately apparent, as he himself had to admit: 'art and, more importantly, architecture, become the faithful mirror of *the hundreds of Padanian diversities* but also the element of distinction of the Padanian region from the rest of the world' (1997: 105, the emphasis is mine). Perhaps an element Padanian art shares is a love of intricate decoration and very bright colours, which affects architecture and traditional costumes, too (Oneto, 1997: 107 and 108). As a foundation for a common artistic sensibility, though, this might seem, once again, weak.

Beside art, Oneto referred to:

1. similarities in the northern cuisine -which had to coexist with many differences (ibid., 109);
2. the recurrence of symbols like the dragon and the Celtic cross in the whole of the north (ibid., 110);
3. similarities in popular music (ibid., 110 and 111);
4. and, finally, a sense of the public good, a 'Calvinist' morality (ibid., 113) that this thesis discussed in chapter 6 -the specific origin of which was not made clear in this book.

If similarities among northerners were difficult to point out, it was the *lack of homogeneity* itself that, with another characteristic strategic move, had to be turned into a *positive and founding value*. The Celts, the Longobards and the communes of the Middle Ages were thus to be celebrated precisely *because* of their unwillingness to come together and give themselves permanent structures of organisation. Thus, if Chapman (1992) and James (1999) are not even convinced that the Celts actually *saw* themselves *as Celts*, pointing out that the category has been constructed *a posteriori* (possibly in the 18th century), the Lega, on the other hand, turned the

lack of a unitary identity into a *political asset*. Lack of homogeneity was translated into *pride* in one's diversity, love of difference, parochialism as value, whether this was expressed by the Celts through their unwillingness to give themselves a centrally controlled power structure (Maggi, in *Quaderni Padani*, 1996; 'Brenno', in *Quaderni Padani*, 1997), or whether it was embodied by the anarchic tendencies of the Longobardic dukes ('Brenno', in *Quaderni Padani*, 1997), or else by the fierce localism of the communes (Oneto, 1997). Being so diverse and being so jealous of their own peculiarities, the Padanians could and should be equated with the Swiss (Vitale, 1996b). Even the recent economic development of northern areas –not just underpinned, but indeed *made possible* by local networks and by the opportunities for mutual trust offered by processes of identification with a local culture (Piore and Sabel, 1984)- was here alleged to be rooted in this inherited love for autonomy.

There is a rich literature on the idea that it is 'diversity' which 'unites us' (to quote the title of an article by 'Brenno', in *Quaderni Padani*, 1996), and the arguments deployed were so similar that at times articles seemed to have been written by the very same person²⁵ (e.g. Oneto, 1997; Oneto in *La Padania*, 1999; 'Brenno' in *Quaderni Padani*, 1996 and 1997; Lottieri in *La Padania*, 1997; Pich in *La Padania*, 1997; Ferrari in *La Padania*, 1997).

If in chapter 6 Padania was exposed as the would-be 'bastion' against the 'other', the ultimate line of defence against immigrants from various 'souths', the repository of an identity that should not be lost, this chapter now claims that, at one and the same time, the *leghisti* regarded difference as sacred, indeed as a value underpinning the whole project of the new nation.

7.9 Conclusions of Chapter 7

The striking feature of the Lega's nationalist discourse of these years is thus that the socially constructed internal *similarity* which is always essential to the achievement of solidarity within the community had to be grounded on the *differences* between the members of it²⁶. This is all the more interesting, as this is a movement which was seeking the establishment of a national community alleged to have been violated and exploited by identified 'others'. While at times the *leghisti* strove to underline unitary

cultural features of the Padanians and reached the point of visibly re-inventing cultures of which little was known for their own purposes, at times instead, as 'similarities' were nowhere to be found, the strategy became to turn difference into a *value* to be cherished. How could the citizens of Padania, still to be convinced of its very existence, manage to exchange mutual recognition on the basis of their 'dissimilarity'? How could this contradiction be sustained? The claim put forward in the next chapter is that such contradiction could be sustained due to the *flexibility* of the concept of community itself, a concept which is, at the very best, elusive.

As Williams once suggested (1988: 76) one of the very few certainties about 'community' is that it is never used unfavourably; apart from this, the concept is so 'flexible' that, as shown in the next chapter, it can be easily adapted to various different political discourses.

It thus appears that:

Lega Nord's propaganda has offered new ways of interpreting the concept of community, a process undoubtedly fulfilling a specific function. The flexibility of the concept as well as its pervasive positive connotations have opened up space to develop an exclusive and xenophobic discourse in the name of the community of Padania... The flexibility of the notion of 'community' has clearly enabled the concept of 'diversity' to be connoted with positive and negative values at the same time, thus offering Lega Nord the opportunity to develop a unique nationalistic propaganda. It is to this extent that Lega Nord's discourse marks a new direction in the understanding of the concept of 'community' itself (Albertazzi and Fremeaux, 2002: 157).

The aim of the chapter that follows is twofold. Firstly it will assess the usefulness of the Lega's case in rethinking nationalism and national identities, and, secondly, it will analyse precisely this notion of Padania seen as a *diverse*, yet still homogeneous and knowable community, in a globalised world.

Notes:

¹ Because he had to make a choice, as it would have been impossible to mention all the populations the Lega's propaganda refers to in a single book, Oneto himself focused on the peoples mentioned above.

² Perhaps the best known name is that of Goldoni.

³ That this history is to a large extent re-invented is indeed crucial to the discussion that follows here and in chap. 8.

⁴ However Oneto says the 5th in his book (1997: 53).

⁵ This is inaccurate: while it is certain that there were Celts in Italy in prehistoric times, historians speak of the 6th and not the 8th century (Grassi, 1991: 8). Furthermore, it is doubtful that one can talk of a Celtic presence *anywhere* in Europe before the 6th c. BC (Robb, 2002: 239).

⁶ The point can still be made even once the Lega's chronology has been corrected: Celtic peoples were already in northern Italy in the 6th c. BC, therefore the invasion of Belloveso (which in reality took place in the 4th c. BC) was not met by fierce resistance in the north.

⁷ That the area was homogeneously Celtic after the descent of Belloveso is debatable: recent excavations at Monte Bibeale showed that the town was inhabited by *both* Celts and Etruscans still after the Celtic conquest (Grassi, 1991). Thus, it would be more correct to talk about a mixing of cultures and a continuous shifting of boundaries, especially on the Apennines. Also, the Celts were *themselves diverse* in terms of their cultures, ways of life and languages (ibid.: 55-64), as new Celtic peoples were still descending into the country in the 3rd c. BC. Finally, unlike the Romans, the Celts did not systematically expel or kill the defeated 'others', rather often adopting their more 'civilised' ways (Moscati et al., 1991), one more reason to doubt the appropriateness of any definition of the north as homogeneously Celtic.

⁸ Roman historians took a very active interest in the Celts thanks to this episode. Without their work, we would know even less about these populations, as, firstly, their use of writing was quite limited (Kruta, 1991a) and, secondly, they did not leave as many material testimonies of their culture as other civilisations of the past -e.g. they would not build roads temples, etc. (Grassi, 1991: 12).

⁹ The battle certainly constituted a watershed in the relationship between the Romans, increasingly the dominant civilisation, and the Celts, some of whom were destined to become more and more 'Romanised' in the decades to follow.

¹⁰ It should be noted that Signori's article -an excellent example of *leghista* re-appropriation of history- was titled 'Hannibal, the liberator'.

¹¹ Historians agree that the Romans tried to wipe out these cultures completely. The Celts had a limited number of choices: either be killed (as it often happened), be expelled from their towns or be assimilated.

¹² This claim is obviously difficult to substantiate, also because the matter may fail to excite the curiosity of many outside the circles of the Lega.

¹³ It is true that these peoples never knew any form of political unity (Grassi, 1991: 7). However, despite being belligerent, they were also open to external cultural influences, e.g. dress and material culture (Moscati et al., 1991).

¹⁴ Given the problems, regularly resurfacing, posed by a strong *identità veneta* (as seen in chap. 4) some leghisti writers chose to stress the elements of similarity among Padanian cultures. As we will see shortly, though, this is a pretty desperate attempt to hide what are very apparent differences between Padanians.

¹⁵ This is no convenient invention of this propaganda. According to some scholars (e.g. Rossi, 1974: 49-57), though, this unwillingness to unite among Longobardic aristocrats (the dukes) also constituted their fundamental weakness.

¹⁶ This is confirmed by historians (Renucci, 1974, in Romano and Vivanti eds.: 1102). According to this writer, who hardly shares the leghista passion for these 'barbarians', the age of the Longobards brought upon the country a deafening silence in terms of culture, philosophy and art (ibid., 1107-1108).

¹⁷ An accusation directed with peculiar vehemence towards Frederick II, as he surrounded himself with state officials who came from what is now the southern region of Puglia - and was half- southerner himself.

¹⁸ As in the case of 'They are coming in their millions...' discussed in the preceding chapter.

¹⁹ As in the case of Venetian 'patriots' such as Gilberto Buson who hijacked a ferry in June 1997, then locked themselves into the S. Marco bell-tower to make a stand against the 'occupation' of Venice by the Italian state. The funny side of their action in a Venice packed with tourists was lost on the judge, who imposed long sentences – a severity that can only be understood, although in no way justified, by assuming that the magistrate wanted to use the case to send a message to all separatists.

²⁰ Smith defines such systems as 'communal mythomoteurs' (ibid., 61).

²¹ In Italian: 'racconti fantastici o altro'.

²² This is a claim still repeated in Romano and Vivanti eds., 1974, a very authoritative work on the history of Italy that, interestingly, dedicates only three pages to the centuries of Longobardic domination. However, there are also historians nowadays that fiercely oppose such an interpretation (e.g. Fumagalli, 1988).

²³ Even the Longobardic historian Paolo Diacono, author of a *Historia Langobardorum* that constitutes one of the fundamental sources of information we have on this people, was after all a Christian and wrote his work after the collapse of the Longobardic reign.

²⁴ When trying to decipher how the *leghisti* interpret these civilisations, the reader is hardly at all helped by the *leghisti* themselves, whose use of terms and concepts is often confusing, to say the least. Oneto (in *Quaderni Padani*, 1998), for instance, writes about a 'sacralisation of the sacred' (*sacralizzazione del sacro*); Predieri alludes to a religious understanding of the 'matter', and not just the 'spirit', as 'transcendental' *among the Celts*, but then fails to explain what it is that the 'matter' would 'transcend' (in *Quaderni Padani*, 1998: 26).

²⁵ Articles signed with the pseudonym of 'Brenno' are indeed often -but not always- the work of Gilberto Oneto.

²⁶ The 'Declaration of Independence of Padania' of 15 September 1996 (cf. chapter 4) thus projects the new nation as a *federation*. Within it, the communes are given a right to dispose of their resources fully, as they see fit. This right cannot be limited by the federation (SOFLN, 1998: 142).

CHAPTER 8

A nation that failed

8.1 Introduction to Chapter 8

Chapters 5-7 brought to the fore two contradictions which lie at the heart of the Lega's propaganda: first, Padania was exposed as a nation grounded on 'exclusion', rather short on positive definitions of identity, and yet a nation that rejected and celebrated diversity *at the same time*; second, the re-discovery of the past of Padania was said to have been openly acknowledged by the leghisti themselves at times as being a political strategy. In chapters 3 and 4 the activities of the LN were read and interpreted against the grain of political events in Italy and by referring to chronic problems such as high taxation, inefficiency of the state apparatuses, corruption of the political system -with associated high costs to businesses- as well as excessive concentration of power in the hands of the central state at the expense of local and regional administrations. The damage to the economy at large that the delay in addressing such apparent problems was causing was there for all to see, and has been discussed in some detail above (cf. chapters 3 and 4). According to Wild, the Lega of the end of the eighties/ beginning of the nineties could be defined as 'the self-representation of industrial districts' (cited in Cento Bull and Gilbert, 2001: 93) precisely because it put forward a programme of radical liberal reforms of the economy and the state which, by addressing some of the problems mentioned above, would have responded to the specific demands for efficiency coming from dynamic sectors of the northern economy.

If decentralisation -a principle which always underpinned the admittedly various keywords that the Lega employed throughout its history -such as 'autonomy', 'regionalism', 'federalism' and now 'devolution'- and a radical reform of the state apparatuses were so obviously needed in the Italy of the period, and if the LN had already been quite successful in re-defining some of the problems of the country as problems 'caused by the south', why was it necessary to re-invent the movement completely in 1995/1996? Why advocate the existence of a *nation* nobody had ever heard anything of, a political enterprise which arguably ended up alienating many in

the down-to-earth, business minded, hyper-productive north? Tambini suggests that Bossi's strategy was aimed at avoiding being 'absorbed' by the much better resourced Forza Italia, and was also justified by his willingness to keep the media focused on his rule-breaking behaviour (Tambini, 2001: 134). Indeed the emergence of Forza Italia on the political stage is central to an understanding of Bossi's change of strategy (Gangemi, 1999), particularly if one takes into account Berlusconi's ability to attract leghisti voters, people whose values and beliefs have been shown to be strikingly similar to those of the supporters of FI (Calvi and Vannucci, 1995). While there is much truth in this version of events, the question still remains whether Bossi was aware of the great risks involved in such an operation.

The power of the idea of the nation, as a community which commands the absolute loyalty of its citizens must have seemed alluring to a leader searching for new ways to re-unite and re-organise a movement that badly needed to regain its self-confidence¹. However, there were many obstacles that needed to be overcome if such an operation was to be successful, some of which we have already considered above (i.e. the lack of a unitary culture, or of a 'language of the north').

The power and 'strength' of the nation as a concept can only be discussed once the notion of community *itself* has been briefly outlined. This chapter thus considers the concept of community, showing how much it appeals to both left and right wing discourses, and then re-considers the idea of the nation asking for what reasons such idea did not attract the 'masses' of northern Italy. The aim here is not to provide a conclusive account of the reasons underpinning the failure of the Lega to establish itself as a rooted 'nationalist' party, as this would involve considering social and political factors that fall outside the scope of this research. The discussion will limit itself to considering the contradictions and weaknesses of the Lega's own discourse in positing 'Padania'. The chapter will come to a conclusion with a discussion of 'Padania' as a product *of* globalisation.

8.2 'Community' in the propaganda of the Vlaams Blok.

This section explores how the right understands 'community' by outlining the striking similarities between the Vlaams Blok's (from now on called 'VB') and the LN's use of the concept. The analysis, which does not claim to be exhaustive, relies on the

reading of primary literature in Flemish provided by Mudde (2000), and is complemented by a study of documents that the VB has made available in English on its website.

Political and cultural movements aiming at representing the Flemish speaking population within Belgium were already active before the beginning of WWI, however the Vlaams Blok itself was founded in 1979. Since the mid-eighties the party turned into a modern right-wing political movement striving to attract young supporters and young voters. Under the slogan 'Own people first' the VB entered the Belgian senate for the first time in 1987 with one senator - just as the Lega managed to see its Bossi and Leoni taking seats in the lower and upper houses of the Italian parliament (cf. chap. 3). As in the case of the Lega, support for the VB at this stage was concentrated in specific areas of Flanders, such as Antwerp, where the party secured 17.7 per cent of votes in the local administrations of the following year (see anonymous, 2003b, on the party's website).

Despite splits in the movement, the year 1991 saw the VB gaining over ten per cent in the national elections and finally establishing itself as a very serious threat to the establishment and the traditional parties. The success of the Blok prompted the creation of a series of anti-racist and resistance groups in Belgium, as well as various agreements among the other parties to exclude the VB from power (ibid.). This position as an outsider of Belgian politics brought rewards to the VB: since the end of the nineties, just when the support for the LN started falling, the VB became the third largest party in Belgium, building a solid party organisation.

Although Flemish nationalism has a much longer history than its Padanian counterpart, the similarities between the VB and the LN are apparent. These movements are both quite recent and both grew very quickly, imposing themselves on the attention of the media and the other political parties. Both parties have a very strict hierarchical structure (Mudde, 2000; Biorcio 1997, 216- 221) and are not at all comfortable with open internal debate. Furthermore, both movements want to speak on behalf of the wealthiest areas within the borders of their respective states; their nationalism is a 'nationalism of the rich', like the Catalan and Basque nationalisms (Conversi, 1997) and, like the latter, is justified by claims of internal colonialism and ethnic oppression. Two obvious and important differences are to be noted as well: a)

the Flemish are characterised by their own language, while the Padanians, as we have seen, are not; b) this language happens to be Dutch and Holland happens to border Belgium, while the Padanians can hardly call on a bordering nation to support their claims.

However, what is especially interesting for the purposes of our analysis is the *ideological* convergence between the two movements in terms of their understanding of 'ethnic community'. The VB claims that the ethnic community takes precedence over the state, as it occurs *naturally* -while the state clearly does not (Mudde, 2000: 96). As a consequence, the movement strives for achieving an ethnically homogeneous Dutch Federation embracing *both* the Dutch-speaking population of Holland and that of Flanders, regardless of them inhabiting what are at present two different *states*. In VB's propaganda, the community has to be *homogeneous*, which in Flanders cannot be attained due to the presence of the French-speaking minority and its alleged dominance over the majority in political terms (the claim of internal colonialism); more recently, the arrival of non-Europeans has added to the threats to Flemish identity (ibid., 97). What constitutes a scandal and offends common sense is thus that the culture that should prevail within certain borders is said not to be the dominant one anymore.

The LN's discourse, as we have seen, is based on similar claims, although the 'culture' often appears in the plural, homogeneity is rarely claimed as a defining characteristic of the community, and writers are undecided if they should define Padania as a 'national community' -singular, as in the Declaration of independence of Padania (Lega Nord, 1996)- or as a federation of 'nations' (Oneto, 1997). What is certain is that both communities are justified by reference to the *ethnie* -a natural occurrence- as opposed to the state -an artificial one². The VB's and the LN's discourses over Europe also present quite striking similarities. Both parties used to refer to Europe as an opportunity at the beginning of the nineties (Mudde, 2000; also chapters 3 and 4). A stronger EU was seen, at this stage, as a passport to freedom, as the strengthening of EU institutions would inevitably have meant -whatever the present British PM would now like voters to think- a progressive weakening of the governing institutions of the member-states. Since the end of the eighties, and until its anti-European conversion in the mid-nineties, the Lega talked of a 'Europe of regions' first, and later a 'Europe of nations'. This is clearly echoed by the VB, which

favoured a 'Europe of ethnic communities' (Mudde, 2000: 99) in which, by keeping the states at bay, the EU would *de facto* have helped preserve an idea of enclosed spaces occupied by their rightful inhabitants.

Even the socio-economic policy put forward by the VB -and this differentiates the party from the LN- is all grounded on the idea of a naturally occurring 'ethnic community'. Leaving on one side the extreme business-friendly liberalism that the Lega -and the Austrian Freedom Party for that matter (Kitschelt, 1997: 160)- have never disavowed, the VB seems to be attracted instead by a sort of right-wing solidarism, a right-wing version of the 'third way' according to which members of the *ethnie* are not abandoned to the ups and downs of the market, but rather protected by the community on the ground of their ethnic identity. It is an idea of welfare whereby, as it might be expected, the resources of the community are reserved *to its rightful members*. In this light, the transfers from Flanders to the south of Belgium, just as the transfers from Padania to southern Italy, constitute an apparent injustice as they hit the poorest members of the Flemish (and Padanian) communities (Anonymous, 2003a on the VB's website).

The notion of the 'naturally' occurring 'ethnic community', which alone provides justification for the exercise of political power, can only be sustained by *both* movements thanks to the vagueness of the two underlying concept of 'ethnicity' on the one hand and 'community' on the other. As for 'ethnicity', we refer to our discussion of the term in the first chapter and the discussion that follows below. The term 'community' will instead be considered in the following section.

8.3 The notion of 'community'

The following discussion relies heavily on Fremeaux (1999) and on Albertazzi and Fremeaux (2002).

Defining 'community' is an almost impossible task due to the slippery nature of the concept (Bell and Newby, 1971). 'Community', as well as other terms the social sciences could hardly do without -such as 'culture' or 'ideology' (see, again, Williams, 1977; 1988)- seems to owe its popularity, at least in part, to its adaptability to very

different contexts. However difficult to define, and although variedly understood, the term always seems to carry very *positive* connotations:

unlike all other terms of social organisation (state, nation, society, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing terms (Williams, 1988: 76).

Indeed, as Plant points out, 'community' 'refers both to the unit of society *as it is* and, crucially, to the aspects of that unit that are *valued if they exist and desired in their absence*' (1974: 13; my emphasis). The notion always encapsulated a pervading nostalgia of the rural social organisation, of a simple world of direct, knowable social relations that, one may be forgiven for saying, most certainly never existed. Thus the concept has often revealed itself as an idealistic one: 'It was not an analytical construct: it reflected the thinker's images of the good life, what human relations *ought to be* (Albertazzi and Fremeaux, 2002: 146; the emphasis is mine).

The notion of community can be seen to acquire value since the rapid transformations of society in the last centuries -as will be shown shortly through the work of Raymond Williams- as modern society is accused of bringing about the negative phenomena of alienation, loss of identity and detachment from local networks. The strength of 'community' has increasingly been, therefore, to suggest the opposite of a social void: solidarity, harmony, unity of purpose and interests, knowability -i.e. the sharing of codes and cultural references (Fremeaux, 1999).

Thus, as Elias points out:

...the use of the term community has remained to some extent associated with the hope and the wish of reviving once more the closer, warmer, more harmonious type of bonds between people vaguely attributed to past ages (cited in Albertazzi and Fremeaux, 2002: 146).

From the perspective of the present analysis, what is even more interesting is Cohen's insistence (1986) on the centrality of the *boundary* for an understanding of the concept of community. Community, in fact, implies *simultaneously* similarity and difference because it emphasises the dual components of *inclusion* and *exclusion*.

The idea of community *resides* in the notion of the boundary, its consciousness is *encapsulated* in the perception of the line dividing the inside from the outside. 'Community' can thus be interpreted as a boundary-expressing symbol to which members may well even attach *different* meanings (ibid.) and the adherence to which may be justified on the basis of *different motivations*. The interpretation of the reality of the community thus becomes almost an individual matter, and yet 'their [members'] shared symbols allow them to believe that they do see and understand things the same way as their fellows and in a different way from other communities' (Albertazzi and Fremeaux, 2002: 147).

'Community' also becomes a powerful 'anti-urban', 'anti-industrial' weapon in the hands of a socialist intellectual such as Raymond Williams. In fact, the term can be employed from within *all* political traditions, precisely due to the vagueness of the notion as well as its flexibility. Thus in *Towards 2000* Williams makes a distinction between the 'natural' community and the 'artificial' nation-state, one that may remind one, for its content if not for its style, of the propaganda of the parties mentioned above, which all ground their claims for separation on the alleged artificiality of their respective *states*. For Williams:

'Nation', as a term, is radically connected with 'native'. We are born into relationships, which are typically settled in a place. This form of primary and 'placeable' bonding is of quite fundamental human and natural importance. Yet the jump from that to anything like the modern nation-state is entirely artificial... The strongest forms of placeable bonding are always much more local: a village or town or city; particular valleys or mountains (Williams, 1983: 180).

It is capitalism which brings about artificiality, as it is 'the main source of all the contemporary confusions about peoples and nations and their necessary loyalties and bonds' (ibid., 184). Here Williams is thinking of the destruction of local communities in his native Wales, of what he sees as the loss of a culture 'of the small'³. His argument hinges on an opposition between the country -seen as the source of all virtues and the place where people know each other personally -and the city- where relationships are false. Capitalism has overridden and destroyed what Williams here

sees as communities 'of human and natural importance': the valley, the town, the village.

Interestingly, this is a rhetoric which reminds one of the 'Declaration of Independence and Sovereignty of Padania of 15 September 1996:

...Thus we [i.e. Padanians] constitute a natural community, a cultural and socio-economic one which is grounded on a shared patrimony of values, culture, history as well as homogeneous social, moral and economic conditions... the Italian state has systematically occupied through time the economic and social system of Padania through its bureaucracy (SOFLN, 1998: 138).

This is an 'ideology of the small' that Williams himself had elsewhere (1975) attacked, pointing out that the opposition between 'the country' (symbol of nature and home to the warm community), on one side, and 'the city' (symbol of advanced capitalism and characterised by the loss of a sense of belonging), on the other, was totally misleading. In fact, this habit of thinking through such dichotomies such as warm/cold, natural/artificial can be said to be *itself* a product of urbanisation. With its references to a 'traditional' past of 'true' belonging and 'natural' identities, and its blindness to the reality of misery and exploitation that often provided the foundation on which 'traditional societies' were built, the idea of the countryside can be exposed as an 'urban myth', one which nowadays has a place in tourist brochures.

The connection between Pandy, where Williams was born, and Padania is thus in this feeling of *nostalgia*, in this mythical past in which Pandy attempts to vanish and from which Padania was trying to emerge. It is nostalgia for a childhood of 'wholeness' in the case of Williams, for a unitary northern-Italian community (that never existed before) in the case of the Lega Nord; and with the term 'nature' to open the way for many possible regressive associations.

8.4 The power of the nation

Regions can be defined according to a variety of criteria: geographic, economic and cultural. A strong regionalism can exist 'where the elements of geography, economic cohesion, cultural identity, administrative apparatus, popular identity, and territorial mobilisation coincide in space' (Keating, 1998: 10). While there was, arguably, some cohesion among the regions of the north in terms of their productive structures, and while Italian regions had been constituted as administrative entities since 1948, it is questionable that there was a strong sense of *regional* identity in the Italy of the 1980s (Newell, 2000: 80). With one exception: the Veneto region, with its distinctive regional economy emerging as a player on the global stage, while the ties between the region and the capital were being eroded due to the crisis of representation faced by the Christian Democrats in this period (Gomez Reino-Cachafeiro, 2002; Cento Bull and Gilbert, 2001). In fact, even the laws giving special status to some Italian regions (such as Val d'Aosta) in 1948 (and Friuli Venezia-Giulia in 1963) only refer to specific ethnic and cultural characteristics that need to be protected in *one* case, and that is Trentino-Alto Adige; however, this is hardly an example of unitary regional identity. The special status here was accorded, on the contrary, following pressures from Austria and given the strength of anti-Italian feelings among the German-speaking population, in order to recognise and protect the *different* identities of the region, as evidenced by the creation of two autonomous provinces (Trento and Bolzano) within it (Gomez Reino-Cachafeiro, 2002: 50 and 51).

Italian regions were administrative inventions, and although not unpopular in the north, they were not the most trusted institutions among northerners⁴. This explains why the concept of 'regional identity' has always been a slippery one, and not necessarily one on which a successful political movement could be grounded. And yet, if for the Liga Veneta it was somehow easier to claim *national* distinctiveness given the long history of Venetian independence, claiming the existence of the nation of, say, Piedmont or Lombardy was much more problematic, not just because of the lack of a distinctive unitary language in these areas, or specific historical precedents (Newell, 2000), but also because the actual regions of Piedmont and Lombardy *do not coincide* with the areas that *some* activists call the 'nations' of Piedmont and Lombardy, as the autonomists themselves have to admit (Brodero and Gremmo, 1978). That is why the literature of these movements of the beginning of the eighties

is confused as to what term to use to define these areas, and is by no means consistent in using the term 'nation' (despite what is claimed by Tambini, 2001), with the important exception of the Liga Veneta.

If not many would have been willing to die for the 'region', exploiting the parochialism of northerners was not without its risks, too. In fact, Bossi distinguished himself from many leaders of self-defined 'ethnic' movements who would eventually become his followers -or else disappear- precisely because he understood that it would have been counterproductive to insist on the *divisions* among northerners and their attachment to their own backyards. At the end of the eighties Lega Lombarda had tried to overcome these difficulties by insisting on the region as a 'community of interests' (Diamanti, 1995: 17). Thanks to this strategy people's identification with the region was reinforced, although the change was only really noticeable among the *leghisti* themselves (Biorcio, 1997: 121 and 122).

After the fall of the Berlusconi government, the strategy changed again. The nation, alleged to be the home of the ethnic group that *rightfully* inhabited it, was thought to be able to provide: a) the strength that came with a large population and economy; b) the sacredness of its ethnic ties and c) all the positive connotations of what could be claimed to be a 'natural' community.

The nation:

provides a powerful means of defining and locating individual selves in the world, through the prism of the collective personality and its distinctive culture. It is through a shared, unique culture that we are enabled to know 'who we are' in the contemporary world. By rediscovering that culture we 'rediscover' ourselves, the 'authentic self' (A.D. Smith, 1991: 17).

In a period of deep crisis for the party and with more and more of its distinguishing themes having been stolen by others, it was the idea of the 'nation' that seemed to provide a chance of salvation. This search for a powerful identity-defining community also explains the insistence of this propaganda on the 'peculiar' spirituality of northerners, whether this was embodied in their 'Protestant' approach to life, or rather in the 'Padanian pantheism', or whether it was expressed by Bossi's reference

to the 'God of Padanians' in his speech to the national conference of the party in 1997. These are excesses that only the necessity to assert unity through 'distinctiveness' can justify.

Exposing Padania as a 'virtual' nation is not a meaningless exercise, although admittedly one that is not particularly difficult. That the nationalist posture was *convenient* to the strategy of the LN in a specific period should not be underestimated due to the fact that all nationalist movements, after all, manipulate, and to some extent re-invent, history. The power of manipulation through rituals and through the media is, in fact, quite limited. Not because it is necessary for some historical events to have *really* taken place or for some figures to have actually existed, but because these events and these figures -real or invented as they might be- *cannot* be made central to a culture and be turned into myths of ethnic foundation *overnight* because they happen to be useful in a specific period. The selection and re-interpretation of the past 'can take place only within strict limits' (Smith, 1989, quoted in Hutchinson and Smith eds. 1994, 154). The past that is re-appropriated must mean something to the people in question -no matter if it appears shadowy and ill documented (Smith, 1998: 198).

After the fall of Berlusconi, Bossi could not directly control influential media -the ones of the Lega were characterised by quite unprofessional output and did not have the power of mobilisation of either the right or the centre-left. However, Bossi's style of communication had successfully forced the Lega on the attention of other media, as demonstrated in chapters 5 and 7: the initiatives of the Lega were indeed perceived as newsworthy because excessive, unexpected and totally out of proportion (Galtung and Ruge, 1965). If one combines, on the one hand the attention received by the movement in the years studied by this thesis and the success of the right in turning immigration into 'the' problem, and on the other growing taxation under the Olive-tree government, a widening economic gap between north and south, the incapacity of the left to successfully reform the state bureaucracy, what becomes difficult to conceive is not that Padania could have succeeded, but rather that it failed.

Admittedly, the aim of the present research is not to explain the success or otherwise of Bossi's movement in the context of Italian politics; also, failure and success do not just depend on the popularity or otherwise of the issues that a movement puts at the

centre of its discourse. However, other factors notwithstanding, it is relevant to ask what went wrong in terms of propaganda strategies. It is after the 'Declaration of Independence' of 1996, in fact, that support for the Lega started falling quite dramatically: why did Padania fail to convince not just the northerners at large, but even the leghisti supporters *themselves*?

8.5 Padania: a failed virtual nation

8.5.1 The lack of an ethnic culture

What is the lesson theorists of nationalism and national identities should learn from the failure of Padania to come into existence as a nation? The nation is clearly in a different league to the region as an identity-defining conceptual tool, however it cannot be created at will -and, arguably, it cannot be grounded on 'heterogeneity'. Showing his familiarity with contemporary 'modernist' writers such as the ones we discussed in chap. 1, Vitale argues that 'nations' are not characterised by a series of fixed and immutable elements that can be described once and for all (in *Quaderni Padani*, 1996b: 10). On the contrary, factors such as language and history need to be 'activated' and need to be valued. The only two elements that are deemed essential to the creation of the 'national community' in this article are 'economic interests' and the 'will' of the members of a community to constitute themselves as a 'nation' (ibid.).

Vitale's approach, while refreshingly honest, openly contradicts (no doubt unwillingly) the huge amount of work put into recovering the historical and cultural roots of 'Padanness' by people such as Oneto or Percivaldi. Moreover, he questions precisely the idea that nations should be seen as 'natural' communities (ibid.: 10). And yet articles such as the one just noted reveal the fundamental weakness of 'padanità' and put it into the open: 'Padania' was used as a *means*. The fundamental outcome of the present research is thus to offer evidence backing A.D. Smith's claims that the link between a nation and a pre-existent *ethnic community* constituting the dominant group within a certain territory is necessary, indeed *indispensable* for the nation to be imagined as such, for it to come into existence.

According to Smith, as we have seen, ethnic communities should be defined as 'named human populations with shared ancestry myths, histories and cultures, having

an association with a specific territory and a sense of solidarity' (1986: 32; see also Hutchinson, 1987; 1994). The bond that these myths and symbols help to create can be very powerful and ethnic communities obviously existed in history *well before* modern nations emerged. The nation goes *beyond* the ethnic community, but it is grounded in the *same* cultures, symbols and myths. It goes beyond it, firstly, because aware of itself *as* nation, i.e. as a mass phenomenon legitimated by a mass *ideology* (nationalism); secondly, as discussed in chap. 1⁵, because characterised by a mass public culture⁶, economic unity and equal rights and duties for all members. These latest three features of the nation are achieved, as demonstrated in chap. 1, and as modernists claim, also thanks to -or, in a rather extreme version of the argument, *exclusively* thanks to- the efforts of the *state*. It is the state which presides over a centralised, unitary education system frequently characterised by a national curriculum, it is the state which takes control of the economy⁷ and guarantees rights to its citizens.

That is to say: what *differentiates* the nation from the ethnic group -but Smith is not very forthcoming on this- is what *the state* normally contributes to the formation of the nation. In the case of Padania, the nation could have been *made* more culturally homogeneous, a new state could have taken control of the northern economy - globalisation notwithstanding- and new rules, rights and duties could, in theory, have been established, had independence been achieved (as the case of Italy itself clearly demonstrates). However, what the state *would not* have been able to provide *ex-nihilo* were the *cultural foundations* upon which, according to Smith, the nation must *always, inevitably* be built. Even a creative recombination of elements of the past must still be 'in character', so to speak:

It must intuitively 'belong to', or cohere with, a particular traditional past and its peculiar flavour... The type of hero-figures, the degree of sacredness, the atmosphere of key-events, the aroma of the habitat, all differ systematically [among different peoples]; together they form a specific 'historical configuration', a constellation which... is quite distinctive in quality and flavour (Smith, 1986: 178)

In chapter 7 we considered what myths were alleged to provide the foundation for a specific Padanian 'ethno-history'⁸. Smith notes that ethno-histories 'are not equally

distributed among the world's populations' (Smith, 1995: 64): while some communities are endowed with well documented histories, others, and particularly those communities oppressed by more powerful neighbours, have not been able to preserve their own specific founding (and politically charged) memories. In fact, this is precisely the claim of the Lega: according to the party's version of events, those memories and heroes that provide a basis for the Padanian identity have been deliberately wiped out by ethnic Italians and have been ignored in history books, as seen above. An opposing view, which was also put forward in chap. 7, is that the documented history of some of the peoples re-discovered by the Lega is *objectively* poor and tenuous, without having to assume that someone is trying to bury it on purpose. This lack of information, as we have seen, is not necessarily bad news for the Lega, as it enables them to re-interpret this history quite freely. Of course there is an important exception, though, this being the history of the independent Republic of Venice, 'La Serenissima'.

The memory of the Republic provided a deeply felt link with a past to be proud of in one specific area of Padania (the Veneto region) and is extensively referred to in the propaganda of the Lega Veneta. And yet, if for once the leghisti could exploit historical memories which were deeply rooted in a culture, the centre was suspicious of them. The 'glorious' history of a Republic that had been independent for over a thousand years was not, in fact, talked about as extensively as the Celts and the Longobards in the 'national' (that is: printed in Milan) propaganda of the LN; these symbols were rather *imposed* on the centre, as Gangemi vividly illustrates (1999: 60-74). Not surprisingly so: the strong Venetian identity constituted the only serious internal threat to the leadership of Bossi and to his idea of a unitary Padania *de facto* replacing local allegiances.⁹

Thus, if *leghisti* intellectuals had admittedly not been the first to recombine 'traditional, perhaps unanalysed, motifs and myths taken from epics, chronicles, documents' (Smith, 1986: 178) of a certain period, nor the first to try to re-vitalise them, however the Padanian reassembled history clearly *failed to resonate* among the wider population. The claim of this study is that the *leghista* strategy of communication was severely undermined in its effort to exploit the past for political purposes by problems that can be summed up as follows:

- a) The irrelevance of Celtic, Visigoth, Longobardic history and cultures for the self-understanding and self-definition of northern Italians.
- b) The difficulties in the Lega's claim of the Lega Lombarda of the Middle Ages (HLL) as a foundation for a specific, separate northern past, given that the saga of the 'free communes' had already been appropriated by Italian official culture. Far from being seen as an example of resistance to 'Rome' (in the shape of a re-born Roman Empire) the struggle of the HLL had already, *constantly* been read by historians as the fight for independence of what were -arguably- Italian cities against a *German* oppressor (e.g. Tabacco, 1989: 216 and 217)
- c) The inability of the Lega to make the most of those memories that were indeed there for the movement to use, rooted in popular culture, such as the 'Serenissima', due to the fears of the leadership and its uneasiness with the notion of 'Venetian identity'. As Comencini once famously said after breaking up with the Lega Nord 'Enough of the Padanian fan [i.e. 'the sun of the Alps'] everywhere. We are getting back our flag, the lion of San Marco, that is a thousand years old (interview with Marozzi, in *La Repubblica*, 1998: 6). He was, of course, right. The memories of a glorious Venice clearly had roots, and yet they were too localised to provide a foundation for Bossi's project.

The choice of supporting outright independence is determined by a variety of factors, identity and self-definition being only *one* of them. For many people such a trauma as splitting up a state obviously *simply* constitutes just 'a step too far', while others might not be willing to face uncertainty even if and when they see themselves as being a 'different' nation. We have discussed at some length what were the economic and social reasons underpinning the Lega's attacks against the central state and the south, and it has been shown that the Lega exploited an undeniable gap between areas of the country (cf. chap. 3 and 4). It is not the intention of the author of this study to down-play the importance of such economic and social factors in creating a felt distance between north and south of Italy, factors which, as it was pointed out in the introduction, have all been analysed and discussed by other researchers. There is no doubt that economic, social *and political* factors (i.e. the propaganda of the Lega) all seemed to pull in the direction of a separation of north and south in the nineties: and yet while Prodi's government was imposing yet *more* sacrifices on Italians and putting up taxes to join EMU and with the Lega all entirely

focused on its identity-work, support for northern independence, *far from going up*, actually even *diminished*. It is true that the 'northern question' took centre-stage throughout the nineties and it is *undeniable* that the present activism of regional administrations and their increased political weight *vis a vis* central government owes a lot, not just to a closer link between administrators and voters made possible by a reformed election system, but to the struggles of the Lega Nord, too. However a reading of the data suggests that support for separation among northern Italians *shrank* in the period considered by this thesis.

8.5.2 The lack of support for independence

Two successive surveys conducted by the Poster institute (in December 1996 and January 1998 respectively) quantified the degree of support for the idea of independence in northern Italy. At the end of 1996 (thus after Padania had been 'declared' independent) 19.3 per cent of northern Italians expressed outright support for northern independence; one year later (thus after the referendum for northern independence organised by the Lega and the 'Padanian elections') this figure was *down to* 13.7 per cent (see Diamanti, 1997b and 1998). Another poll carried out, this time, by Diakron in September 1996 placed the popularity rating of the idea of secession among northern Italians at a more conservative 15.6 per cent only (Cento Bull and Gilbert, 2001: 116 and 117). However, the difference can probably be explained by bearing in mind that the survey by Poster mentioned above had excluded -conveniently for the Lega!- the massively 'unionist', left leaning, Emilia-Romagna -and we know that identification with the left is a very strong factor predicting anti-separatist feelings in the north (Diamanti, 1997b). And yet, even if we ignore the above and even if we use the Diakron data and we disregard Poster, the conclusions would be that support for independence in 1996 was even more confined than we previously thought, while the slump -more limited as it might be- would of course still be there.

The reading of these data is complicated by the fact that there were a considerable number of people -even if, again, a decreasing number of them (25.8 per cent in 1996, 17.4 per cent in 1998 according to Poster)- who were not ready to split up the country, and yet declared that, *in theory*, it would have been advantageous for the north to do so (see Diamanti, 1997b; 1998). These were obviously people the Lega

would have liked to convince and who *could* be convinced: however the fact remains that support for independence overall diminished. As if this were not bad enough for the Lega, given these were the people who had to buy into the idea of the nation of the north, some data even suggest that support for independence lowered *among leghisti supporters themselves*. More than that, it occurred among people happy to 'come out' as leghisti, from whom one would expect some degree of loyalty to the party's line. This claim is based on the reading of data coming from various sources.

A survey conducted by ABACUS found that *even* Leghisti supporters identified more strongly with their commune (53,2 per cent) than 'the north' (40, 3 per cent)¹⁰ in 1996. Moreover, at the end of 1996 50.3 per cent of self-declared *leghisti* voters taking part in a survey stated that separation was both 'acceptable' and 'desirable', a significant but not unexpected result from the supporters of a secessionist party (Diamanti, 1997b). This result was also consistent with a survey conducted a few months earlier (May 1996) on a sample of 500 northern *leghisti* by SWG: in fact, 53.6 per cent of respondents to this survey declared that it would have been either 'certain' or at least 'probable' that they would have followed Bossi to secession (Tambini, 2001: 133 and 134). The results of such survey were perhaps not as comforting for Bossi as the data concerning *leghisti militants* who were *actively* involved in the life of the party in this period: 65.9 per cent of such militants, in fact, wanted Padania to be independent in 1996 and the number rose to 74.9 in 1997 (Biorcio, 1997: 202). The differences between voters and militants can obviously be explained with reference to their different degree of involvement with the party and the fact that the militants were interviewed at a 'symbolically charged' and 'loyalty defining' event, namely the congress of 1997, of which more has been said in chapter 7. The militants were indeed a fundamental asset and they were, in large part, already behind their leader: but what about the leghisti as large? Significantly -and this seems to have gone unnoticed- in January 1998, the support for independence among leghisti voters had *shrunk* from the 50.3 per cent mentioned above (end of 1996) to 45.5 per cent. More bad news: the only sympathisers of other political formations among whom the percentage of 'separatists' was higher than 15 per cent in the north were the supporters of FI (Diamanti, 1998: 155).

This, on the one hand, confirms that there are many similarities (a worrying thought for Bossi) between the profile of the LN's voters and those of the FI (worrying

because it has been demonstrated that the flow of votes is normally one-way only)¹¹. On the other hand, these data also show that the nation of Padania was *not* making new inroads in the hearts and minds of northerners: quite the opposite, the Lega might have created disillusion (the conditional is necessary here) *among the leghisti themselves*. This is to say that while economic liberalism and fiscal federalism had touched the Padanians of the industrial districts (Turani, quoted in Gangemi, 1999: 73), and had not been forgotten by the Lega, although perhaps sidelined by other issues, the nationalism of the Longobards, while failing to keep the traditional constituencies of the Lega on board its *carroccio* -as the slump of votes for the Lega demonstrates- did not even totally convince the *leghisti* themselves.

8.6 Padania and globalisation

The nation of Padania can be understood not just as a *reaction to* globalisation, but as the product of a *specific* kind of capitalist modernisation. The small 'community of professionals' in a globalised world (cf. chap. 6) is thus an example of a 'local' generated by interaction with the 'global'.

Chapter 2 considered how 'globalisation' as a process has been defined within the social sciences and communication studies. But what was, and is, the Lega's *own* understanding of the phenomenon, and what role does it play in the party's propaganda? The theme of globalisation and 'mondialismo' -i.e. the purported attempt to impose a homogenised, multi-racial way of life on peoples and cultures- has taken centre-stage in the Lega's production of recent years. By employing a rhetoric that, while not being any longer alien to populist movements of the so-called New Right, nonetheless still reminds one of the far-left, the monster of 'globalisation' has been exposed by Lega Nord as a process driven by the economic interests of the mega-corporations which control the international market. The globalisation of the economy means, as seen in chap. 6, a policy of free immigration from the south of the world pursued by Western powers, eager to secure cheap labour for themselves. This is alleged to be a new form of slavery aimed not only at the exploitation of the immigrant, but indeed at the humiliation and, ultimately, the destruction of the various Western European identities and ways of life. If not stopped, the process will erode the fabric of northern society, as the mixing of cultures makes the mutual

understanding and the sense of community on which society thrives all but impossible to preserve¹². This stance is apparent in the writings of the leader, who has publicised his opposition to what he regards as an almost inevitable consequence of globalisation, i.e. a multi-racial 'Americanised' society (Bossi, 1999: 129-130); in recent years this stance has, if anything, even hardened (e.g. Zilio, in *La Padania* 2000; Col in *La Padania*, 2000; Bassi in *La Padania*, 2001).

Padania, although still unborn, thus appears confused as to which stance it should take *vis a vis* a rapidly changing world. Northern Italy strikingly displays a process whereby capitalism is restructuring itself by creating a flexible economy able to perform well in the global market – i.e. the model of the 'Third Italy', based on a network of small and hyper-specialised companies. People living in the areas in which this model seems to be stronger are indeed those who often support the Lega Nord, and those who the party clearly strives to represent. This 'Third Italy' would certainly find it useful to liberate itself from the suffocating inefficiency of the archaic Italian state and Italian bureaucracy, and needs to maintain the lucrative trade and effective connections with Central and Northern Europe. This is where the 'European' and 'Protestant' vocation of Padania comes from and this explains in what terms Padania is (and wants to be) a dynamic producer profiting from a globalised market. Yet on the other hand, while embracing modernisation and the values of capitalism -which Lega places at the core of the project of Padania- the people of the north are invited to reject those aspects of a globalised world which allegedly threaten their identity- i.e. migration and the consequent loss of purity of Western cultures.

Padania's willingness to be 'European' thus paves the way to what has been defined here as 'xenophobia of the professional man', which replaces more 'traditional' forms of racism while still rejecting those very notions of 'difference' and 'diversity' on the basis of which the idea of a 'heterogeneous community' had sometimes been claimed.

Cento Bull and Gilbert argue that the contradiction outlined above is *inherent* in the culture of the industrial districts of the north themselves:

[The Lega Nord] *was also able to recreate a collective identity out of the localistic and even parochial values of small-scale capitalism. It captured*

the mixture of nostalgia for a rural and idealised past and fear for what the future might bring that characterised the mood of many areas of small scale production after a period of intense... economic expansion (2001: 4).

The values of the 'local' were not just *aspects* of the culture of northern Italy in the provinces: they were one of the *secrets* of the development of these areas. The Lombard and Veneto regions were (and, in the case of the latter, had become fairly quickly) among the richest areas in Europe also *thanks to* these values and *through* the upholding of them (Priore and Sabel, 1984; Cento Bull and Corner, 1993; Cento Bull, 1996; Cento Bull and Gilbert, 2001).

Small-scale industrialisation owed a lot to the local community. The industrialisation of the north –interestingly accompanied by limited urbanisation (Cento Bull, 1996: 178)- thrived *thanks to* the 'preservation of the family as an economic unit' (ibid.), thanks to people's personal contacts (which were conducive of trust, good business relations, the opening of informal lines of credit etc.), due to the entrepreneurs' knowledge of local cultures, due to their family ties with business partners and clients. Moreover, class conflict in the Third Italy –as opposed to the urban areas of the north, the areas of the big industry- did not reach high levels 'consequent upon the fact that the small-business owner would often be an ex-worker with a workforce which itself aspired to the position of the entrepreneur' (Newell, 2000: 77). In the case of the central regions of Emilia-Romagna and Toscana -included in the project of the 'Great Padania' even if not very inclined to share the *leghista* culture-industrialisation thrived even, and amazingly, thanks to *anti-capitalist* feelings and attitudes. The strength and importance of the co-operatives' movement testifies to this.

And yet, as Ilvo Diamanti observed, the society of the Third Italy, and specifically that of Veneto, went through a profound process of *secularisation* through the 1960s, the 1970s and the 1980s (Diamanti, 1995). People's identification with the Church and the values of Catholicism, as he shows, declined at a fast pace. This decline had a great impact on this sub-culture, as well as imposing a change of strategy on the Christian Democrats, the hegemonic party in the Veneto region up until the emergence of the Leagues (cf. chap. 3). The DC, in fact, and correctly so, became

less confident it could simply rely on people's Christian values to remain in power and turned even more decisively than before into the guarantor of the *interests* of the region 'in Rome', to use a *leghista* expression. The DC became a *mediator* between the centre and the Venetian periphery. However, while the DC put interests -and, increasingly, just and *purely* interests- at the core of its political strategy, a new political party was putting, again, *interests -clearly-* but also *values* (which were *based on and consistent with* the very culture that made development possible) at the core of its strategy: not just the family, which has become a sort of obsession for this party¹³ but the local community, too¹⁴. This party was the Lega Nord -the Liga Veneta having focused more on issues of language and having shown itself less able to provide that peculiar blend of pride, identity, and *liberal policies* that Bossi was able to put forward.

The 'knowable', proud, inward-looking, xenophobic community of 'Padania' proposed by the Lega in the nationalist period can therefore be exposed as a contradiction, given that it is the people of the north who have taken advantage of the openness of the EU to create an economy which is still utterly reliant on export and, increasingly, also on a foreign work-force. Nonetheless, this community, nostalgic towards its past, is also the product of an imagination which is inspired by a *unique* model of modernisation and development. 'Padania' is an economic model deeply in love with the model of society, the peculiar values that have made its development possible - and all dressed up in Celtic clothes.

8.7 Conclusions of chapter 8

If there are many reasons to agree with Cento Bull and Gilbert (2001: chap. 5) when they claim that this attitude of the Lega (local communitarianism) ended up alienating the businessmen and local administrators of the north who wanted more, and not less, globalisation, on the other hand it is also important to acknowledge that the party's rhetoric reflected real fears and grievances among the workers and artisans of the north.

As seen in chap. 4, the Lega of the separatist period had increasingly become a party of the *working class* (including *well-off* manual workers, such as artisans), it had lost

some of the well-educated voters who had sympathised with its struggle in the 'golden' age of leaders such as Formentini and Pivetti, and it had retreated to the sub-Alpine little towns of post-fordist industrialisation. The people the Lega now represented, were, overall, quite suspicious, when not even scared, of globalisation.

As Gardani (1997) demonstrates, by using data collected by the Poster Institute in its 1996 survey, the great majority of northerners do not travel abroad very much, and when they do it is for tourism. This is to say: the occasions for some meaningful and in-depth reflection on other people's cultures and ways of life are for them, overall, pretty rare. And yet, the percentage of northerners who claim they keep informed regularly about what is going on in the rest of the world is significant: 89 per cent of those interviewed (*ibid.*, 312). This apparent contradiction can be explained fairly easily. 58 per cent of working class people interviewed for this survey 'claimed that external political developments affected their region, while nearly 70 per cent thought that external economic developments in Europe and the world directly affected their region' (Beirich and Woods, 2000: 140).

The northern working class population was, at the same time, quite ignorant of other cultures *and yet fearful* of the impact of foreign politics and the international economy on their own life. Gardani (1997) believes that these fears of foreign events and foreign 'agents' with whom little contact is possible are, on the one hand, what explains people's interest in foreign news, and on the other what determines people's attachment *to the local* and their demand for '*identity*'. If this perception is correct, then what alienated voters who had been previously attracted by the Lega's programmes of liberalisation and federalism (e.g. the extremism, the radical anti-Europeanism) is what kept others behind its flag. Workers of an export-driven industry, more directly exposed than others to the ups and downs of the market, as well as the competition of foreign 'would-be-exploited', may have seen the strengthening of local and regional institutions, even the possible creation of an independent community, as a defence against global forces. Their nostalgia for a pre-industrial 'local' was in itself a *product* of globalisation. It was *not* simply 'anti-modernisation', in the common sense of the term, that motivated this people, but rather a conception of modernity which owed much *to the local*: it was a nostalgia for a golden past of dialect and knowability that had made a *certain growth* possible in the first place.

Padania can thus be interpreted as the outcome of that very process, globalisation, that this invented nation was out to oppose. It had been globalisation that accelerated the modernisation and fragmentation of northern Italian society, not just through immigration and not just through the influence of American cultural products, but by making the northern Italian economy more and more reliant on exports towards the EU and by facilitating the expansion of Italian capitalism abroad. By doing so, globalisation had created that need for community, warmth and nostalgia for a recent but fading past that the Lega thought, at some point, it had to put at the centre of its discourse. Furthermore, it had also been the process of globalisation which had undermined the authority of conventional political structures, in a context where the state already failed to command much loyalty and in a context in which political subcultures were in crisis (Diamanti, 1995).

The present climate of international conflict, apparent Western vulnerability to terrorist attacks, a crisis of the international economy and alleged war between civilisations and religions should feed into the feelings and fears that the Lega does not just merely express, but actively helps creating as a political entrepreneur. If this will suffice to reverse the fortunes of this movement after the failure of the nationalist strategy remains to be seen.

Notes:

¹ At the beginning of 2003, although the Lega remains a partner of the second Berlusconi government and is talked about by the media -if not as much as in 1996 and 1997- there is still no sign that the movement will regain that capacity to set the political agenda and affect public opinion that it enjoyed at the beginning of the nineties.

² With reference to the Lega, see Bossi, 1989; Vitale, 1996a; with reference to the VB, see anonymous, 2003a, on the party's website.

³ Interestingly, when looking for examples of 'natural communities' people can identify with, Williams finds them in the local communities of Wales *and Italy* (ibid.).

⁴ In a 1998 survey among voters in the north, the EU appeared to be trusted by 56.5 per cent of respondents and the communes by 48.4 per cent; the regions were trusted by 44 per cent of respondents (Diamanti, 1998).

⁵ There a nation was defined as 'a named human population which shares myths and memories, a mass public culture, a designated homeland, economic unity and equal rights and duties for all members' (Smith, 1995: 56 and 57).

⁶ Within ethnic groups, a common culture may well be the patrimony of an elite (e.g. the ancient Greeks).

⁷ As chap. 2 demonstrated, the capacity of the state to run the national economy has always been limited -although this does not make states totally irrelevant either.

⁸ 'Ethnohistory' is not the scientific analysis of the past, but rather the carefully selected memory of successive generations of what 'counts' as the people's past (Armstrong, 1982; Smith, 1995: chap. 3).

⁹ Segato (1996) and other 'venetisti' (i.e. theorists of the Venetian identity) openly declared that their culture developed out of a struggle *against the Celts*. This would explain the readiness of their ancestors to ally themselves to the Romans (cf. chap. 7), but cannot go down too well in Milan. In this context, it is not surprising that Bossi spoke out repeatedly against regional autonomists, defining himself as a 'Padanian patriot' (e.g. at the congress of Lega Nord Piedmont in 1996, see Biorcio, 1997: 131). For a discussion of the political tension between 'Lombardi' and 'Veneti' see especially chap. 4.

¹⁰ See Biorcio (1997: 130). Here respondents could declare what communities they preferred among a limited series including northern Italy, their own region, their commune, Italy, Europe and the world.

¹¹ Bossi has always been well aware that the LN could end up being absorbed by FI, and he knows as well that his voters are attracted to Berlusconi's movement. Such awareness is reflected, for instance, in the speech delivered by the leader in Pontida after the less than enthusiastic performance of the party in the European elections 1994, a performance that demonstrated how FI was growing at the expense of the Lega (reprinted in Bossi, 1996: 67-74).

¹² According to another very controversial poster distributed at the beginning of 1999, the process of globalisation is controlled by American bankers and will turn the whole world into a 'melting pot'. The link between loss of culture, loss of values and crisis of the family-unit is here made explicit: 'brother immigrant, go home! This is our own country. By coming here you help American bankers to take over other people's economies thanks to globalisation, which makes mincemeat of peoples. If society becomes just a matter of money, everything will be lost: families, children, beliefs and values...' (Available at the national centre of the Lega Nord, Milan).

¹³ See how the image of children has been exploited by the party in the last few years. The cover of *Il Sole delle Alpi* on 18 July 1998 provides a good example, but see also the various posters now available on the Lega's website (www.leganord.org) such as 'Si ai bambini della Padania'.

¹⁴ See, again, the posters of the party on the website mentioned above, such as 'Orgoglio padano' (2001).

CHAPTER 9

Summary and Conclusions

9.1 What has been done

In this thesis, I aimed to deconstruct an identity with which a political movement tried to 'replace' previous identifications and loyalties in northern Italy. 'Padania', in the intentions of its proponents, should have made previous political allegiances redundant in both the 'white' and 'red' regions -and this in an age in which such allegiances were already crumbling- and, at the same time, would have given millions of people an opportunity to discard an identity they were assumed to despise (i.e. the Italian).

'What counts', Bossi once famously wrote 'is that we are all Lombards' (1996: 7). The identity on offer was later re-defined but the basic idea remained the same: Communist or Liberal, and, even more importantly, *lombardo* or *veneto* 'what counts is that we are all Padanians'. Given what I had learnt from 'modernist' thinkers (i.e. that all national identities are constructed through representation), I decided to 'test' to what extent and through what strategies the party Lega Nord had constructed this 'padanità'. In fact, in order to create and communicate the Padanian identity the party had resorted to a repertoire that was familiar among nationalist movements; indeed the Lega had even revealed itself to be an attentive student of the 'modernist' paradigm, quite openly using an approach to justify its own course of action.

Although the movement still talks of 'Padania' as a community nowadays and refers to the 'Padanians' as its inhabitants, this thesis focused on a defined past historical period (from 1996 to 1998) because it was in this period that the party unsuccessfully tried to turn 'Padania' into a 'nation-state' by splitting the north and the south of Italy. It is my contention that in such a period great energies were put into constructing a new cultural entity and into making it visible through a variety of discursive strategies. I hope that my commitment to studying and interpreting the documents of the Lega led to a reflexive discussion of this proposed identity which was able to bring to the surface its main characteristics and contradictions.

I would have been given the opportunity to become a citizen of Padania myself, had the Lega been successful, being northern Italian -and of northern Italian origin, too: yet, I did not conceal the uneasiness that I felt when confronted by some of the party's articles and posters. Indeed the Lega can at times resort to a very disturbing rhetoric. However, the time spent in Milan, as well as the years spent on the party's literature, convinced me that, despite the Lega being often depicted as a 'monster' in British newspapers and despite the excesses of the party, what should be noticed is the profound 'ordinariness' of the *leghista*. Although perhaps painful to admit, Bossi gave citizenship to feelings of distrust not just towards the state, but specifically towards southerners, that were lurking behind the surface of northern 'ordinary' life: we (northern Italians) all knew that.

This suspicion towards southerners, as well as the dislike of the coloured 'other', was already part of a culture, but officially rejected by all political parties, and certainly very much so by the 'red' and Catholic cultures. It was through exceptional, headline grabbing events celebrating such hidden but 'ordinary' distrust that the Lega tried to bring 'Padania' to light. The distance between the north and the south, in economic and cultural terms, was *not* created by the Lega, as I have been at pains to point out, however it was the Lega who gave such feelings the dignity of an ideology. Through the 'gap', through 'difference' everything could be explained, down to that little road somewhere in Lombardia that had not been resurfaced yet, so that everything *became* the result of difference. All the problems and the obstacles to growth, happiness, 'warmth', 'closeness' became 'south'. This ideology reached its apogee with the 'invention' and positing of 'Padania'.

The first part of the thesis presented the three spheres that would provide the framework of analysis of this research (the concepts of 'nation', 'ethnic group' and 'nationalism'; 'globalisation' and, finally, the history of the Lega Nord). It appeared to be necessary to analyse each domain so as to understand what the issues at stake were, given that: a) 'Padania' could be 'read' as a specific example of 'invention of a nation' in the wake of 'recognised' so-called 'objective' elements of 'nationhood'; b) 'Padania' was posited as a refuge against a globalising world of no values, an 'upside down' world; c) 'Padania' had been posited by a party that exploited the opportunities provided by a political system ready for implosion, indeed a movement which had been partially responsible for such an implosion. As has been pointed

out at the beginning, if the Lega did not just 'mirror' the feeling and the frustrations of the north but indeed created a *new* culture through its own media, then this culture, and the discourse that created it, were worth of careful consideration and study.

The first chapter set out to analyse the aforementioned attributes of concepts such as the 'nation'. A review of different conceptualisations of this notion was aimed at providing an understanding of its status in academic literature. I pointed out that 'nation' is a much debated and controversial notion that defies agreement; furthermore, I argued that what at times appeared as disagreements might all too often be interpreted as terminological quarrels. Despite these difficulties, it was possible to reach a working definition of the terms mentioned above, and in particular it was possible to define the nation (by following Smith) on the basis of the sharing of myths and memories, as well as a common culture. However, we had to point out then, and we should repeat now, that these elements, although not 'objective', i.e. although not grounded on any allegedly scientific 'proof' of the existence of different national characters, could not, anyway, be manipulated at will. This constitutes the fundamental teaching of 'Padania' to theorists of nationalism and national identities. This research thus confirms Smith's theory, while rejecting a post-modernist reading of the nation.

The second chapter prepared the ground for a discussion of the community of Padania that, once again, was offered at the end. Chapter 2 set out to explore how 'globalisation' had been conceptualised within Communication studies and what were the links between the national, the global and the local. This discussion left us with some conceptual tools and an unresolved problem: some tools, in the shape of definitions of globalisation in the economy, as a cultural process and as an ideology; a problem, i.e. whether the 'local' that is so often proposed as the opposite of the 'global' in political rhetoric -and always, in fact, in the pages of the Lega- should be regarded as *a product* of globalisation itself. In the case of 'Padania', we later found out (chap. 8) that a certain 'ideology of the local' was indeed aimed at preserving a model of modernisation that owed much to local networks. In this sense, Padania's 'local' is a reaction to the 'global', however Padania can play a dynamic role in the international economy precisely because its model of development was built 'on' such a 'local'.

In the third and fourth chapters, the development of the Lega from its origin up until its first experience in government (chap. 3) and then throughout the 'nationalist phase' (chap. 4) was examined. A brief review of the acute problems that the Italian state was facing in this period provided a framework necessary to locate the genesis and success of the Lega Lombarda/ Lega Nord as a 'political actor'. As already pointed out, I do not believe that the Lega is merely the mirror of such problems. If this work focused on identity formation it is precisely because I see the ability of the party to be partially successful in creating a new culture in the north as crucial to understanding its past achievements, and because, in its turn, such a reconceptualisation of northern identity can teach us a lot about the strategies employed by all nationalist movements.

The findings of the present research in the chapters that followed -for instance the idea that the Lega's strategies were all based on exclusion- would hardly make any sense at all if one forgets the political environment within which the Lega had to operate as just one, if admittedly fundamental, political actor. That is to say that economic, social and political factors *did not* in themselves determine the way the Lega developed and its choice to turn to nationalism; however they provided specific opportunities that the Lega decided to take or otherwise, and they set limits within which the Lega had to operate. Turning to nationalism was still a choice, and a surprising one for that matter. However, when one considers that FI was successfully occupying the Lega's political territory, Bossi's choice in the nineties, in no way inevitable, becomes more understandable. Furthermore, without knowing about a gap between areas of the country that had now for the first time been selected as foundation of a whole ideology and without keeping in mind the chronic inefficiencies of Italian bureaucracy, the struggle of the *leghisti* would have become, again, incomprehensible.

The fifth chapter and the first section of the sixth presented the chosen methodology for the thesis. It was shown that for an investigation of the posited identity of the 'padano' it was necessary to conflate two different methods of research. Quantitative content analysis provided a reliable way to weigh up the relative importance of a series of themes in the construction of 'Padanness', while textual analysis provided the opportunity for in-depth analysis of such themes. Chapter 5 also presented the

results of my content analysis, showing that 'difference' and 'a common history and culture' had been the two themes on which the Lega had relied the most to posit its new northern identity. Chapters 6 and 7 investigated such key-ideas.

The notion that Padania was characterised by a specific 'work-ethic' and peculiar way of production might not have been the dominant theme in the construction of Padanian identity, as shown by content analysis, however, this theme revealed itself as fundamental in differentiating between the northerner and the southerner, the northerner and the foreigner. Thus this theme was revealed as having a strategic importance in chap. 6, as it is on such a perception of the differences between north and south that a 'xenophobia of the professional man' was articulated, positing itself as 'common sense' by exploiting pre-existing fears.

The seventh chapter explored the role of a series of ancestors and heroes which the Lega had appropriated as 'fathers of Padania', showing what was the role of such figures in the Lega's discourse, as they provided the party with 'communal mythomoteurs'. Such a 'way forward', as is often the case within nationalist discourse, was revealed to be a 'way backwards', i.e. a rediscovery of values and principles that Padanians were said to have lost due to 'Italian colonisation'. At the same time such an understanding of the past was shown to coexist with a candidly 'postmodern' approach which treated history as a resource, i.e. just a cultural instrument functional to the pursuit of independence. Here the 'will' of a people was said to be the only *sine qua non* in the creation of a nation – a false conclusion and a lesson, incidentally, the Lega had to learn for itself at great cost. Re-writing the past, even one about which little is known, was shown in this chapter to be no easy task, as 'every' past is always-already filled with meaning. The Lega's discourse also opened up one further contradiction insofar as 'difference' and 'diversity', allegedly 'threatening' the Padanian identity, were now valued as positive values, real founding elements of the Padanian identity.

The eighth chapter again interrogated the notion of the nation. The Lega was said to have been able to exploit the positive connotations that are always inevitably associated with the concept of 'community', however Padania's case revealed that representation, although necessary, was not, in itself, a powerful enough force to bring the nation into existence. The Lega's efforts to re-invent an identity were

clearly too 'convenient' to the party's strategic needs to be regarded as convincing by outsiders. The Lega exploited (and still very much exploits at the beginning of the new millennium) the need for community, warmth and 'knowability' felt in northern Italian constituencies due to the threats (allegedly) posed by globalisation, and responded to the fears of the population at large –but particularly the working classes- that events beyond people's control were deeply affecting their lives. This thesis has shown that this rhetoric of the 'small community' seen as a bulwark against globalisation reflects the northern specific model of modernisation.

In studying how Padania was constructed I have given a small contribution to both an understanding of the Lega's propaganda (and thus, inevitably, of contemporary Italian politics) and to a discussion of how 'identities' are constructed, defined and posited through communication. A focus on 'identity work' was already present in the authors discussed in chapter 1: this thesis has tested if and to what extent such theories worked or otherwise when analysing a specific case-study.

9.2 Absences

One interesting area has been left untouched by the present research, namely the *comparative* analysis of how national identities are posited by different movements in different countries and different historical contexts, and specifically the analysis of how this is happening right now in contemporary Europe. Despite having given references to other countries, strategies and discourses (e.g. when discussing the 'invention of Switzerland' in chap. 1 or the VB's propaganda in chap. 8) this thesis always had to rely on secondary sources in such instances. There are, clearly, linguistic obstacles that cannot always be overcome, however, on the other hand, the mastering of English makes it possible to access a wealth of information nowadays due to the availability of documents in this language, and often on easily accessible websites. One should be cautious, though: such documents are targeted at an international audience, seek international recognition: their tone is not necessarily the same which characterises internal propaganda.

A series of interesting questions could be asked of a corpus of documents representing different 'nationalisms':

- a) How are claims of 'internal' colonialism and 'invasion' from the outside articulated and what is the role of such claims in different parties' propaganda?
- b) What is the strategic role of the economy in different discourses, especially within the nationalists allegedly speaking on behalf of the richest areas of Western Europe (e.g. Austria, Holland, Denmark, and so on?)
- c) How is the re-interpretation of history articulated through different parties' discourses and how is it 'communicated'?
- d) how is the 'homogeneity' of the nation conceptualised? Who 'belongs' to the nation and on the basis of what claims?

All of these questions involve studying issues such as:

- a) the particular uses of their own media by different parties;
- b) movements' efforts in gaining visibility through national media;
- c) the deployment or otherwise of symbolic gatherings and rallies to reinforce identity in different contexts.

There is much to gain from the study of the symbolic construction of nations and 'would-be' nations: however the Lega's 'creativity' in its uses of nationalism might well be revealed still to be unmatched.

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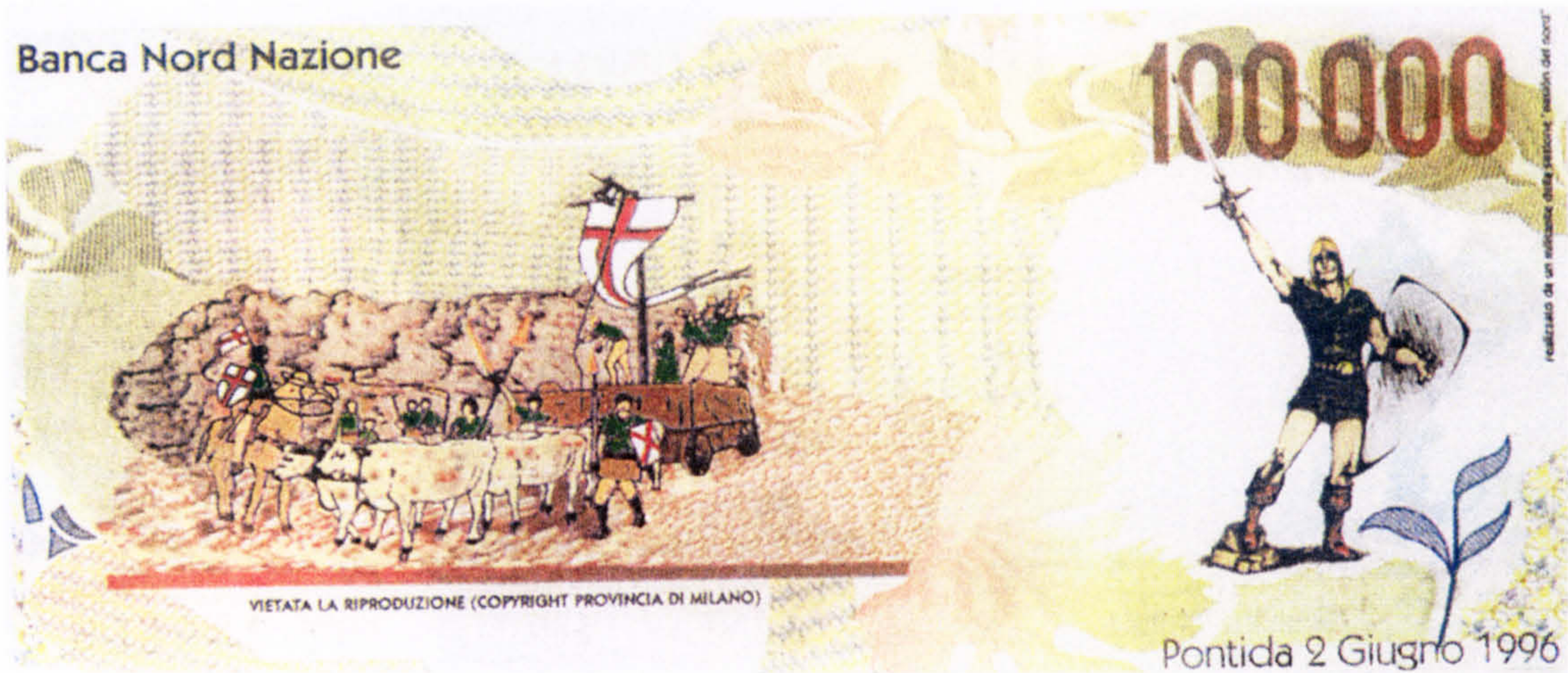
Appendix 1

'Lire padane' printed after the Declaration of Independence of 15 September 1996 (with images of Umberto Bossi).



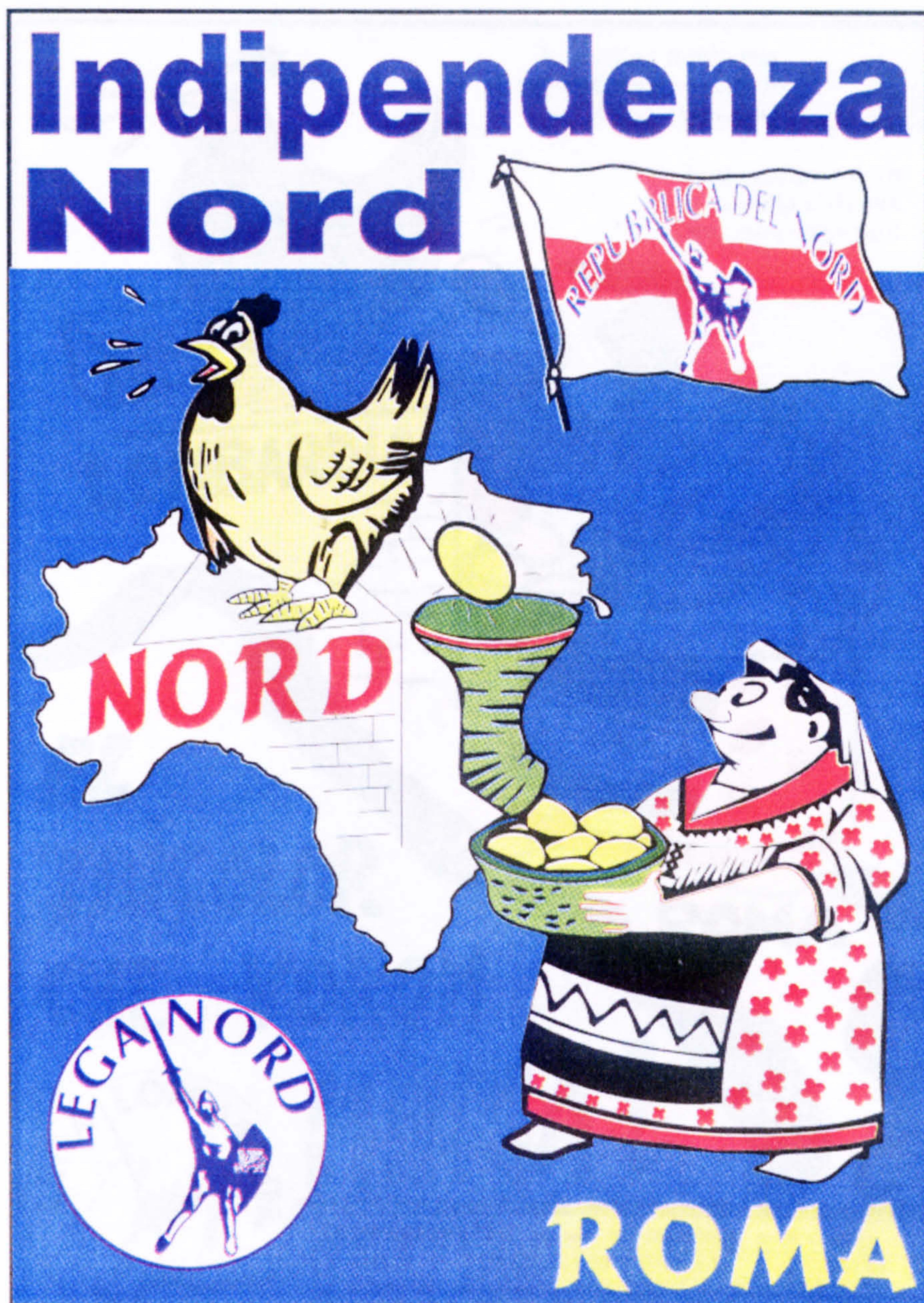
Appendix 2

'Lire padane' printed after 'the pact of Pontida' (June 1996) and the 'Declaration of Independence of Padania' (September 1996).



Appendix 3

Poster printed in December 1995



Appendix 4

Poster printed in 1988

La gallina lombarda
"scodella" uova d'oro
per Roma e più giù!

Tutte restano fritte
in padella e da noi
non ritornano più!

LOMBARDIA

**EL TRICOLOR
CHE VÖROM
MINGA!**

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Appendix 5

Poster printed in December 1995



Appendix 6

Poster printed in the Summer 1998

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FERMIAMOLI!!! ARRIVANO A MILIONI



VU' CIULA'?

VU' GUMPRA'?

VU' STUPRA'?

VU' SBALLA'?

VU' LAVA'?

FUORI DALLE PALLE!

Firma anche Tu il referendum
che li rispedisce a casa loro!

Per informazioni telefona allo 02/66.21.11



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AVAILABLE

Variable print quality

FATTO DEL GIORNO

Domenica 7 e Lunedì 8 giugno 1998

3

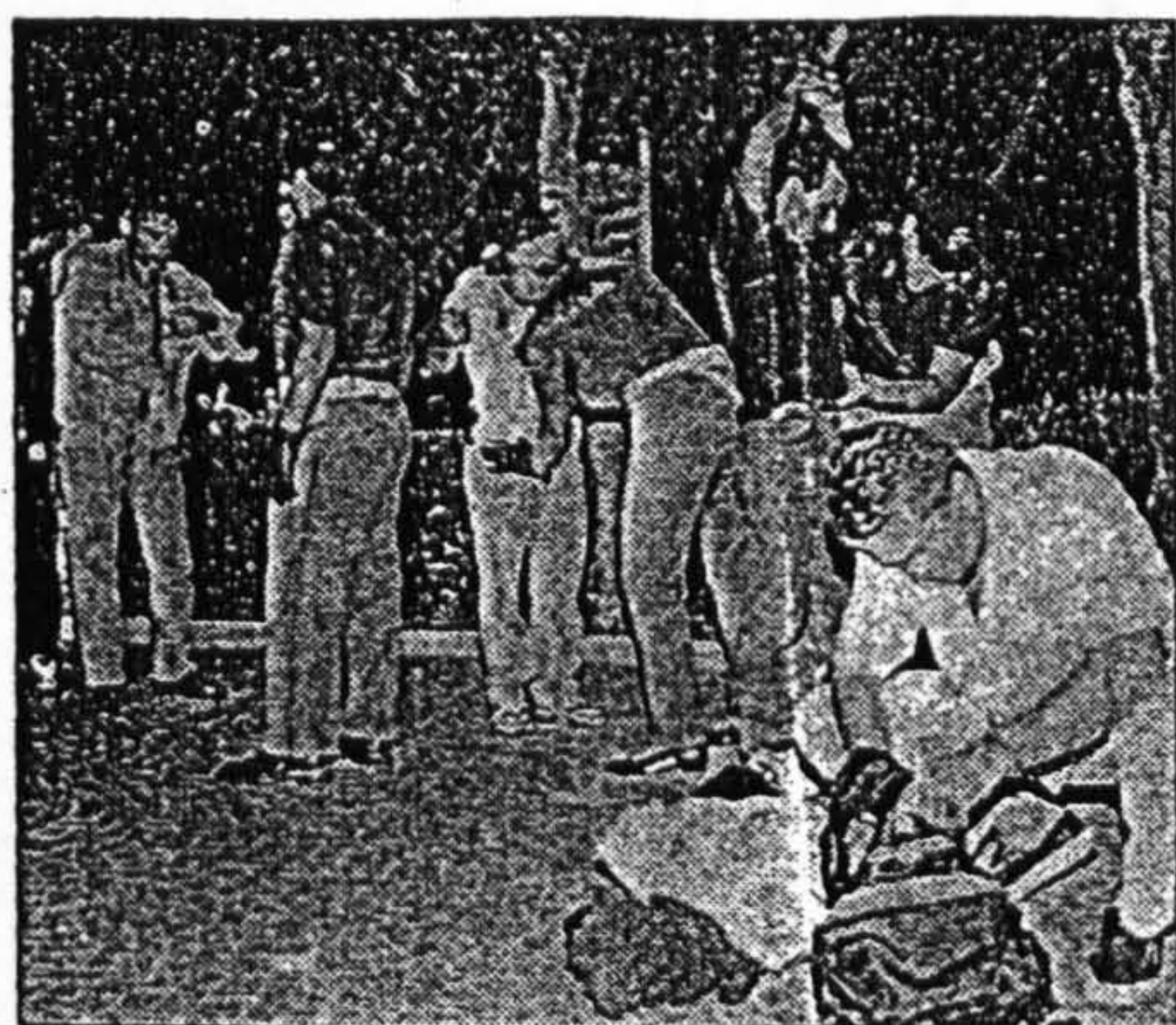


Dai lavavetri ai semafori, agli spacciatori nei parchi. I clandestini sono sempre in agguato

Tranquillo weekend di paura

Ecco tutti i rischi che una famiglia corre nella sua città

per più indifesi. Andiamo una famiglia decisa di uscire per una giornata in un sabato pomeriggio, per andarsi a fare un gelato in un'auto? Con cosa va, in auto? Deve essere preparata a respingere, ad ogni costo, l'assalto dei ladri, armati di arnesi idoporcari assai più che a un parabrezza; insistenti, che non si contentano di un diniego, brattano il vetro anche se si rifiuta. Occorre quasi alla lite, suoclacon, avanzare di metro con l'auto, e fare di farli desistere. Tenere gli sportelli con la sicura, altrimenti un attimo, aprono e via quello che c'è nelle borsette o quant'altro. Ci vanno in tram? Che andar di notte, se no anche lì, maleodorosi e rumorosi. Non è lo diremmo anche lavavetri. un italiano non può fare la parodia? Ci sarebbe, rovertà al dire sporci- mezzo di sapone costate poco e ci sono i bagni pubblici o di assistenziali in cui con soldi è possibile fare. Ma se il tram di solo fastidio, di notte ragazze sole o accompagnata, diventa: aggressioni e molestie sessuali. Ma arrivati nei danni agli agodinetto l'avventura



Spacciatori extracomunitari perquisiti dalla polizia (Ansa)

non è certo finita: i ragazzi vogliono correre nel prato? Sarà meglio fare prima una ricognizione per evitare siringhe sporche. Sono ragazzi italiani per lo più a dro-

cano di appiappare oggetti contraffatti o rubati. Verso sera, tornando a casa, c'è il modo di ammirare il campionario di prostitute di ogni colore, dalle albanesi, alle nigeriane, organizzate con sistemi di marketing, divise in zone, in fasce di età, in porzioni di strade controllate a vista dai papponi di diversa etnia, quasi tutti clandestini. E spesso da sotto la camicia spunta un coltello, scoppia la rissa, i regolamenti di conti sono pressoché quotidiani, il sangue scorre. Per non parlare delle violenze carnali, praticamente impunte. Per una ragazza attraversare un parco di notte - ma anche di giorno - come dovrebbe essere suo sacrosanto diritto fare, significa mettersi a rischio più

che andare in autostrada contromano. La clandestinità impedisce di trovare un lavoro, e quindi un clandestino è necessariamente o un accattone o un criminale, due figure entrambe da rifiutare. Questo non vuol dire chiudersi a riccio, non vuol dire rifiutare l'immigrazione a priori, essere disumani: vuol dire voler regolamentarla, renderla trasparente nei numeri e nei nomi, sapere dov'è un immigrato, cosa sta facendo, come campa. Perché sapere questo vuol dire avere una garanzia di legalità, una sicurezza nella convivenza civile, la ragionevole probabilità di non dover affrontare un nemico sconosciuto. Ma questo Stato annegato nella demagogia ammanta di garantismo l'inefficienza, rende lecito ciò che non può controllare, finge di non vedere perché ammettendo di vedere dovrebbe ammettere di non potere. E costringe i cittadini a scendere in strada per difendere i propri diritti e la propria tranquillità. Si arriva così a questo assurdo: che la polizia, la quale ha una «delega» dalla società per combattere il crimine - e per questo ha armi e tutele che un normale cittadino non ha - delega invece a sua volta i cittadini a fare il lavoro che essa non fa, a correre al suo posto i rischi che essa polizia è addestrata e pagata per correre. Complimenti. Ci costringe a difenderci da soli, come nel Far West, poi i soliti benpensanti gridano alla «giustizia sommaria». La gente ne farebbe volentieri a meno, sarebbe ben felice di lasciar fare alla giustizia «normale». Se ci fosse, però.

Prendere il tram di notte può essere per tutti molto rischioso: aggressioni e molestie sessuali sono all'ordine del giorno

garsi, certo, ma molti immigrati fanno i «cavalli», gli spacciatori. Loro non si drogano, sono più furbi, si limitano a far circolare la «neve» e a riempirsi le tasche. E dopo aver preso il gelato, stia attenta la signora a tenere ben stretta la borsetta, gli scippi sono decine al giorno. E deve guardarsi anche dai pataccari, le decine di venditori ambulanti che cer-

LA NUOVA GIUNGLA

<p>Al semaforo L'incubo dei lavavetri</p>	<p>Ai giardinetti Siringhe e spaccio di droga</p>	<p>Scippi Le strade non sono più sicure</p>	<p>Tram Con il buio pericolo di aggressione</p>
<p>Degrado, problemi sanitari e criminalità Prostituzione</p>	<p>Per pochi soldi si rischia la pelle Risse</p>	<p>Contrabbando e danno per i commercianti Commercio abusivo</p>	

P&G Infograph

Appendix 8

Symbol of the Lega Nord (Alberto da Giussano) and symbol of Padania (il sole delle alpi).

